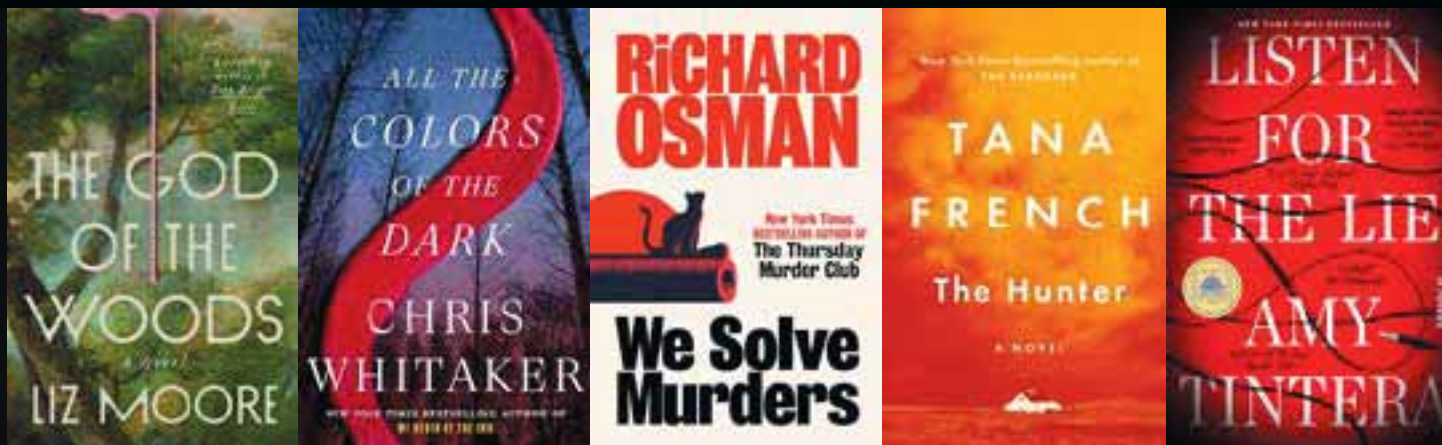


# *Deadly Pleasures* *Mystery Magazine*



## *The Best of the Best 2024* *Critics' Choice*



# The Quest to Find the Best of the Best for 2024

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

This year I was able to accumulate 107 "Best" lists. Not all lists are equal. I personally give most credence to the lists generated by the *Deadly Pleasures* (Barry Award Committee) Staff. Their expertise is unparalleled.

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

1. Oline Cogdill
2. amazon.com
3. British reviewers such as Barry Forshaw, Laura Wilson & Jake Kerridge
4. British newspapers such as *The Times*
5. American Reviewers such as Sarah Weinman and Tom Nolan
6. *Tertulia's* comprehensive list

The best lists from the British seem to come out earlier in the process than many of the others and that gives me time to read some of the titles appearing on those lists that I was previously unaware of or hadn't gotten around to reading. I got ahold of two mysteries that critics have called **THE FINDER MYSTERIES** by Simon Mason. They are called novellas but I consider them book length. You can find my glowing reviews of them on pages 95-96. I also purchased a copy of **WHITE CITY**

by Dominic Nolan but haven't read it yet. I hope you take advantage of the lists you will find in subsequent pages to find books that fit your interests and tastes -- and have a similar experience to what I have had.

The list that appears on pages 20-21 is the result of my efforts -- the Best of the Best of 2023. This year the "race" for the top spot was close between **THE GOD OF THE WOODS** by Liz Moore and **ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK** by Chris Whitaker, with **THE GOD OF THE WOODS** edging out **ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK**. Both were on my personal best of the year list with **ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK** being my personal favorite of the year.

The top psychological suspense novels are **FIRST LIE WINS** by Ashley Elston and **LISTEN FOR THE LIE** by Amy Tintera. The best cozy appears to be **PONY CONFIDENTIAL** by Christina Lynch. The best traditional mystery is **WE SOLVE MURDERS** by Richard Osman.

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

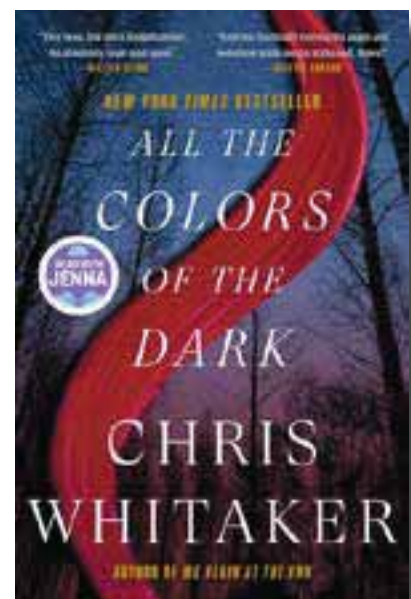
This process provides great input to

the Barry Award Nominating committees.

A problem that crops up every year is when an excellent mystery is published in the U.K. in one year, but doesn't come out in the U.S. until the next year. Examples of this are: **WITNESS 8** by Steve Cavanagh, **THE ENIGMA GIRL** by Henry Porter, **LEO** by Deon Meyer and **THE PROFILER** by Helen Fields. All these came out in the U.K. in 2024 and will appear in the U.S. in 2025. It is in 2025 that they will be considered for Barry Award nominations. Most of our readers live in the U.S. so we like to nominate books in the year that the U.S. readers have the greatest access to them.

There are a lot of excellent mysteries published in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.K., Ireland, Europe and elsewhere in the world that can and should be of interest to the American mystery and thriller fans -- if they are exposed to them. That's what we try to do in *Deadly Pleasures* -- alert you to good reading no matter where the books are written or published.

The Best of the Best list on pages 20-21 can be a valuable resource in your own reading and a great resource for book clubs.



# Experts' Lists

## Best Mysteries of 2024

### Deadly Pleasures Staff

#### Jeff Poppo

##### Crime

MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
THE MERCY CHAIR, M W Craven  
(U.K.)

SANCTUARY, Garry Disher (Aust)  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
SHADOW CITY, Natalie Conyer (Aust)  
DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE,

Ace Atkins  
TIPPING POINT, Dinuka McKenzie  
(Aust)

WITNESS 8, Steve Cavanagh  
(2025 in U.S.)

CREEPER, Margaret Hickey (Aust)

##### Thrillers

LOOK IN THE MIRROR,  
Catherine Steadman  
THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS,  
John Connolly

BLACK WOLF, Juan Gomez-Jurado  
THE ENIGMA GIRL, Henry Porter  
(2025 in U.S.)

##### Debuts

THE CALL, Gavin Strawhan  
(2025 in U.S.)  
A RELUCTANT SPY, David Goodman  
(U.K.)

#### Meredith Anthony

##### Mysteries

CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
Duane Swierczynski  
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker

THE IMPOSITION OF UNNECES-  
SARY OBSTACLES, Malka Older  
GALWAY CONFIDENTIAL,  
Ken Bruen

THE HUNTER, Tana French  
ORDINARY BEAR, C. B. Bernard  
THE STARS TURNED INSIDE OUT,  
Nova Jacobs  
THE LOST BOY OF SANTA

CHIONIA, Juliet Grames

##### Thrillers

THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
IN TOO DEEP,  
Lee Child and Andrew Child  
FATAL INTRUSION,  
Jeffery Deaver and Isabella Maldonado

#### Larry Gandle

##### Crime

KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,  
Steve Cavanagh

CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
WILD HOUSES, Colin Barrett  
BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore

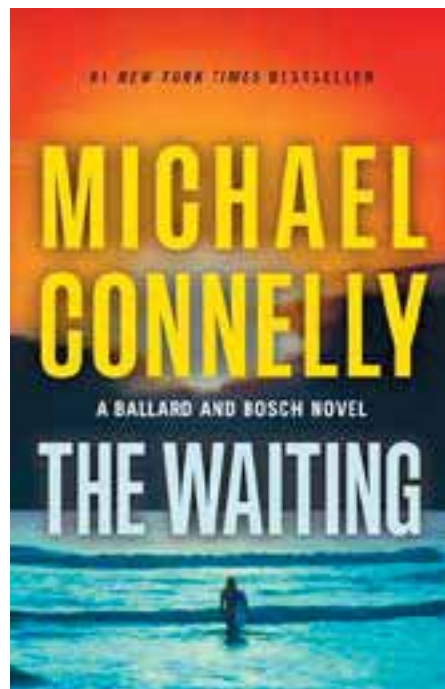
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker

WITNESS 8, Steve Cavanagh  
(2025 in U.S.)

THE DROWNING, John Banville

#### “Mystery” Mike Bursaw

(Barry Award Nominating Committee)



#### Mysteries & Thrillers

ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN, John Brownlow  
ORDINARY BEAR, C. B. Bernard  
THE MERCY CHAIR, M. W. Craven  
FIRST FROST, Craig Johnson  
ERUPTION,

Michael Crichton & James Patterson  
BLOODLANDS, Mark Dawson  
THE GOLDEN LIBRARY,  
Scott Mariani

THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
A DEATH IN CORNWALL,  
Daniel Silva

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE,  
Jo Callaghan

SPIRIT CROSSING,  
William Kent Krueger  
THE DETECTIVE GONE GRAY,

Jake Needham  
SIN CITY, James Swain

#### Mike Dillman

(Barry Award Nominating Committee)

##### Crime

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
SOMEONE SAW SOMETHING,  
Rick Mofina

EVERYONE IS WATCHING,  
Heather Gudenkauf

CAPE RAGE, Ron Corbett  
ORDINARY BEAR, C. B. Bernard  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
A CALAMITY OF SOULS,

David Baldacci  
THE HITCHCOCK HOTEL,

Stephanie Wrobel  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly

PROFILE K, Helen Fields  
(U.S. as THE PROFILER, 2025)

##### Thrillers

ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN, John Brownlow  
NOBODY'S HERO, M. W. Craven  
RED SKY MOURNING, Jack Carr  
KINGPIN, Mike Lawson  
FIRST STRIKE, Stephen Leather

#### Ayo Onatade

(Barry Award Nominating Committee)

GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Harkaway

HOLMES AND MORIARTY,  
Gareth Rubin

THE SPARROW AND THE PEA-  
COCK, I. S. Berry )2023 title in U.S.)  
MOSCOW X, David McCloskey

(2023 title in U.S.)

WHITE CITY, Dominic Nolan  
HOTEL LUCKY SEVEN, Kotaro Isaka  
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
BUTTER, Asako Yuzuki  
IMPOSTER SYNDROME, Joseph Knox

**Steele Curry**

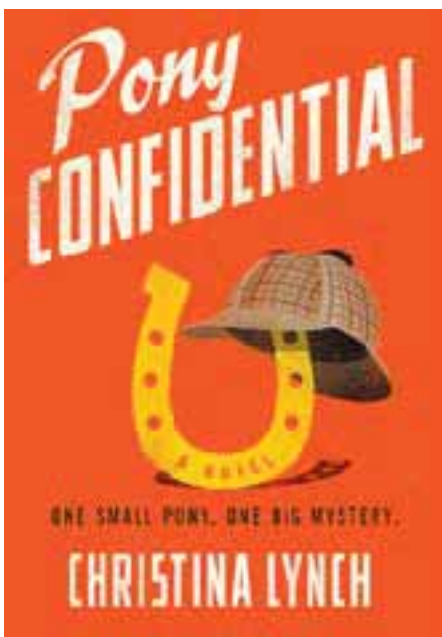
**(In Memorium)**

HE SCARLET PAPERS,  
Matthew Richardson  
GALWAY CONFIDENTIAL,  
Ken Bruen  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
THE LAST FEW MILES OF ROAD,  
Eric Beetner  
PHANTOM ORBIT, David Ignatius  
ONE DEADLY EYE,  
Randy Wayne White  
A DEATH IN CORNWALL,  
Daniel Silva  
DEAD GROUND, Graham Hurley

**Robin Agnew**

**Mystery**

A COLLECTION OF LIES,  
Connie Berry  
IT'S ELEMENTARY, Elise Bryant  
THE DARK WIVES, Ann Cleeves  
THE LAST WORD, Elly Griffiths  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
DEATH AT THE SANITORIUM,  
Ragnor Jonasson  
PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
Christina Lynch



GATHERING MIST,  
Margaret Mizushima  
AGONY HILL, Sarah Stewart-Taylor  
ONE WRONG WORD,  
Hank Phillippi Ryan

**Cozy**

THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES,  
Kat Ailes  
A MESSY MURDER, Simon Brett  
A VERY WOODSY MURDER,  
Ellen Byron  
A CYCLIST'S GUIDE TO CRIME &  
CROISSANTS, Ann Claire  
SAME DIFFERENCE, E.J. Copperman  
THE BUSY BODY, Kemper Donovan  
A DEADLY WALK IN DEVON,  
Nicholas George  
SMOKE AND MIRRORS, M.E. Hilliard  
THE LAST LINE, Scott Lyerly  
EVERYONE THIS CHRISTMAS HAS  
A SECRET, Benjamin Stevenson

**History Mystery**

A DEADLY ENDEAVOR, Jenny Adams  
A DEATH BY MISADVENTURE,  
Tasha Alexander  
MISERY HATES COMPANY,  
Elizabeth Hobbs  
THE LAST HOPE, Susan Elia MacNeal  
MURDER BY LAMPLIGHT,  
Patrice McDonough  
MURDER AT THE WHITE PALACE,  
Allison Montclair  
A NEST OF VIPERS, Harini Nегendra  
A GRAVE ROBBERY,  
Deanna Raybourn  
DEATH IN THE DETAILS,  
Katie Tietjen  
LOCKED IN PURSUIT, Ashley Weaver

**Ali Karim**

A TALENT FOR MURDER,  
Peter Swanson  
LEO, Deon Meyer (2025 in U.S.)  
ONE OF US IS DEAD, Peter James  
YOU LIKE IT DARKER, Stephen King  
FRAMED,  
John Grisham & Jim McCloskey  
THE RUMOR GAME, Thomas Mullen

**George Easter**

**Mystery/Crime**

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,  
Steve Cavanagh

BLACK WOLF, Juan Gomez-Jurado  
THE WRONG HANDS,  
Mark Billingham  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
Duane Swierczynski  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
THE DETECTIVE GONE GRAY,  
Jake Needham  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
LOCKED IN, Jussi Adler-Olsen

**Debut**

ORDINARY BEAR, C. B. Bernard  
PAPER CAGE, Tom Baragwanath  
IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE,  
Jo Callaghan  
WORDHUNTER, Stella Sands  
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston

**Thrillers**

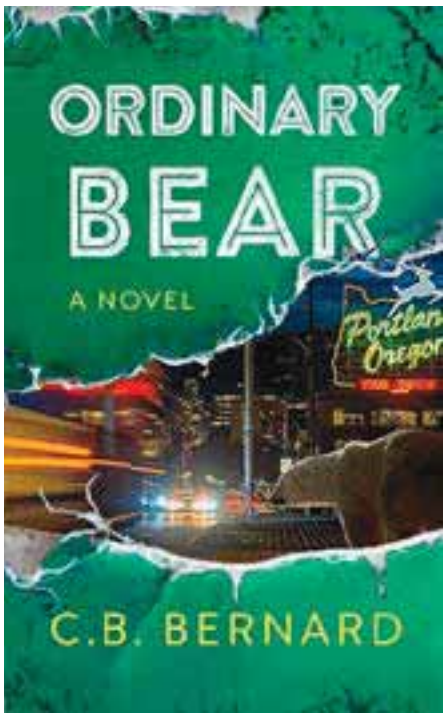
ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN, John Brownlow  
FIRST STRIKE, Stephen Leather  
THE SCARLET PAPERS,  
Matthew Richardson  
**U.K. (not published yet in U.S.)**  
LOST AND NEVER FOUND,  
Simon Mason  
THE WILD SWIMMERS,  
William Shaw  
THE MERCY CHAIR, M. W. Craven  
THE FINDER MYSTERIES,  
Simon Mason  
WITNESS 8, Steve Cavanagh  
(in US, March, 2025)  
LEO, Deon Meyer  
(in US, February, 2025)

**Australian/New Zealand Crime**

SHADOW CITY by Natalie Conyer  
TIPPING POINT, Dinuka McKenzie  
THE CALL, Gavin Strawhan  
(In US, February, 2025)

**Maggie Mason**

THE DISSECTION MURDERS,  
Steve Packwood  
BETWEEN A FLOCK AND A HARD  
PLACE, Donna Andrews  
THE PHANTOM PATROL,  
James R. Benn  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
DOG DAY AFTERNOON,  
David Rosenfelt  
ASH DARK AS NIGHT, Gary Phillips  
WE THREE QUEEN, Rhys Bowen



**Ted Hertel**

DOUBLE BARREL BLURR, Lou Berney  
 WHEN WE WERE SILENT,  
 Fiona McPhillips  
 THE UNQUIET BONES,  
 Loreth Anne White  
 LAKE COUNTY, Lori Roy  
 DEATH COMES TOO LATE (short  
 stories), Charles Ardai  
 THE PRICE YOU PAY, Nick Petrie  
 THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
 John Shen Yen Nee & S. J. Rozan  
 ORDINARY BEAR, C. B. Bernard  
 SPIRIT CROSSING,  
 William Kent Krueger  
 CLETE by James Lee Burke  
 CREAM OF THE CROP: Best Mystery  
 and Suspense Stories of Bill Pronzini by  
 Bill Pronzini (short stories)

**Kevin Burton Smith**

GALWAY CONFIDENTIAL,  
 Ken Bruen  
 MURDER AT LA VILLETTE,  
 Cara Black  
 CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
 Duane Swierczynski  
 KINGPIN, Mike Lawson  
 THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
 S. J. Rozan & John Shen Yee Nee  
 HERO, Thomas Perry  
 NEGATIVE GIRL, Libby Cudmore  
 HUGE, Brent Butt

WHERE THE BODY WAS,  
 Ed Brubaker & Sean Phillips  
 CREAM OF THE CROP: Best Bill  
 Pronzini Stories

**Craig Sistorson**

PAPER CAGE, Tom Baragwanath  
 RETURN TO BLOOD, Michael Bennett  
 SANCTUARY, Garry Disher  
 DEVIL'S KITCHEN, Candice Fox  
 MISSING WHITE WOMAN,  
 Kellye Garrett  
 EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
 THE WRONG HANDS,  
 Mark Billingham  
 HOME TRUTHS, Charity Norman  
 BLOOD RED SUMMER by Eryk Pruitt  
 THE MERCY CHAIR by MW Craven  
 CLETE by James Lee Burke  
 17 YEARS LATER by JP Pomare  
 GUIDE ME HOME by Attica Locke  
 THE WAITING by Michael Connelly  
 THE CRACKED MIRROR,  
 Chris Brookmyre

**Hank Wagner**

THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
 DON'T TURN AROUND, Harry Dolan  
 ORDINARY BEAR, C. B. Bernard  
 CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
 Duane Swierczynski  
 KINGPIN, Mike Lawson  
 WORST CASE SCENARIO,  
 T. J. Newman  
 SUGAR ON THE BONES,  
 Joe R. Lansdale  
 ALTER EGO, Alex Segura  
 A WORLD OF HURT, Mindy Mejia  
 DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE,  
 Ace Atkins

**Other Experts**

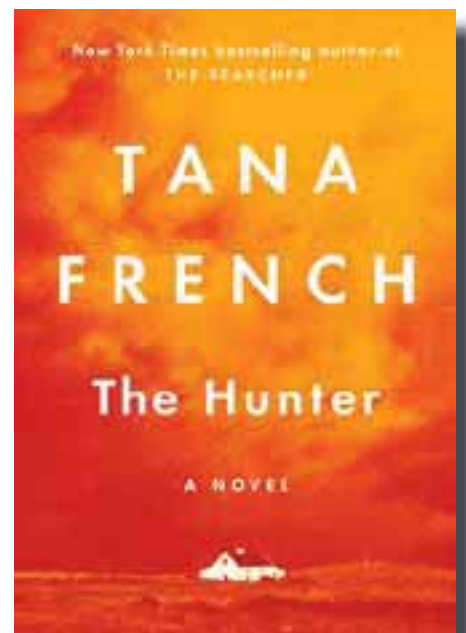
**Oline Cogdill**

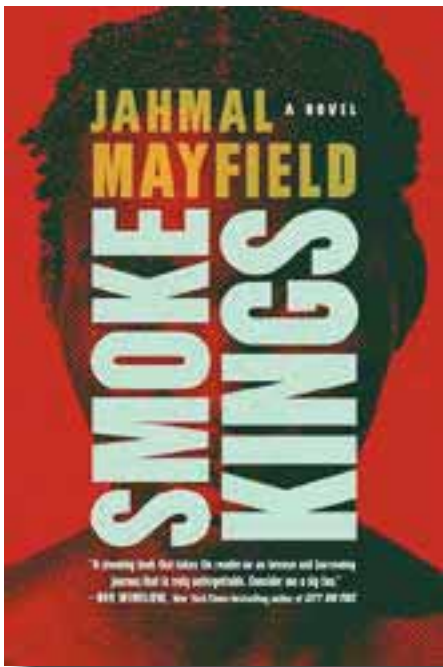
Nationally Syndicated Reviewer  
*Florida Sun Sentinel*  
 Barry Award Nominating Committee  
**Crime**  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS, Liz  
 Moore  
 THE WAITING, Michael Connelly

THE PUZZLE BOX. Danielle Trussoni  
 HAVOC, Christopher Bollen  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 ALTER EGO, Alex Segura  
 DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE,  
 Ace Atkins  
 THE HITCHCOCK HOTEL,  
 Stephanie Wrobel  
 THE RIVALS, Jane Pek  
 WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND,  
 Wanda M. Morris  
 DOUBLE BARREL BLUFF, Lou Berney  
 MISSING WHITE WOMAN,  
 Kellye Garrett  
 CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
 Duane Swierczynski  
 AGONY HILL, Sarah Stewart Taylor  
 BROILER, Eli Cranor  
 I DREAMED OF FALLING, Julia Dahl  
 SAFE AND SOUND, Laura McHugh  
 THE LOST VAN GOGH,  
 Jonathan Santlofer  
 THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
 S. J. Rozan & John Shen Yen Nee  
 TROUBLE ISLAND, Sharon Short  
 THE WHARTON PLOT,  
 Mariah Fredericks

**Debuts**

THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES,  
 Kat Ailes  
 KNIFE RIVER, Justine Champine  
 TWICE THE TROUBLE, Ash Clifton  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 BOOKED FOR MURDER, P. J. Nelson  
 BLOOD IN THE CUT,  
 Alejandro Nodarse





**Sarah Weinman**

*Mystery Reviewer*

*The New York Times*

- THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
HALL OF MIRRORS, John Copenhaver  
BLESSED WATER, Margot Douaihy  
SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
SWALLOW THE GHOST,  
Eugenie Montague  
ROUGH TRADE, Katrina Carrasco  
MAY THE WOLF DIE,  
Elizabeth Heider  
NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH,  
Robyn Gigi

**Sarah Lyall**

*The New York Times*

**Best Thrillers**

- HAVOC, Christopher Bollen  
THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
BRIGHT OBJECTS, Ruby Todd  
THE WINNER, Teddy Wayne  
NOBODY'S HERO, M. W. Craven  
THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
Dervla McTiernan  
THE NIGHT GUEST,  
Hildur Knútsdóttir  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,

Liz Moore

**Laura Wilson**

*The Guardian*

**Crime Time**

- WHITE CITY, Dominic Nolan  
WHAT A WAY TO GO, Bella Mackie  
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,  
I. S. Berry (2023 title in U.S.)  
BONEHEAD, Mo Hayder  
HUNTED by Abir Mukherjee  
WHAT A WAY TO GO, Bella Mackie  
THE KELLERBY CODE, Jonny Sweet  
THE LIST OF SUSPICIOUS THINGS,  
Jenny Godfrey  
NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Harkaway  
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
FINDER MYSTERIES, Simon Mason

**Alison Flood**

*The Guardian*

- GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
HAS ANYONE SEE CHARLOTTE  
SALTER?, Nicci French  
BONEHEAD, Mo Hayder  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman

**Paul Burke**

**Crime Time**

- WHITE CITY, Dominic Nolan  
THE VENUS OF SALO, Ben Pastor  
THE LAST DAYS OF JOHNNY  
NUNN, Nick Triplow  
THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
THE SILENT KILLER, Trevor Wood  
THE FINDER NOVELLAS,  
Simon Mason  
MOSCOW X, David McClockey  
(2023 title in U.S.)  
SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke

**Victoria Selman**

**Crime Time**

- DAY ONE, Abigail Dean  
ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
INTO THE FLAME, James Delargey  
THE WRECKAGE OF US,

Dan Malakin

- THE FURY, Alex Michaelides  
SEVEN DAYS, Robert Rutherford  
THE PROFILER, Helen Fields  
THE LAGOS WIFE, Vanessa Walters

**Barry Forshaw**

*The Financial Times*

**Crime Time**

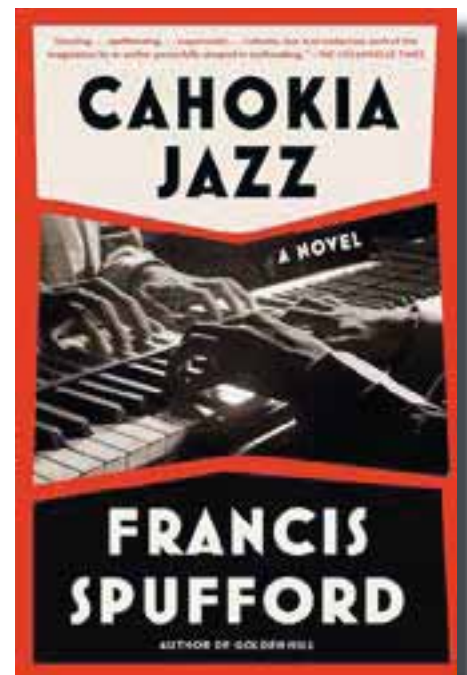
- HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,  
I. S. Berry (2023 in U.S.)  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
THE FINDER MYSTERIES,  
Simon Mason  
THE BELLS OF WESTMINSTER,  
Leonora Natrass  
WHITE CITY, Dominic Nolan  
THE LAST DAYS OF JOHNNY  
NUNN, Nick Triplow  
DAY ONE, Abigail Dean  
BAY OF THIEVES, Megan Davis

**Adam LeBor**

*Financial Times*

**Best Thrillers**

- EVERY SPY A TRAITOR, Alex Gerlis  
KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Harkaway  
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,  
I. S. Berry (2023 in U.S.)  
MOSCOW X, David McClockey  
(2023 in U.S.)  
MIDNIGHT IN VIENNA, Jane Thynne



## Joan Smith and Mark Sanderson

*The Times and Sunday Times*  
Best Crime

**BETWEEN TWO WORLDS** by Olivier Norek – *The Times and Sunday Times*  
Crime Book of the Year

WHITE CITY by Dominic Nolan  
ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
COVER THE BONES, Chris Hammer  
NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
A STRANGER IN THE FAMILY,  
Jane Casey  
THE FINAL ACT OF JULIETTE  
WILLOUGHBY, Ellery Lloyd  
THREE BURIALS, Anders Lustgarten  
CINNAMON GIRL, Daniel Weizmann  
THE WRONG HANDS,  
Mark Billingham

## James Owen and John Dugdale

*The Times and Sunday Times*  
Best Thrillers

**THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW**, I. S. Berry – *The Times and Sunday Times* Thriller of the Year  
(2023 in U.S.)

MOSCOW X, David McCloskey  
(2023 in U.S.)  
CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
DAY ONE, Abigail Dean  
THE END OF SUMMER,  
Charlotte Philby  
HONOUR AMONG SPIES,  
Merle Nygate  
WHAT A WAY TO GO, Bella Mackie  
SPIRAL, Cameron Ward  
THE ENIGMA GIRL, Henry Porter  
(2025 in U.S.)  
LEO, Deon Meyer (2025 in U.S.)

## Jake Kerridge

*Daily Telegraph*  
Crime Time

KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Hardaway  
HERE IN THE DARK, Alexis Soloski  
(2023 in U.S.)  
THE FINDER NOVELLAS,  
Simon Mason  
LIVING IS A PROBLEM,  
Doug Johnstone

THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW, I. S. Berry (2023 in U.S.)  
THE REVENGE OF RITA MARSH,  
Nilesha Chauvet  
THE NIGHT OF BABA YAGA,  
Akira Otani  
IMPOSTER SYNDROME,  
Joseph Knox  
HOLMES AND MORIARTY,  
Gareth Rubin  
A CASE OF MATRICIDE,  
Graeme Macrae Burnet

## Maxim Jakubowski

Crime Time

A STREETCAR NAMED ABERYSTWYTH, Malcolm Pryce  
DARK RIDE, Lou Berney (2023 in U.S.)  
ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW, I. S. Berry (2023 in U.S.)  
AN HONEST LIVING, Dwyer Murphy  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
CABARET MACABRE, Tom Mead  
EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
BLOOD SACRIFICE,  
Douglas Skelton

## Tom Nolan

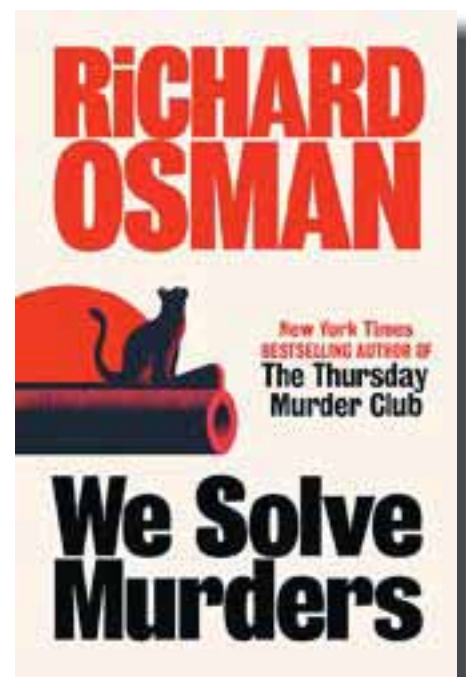
*The Wall Street Journal*

THE DROWNED, John Banville  
THE ALASKA SANDERS AFFAIR,  
Joël Dicker  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
CLOSE TO DEATH,  
Anthony Horowitz  
THE STARS TURNED INSIDE OUT,  
Nova Jacobs  
THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
TELL ME WHO YOU ARE,  
Louise Luna  
THE HOLLOW TREE, Philip Miller  
THE DEVIL RAISES HIS OWN,  
Scott Phillips  
A TALENT FOR MURDER,  
Peter Swanson

## Karen MacPherson

*The Washington Post*  
Best Mysteries

CIRCLE IN THE WATER,



Marcia Muller  
ECHO, Tracy Clark  
THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
MAY THE WOLF DIE,  
Elizabeth Heider  
THE PRINCESS OF LAS VEGAS,  
Chris Bohjalian  
A REFINER'S FIRE, Donna Leon  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
THE RIVALS, Jane Pek  
WHAT TIME THE SEXTON'S SPADE  
DOTH RUST, Alan Bradley  
WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
Marcie R. Rendon

## Stephanie Merry

*The Washington Post*  
Best Thrillers

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
EXPOSURE, Ramona Emerson  
FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE,  
Walter Mosley  
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE,  
Amy Tintera  
THE WINNER, Teddy Wayne

# Booksellers' Lists

## Best Mysteries of 2024

### Amazon

([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))

#### Best Standalones

THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker

THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
Jason Rekulak

LOST MAN'S LANE by Scott Carson

THE EXCITEMENTS by CJ Wray

PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
Christina Lynch

KILL FOR ME, KILL FOR YOU,  
Steve Cavanagh

LISTEN FOR THE LIE by Amy Tintera

BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy

WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND,  
Wanda M Morris

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston

WORDHUNTER, Stella Sands

DEADLY ANIMALS, Marie Tierney

THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
Emiko Jean

WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
Dervla McTiernan

A CALAMITY OF SOULS,  
David Baldacci

BROILER, Eli Cranor

THE UNQUIET BONES,  
Loreth Anne White

HOUSE OF GLASS, Sarah Pekkanen

THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE,  
Jo Piazza

#### Best New and Continuing Series

WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman

THE HUNTER, Tana French

THE WAITING, Michael Connelly

CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow

THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny

DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
ROOK, Kate Atkinson

GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke

SPIRIT CROSSING,  
William Kent Krueger

THIS IS WHY WE LIED,

Karin Slaughter

EXPOSURE, Ramona Emerson

FAREWELL AMETHYSTINE,  
Walter Mosley

THE BUTCHER GAME,  
Alaina Urquhart

### Barnes & Noble

([www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com))

THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny

THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker

THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
Laura Dave

THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
Jason Rekulak

MIND GAMES, Nora Roberts

WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman

KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Hardaway

THIS IS WHY WE LIED,  
Karin Slaughter

SPIRIT CROSSING,  
William Kent Krueger

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEVLINS,  
Lisa Scottoline

THE SEVENTH FLOOR,  
David McCloskey

HOME IS WHERE THE BODIES ARE,  
Jeneva Rose

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, Riley Sager

SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles

THE BUTCHER GAME,  
Alaina Urquhart

ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware

WE USED TO LIVE HERE,  
Marcus Kliever

THE HUNTER, Tana French

EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson

THE FURY, Alex Michaelides

THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton

THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz

MURDER ROAD, Simone St. James

EXPOSURE, Ramona Emerson

BLOOD LIKE MINE, Stuart Neville

### Waterstones

U.K. Bookstore Chain

#### Detectives

DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
ROOK, Kate Atkinson

MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin

IN TOO DEEP,  
Lee Child and Andrew Child

AN EYE FOR AN EYE, Jeffrey Archer

WITNESS 8, Steve Cavanagh

THE SUSPECT, Rob Rinder

THE DARK WIVES, Ann Cleeves

THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS,  
John Connolly

THE WAITING, Michael Connelly

TO DIE FOR, David Baldacci

ONE OF US IS DEAD, Peter James

CAMINO GHOSTS, John Grisham

#### Cosy Crime

WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman

THE HOTEL AVOCADO,  
Bob Mortimer

MURDER AT THE MONASTERY,  
Reverend Richard Coles

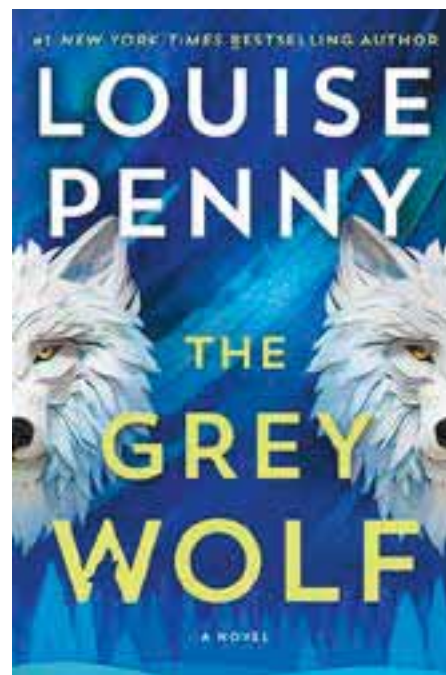
THE EXAMINER, Janice Hallett

THE KELLERBY CODE, Jonny Sweet

THE FELLOWSHIP OF  
PUZZLEMAKERS, Samuel Burr

THE MAN IN BLACK AND OTHER  
STORIES, Elly Griffiths

#### Thrillers





ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
FURY, Alex Michaelides  
PRECIPICE, Robert Harris  
THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
WHAT A WAY TO GO, Bella Mackie  
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
BUTTER, Asako Yuzuki

HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty  
THE BURIAL PLOT, Elizabeth Macneal  
IMPOSTER SYNDROME, Joseph Knox  
GRAVE YARD SHIFT, M. L. Rio  
BLOOD TIES, Jo Nesbo  
THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
SAFE ENOUGH and Other Stories,  
Lee Child

THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
THE PUZZLE WOOD, Rosie Andrews  
REDEMPTION, Jack Jordan  
ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
THEN THINGS WENT DARK,  
Bea Fitzgerald

THE HOUSE OF MIRRORS, Erin Kelly  
PRIMA FACIE, Suzie Miller  
ERUPTION,

James Patterson & Michael Crichton  
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO  
BREAKING AND ENTERING,  
Andrew Hunter Murray  
FIRST WIFE'S SHADOW, Adele Parks  
THE ALASKA SANDERS AFFAIR,  
Joel Dicker  
INK RIBBON RED, Alex Pavesi  
END OF STORY, A. J. Finn

#### **Espionage**

KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Hardaway  
DOWN CEMETERY ROAD,  
Mick Herron (reprint – not espionage)

#### **Rakuten Kobo**

(www.kobo.com)

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker – Top Pick  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore

LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
HOME IS WHERE THE BODIES ARE,  
Jeneva Rose  
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston

## Publications' Lists

### Best Mysteries of 2024

#### **Kirkus**

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
IT'S ELEMENTARY, Elise Bryant  
UNDER THE STORM,  
Christopher Carlsson  
THE UNWEDDING, Ally Condie  
WHO TO BELIEVE, Edwin Hill  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
JOE HUSTLE, Richard Lange  
GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore

TWO TIMES MURDER,  
Adam Oyebanji  
HERO, Thomas Perry  
CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
**Fiction**

CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner

#### **Publishers Weekly**

ASH DARK AS NIGHT, Gary Phillips  
BRIGHT OBJECTS, Ruby Todd  
CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
LOST MAN'S LANE, Scott Carson  
MAY THE WOLF DIE,  
Elizabeth Heider  
ONCE MORE FROM THE TOP,  
Emily Layden

THE PUZZLE BOX, Danielle Trussoni  
ROUGH TRADE, Katrina Carrasco  
THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
THE SILVER BONE, Andrey Kurkov  
SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
WE SOLVE MURDER, Richard Osman

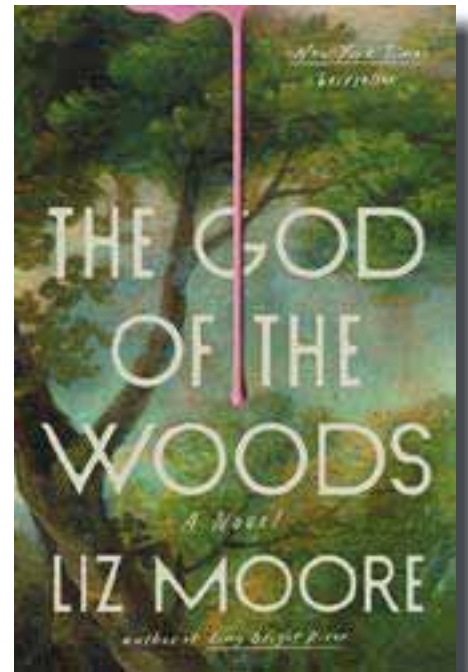
#### **Library Journal**

by Liz French & Lesa Holstine  
THE SECRET WAR OF JULIA CHILD,  
Diana R. Chambers  
THE WHARTON PLOT,  
Mariah Fredericks  
PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
Christina Lynch  
THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
John Shen Yen Nee & S. J. Rozan

THE MURDERESS, Laurie Notaro  
THE BRIAR CLUB, Kate Quinn  
WHEN THEY LAST SAW HER,  
Marcie R. Rendon  
MURDER ROAD, Simone St. James  
THE PUZZLE BOX, Danielle Trussoni  
THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
Best Pop Fiction of 2024 List  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore

#### **Literary Fiction**

CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner



#### **Booklist**

by Susan Maguire

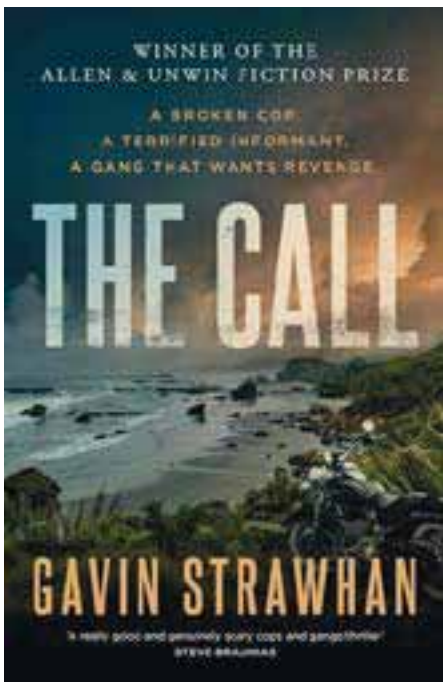
AFTER THAT NIGHT, Karin Slaughter  
ALL THE SINNERS BLEED,  
S. A. Cosby – (2023 title)  
BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN,  
Jessica Knoll (2023 title)  
FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE,  
Walter Mosley  
HERO, Thomas Perry  
THE HUNTER, Tana French

ILIUM, Lea Carpenter  
 THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
 OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
 ONE OF US KNOWS, Alyssa Cole  
 PAY DIRT, Sara Paretsky

**Editors' Choice**

WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
 Marcie R. Rendon  
 SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles  
 ONE OF US KNOWS, Alyssa Cole  
 THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
 OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner

**New Zealand's LISTENER  
 Magazine**



17 YEARS LATER by JP Pomare  
 THE CALL by Gavin Strawhan  
 THE CRACKED MIRROR,  
 Chris Brookmyre  
 DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
 ROOK, Kate Atkinson  
 THE DROWNED, John Banville  
 EVERYBODY KNOWS, Jordan Harper  
 (2023 title in U.S.)  
 HIGHWAY 13, Fiona McFarlane  
 HOME TRUTHS, Charity Norman  
 HUNTED by Abir Mukherjee  
 LEAVE THE GIRLS BEHIND,  
 Jacqueline Bublitz

NO ONE WILL KNOW, Rose Carlyle  
 RETURN TO BLOOD, Michael Bennett

**Dayton Daily News**

by Vick Mickunas

BROILER, Eli Cranor  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 SLEEPING GIANTS, Rene Denfeld  
 HERO, Thomas Perry  
 LILITH, Eric Rickstad  
 WANTED, Abir Mukherjee  
 SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles  
 MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin

**Everand**

I NEED YOU TO READ THIS,  
 Jessa Maxwell  
 THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
 Laura Dave  
 THE DARK WIVES, Ann Cleeves  
 THE MANY LIES OF VERONICA  
 HAWKINS, Kristina Perez  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty  
 THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
 HORROR MOVIE, Paul Tremblay  
 ONE KILLER PROBLEM,  
 Justine Pucella Winans  
 LOOKING FOR SMOKE, K. A. Cobell  
 ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
 THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
 THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
 OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
 ROUGH TRADE, Katrina Carrasco  
 DAUGHTER OF MINE,  
 Megan Miranda  
 ONE OF US KNOWS, Alissa Cole  
 LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 LOST MAN'S LANE, Scott Carson  
 KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,  
 Steve Cavanagh  
 BLESSED WATER, Margot Douaihy  
 UNDER THIS RED ROCK,  
 Mindy McGinnis  
 EVERYONE WHO CAN FORGIVE ME  
 IS DEAD, Jenny Hollander  
 THE FURY, Alex Michaelides  
 ONLY IF YOU'RE LUCKY,  
 Stacy Willingham

THE SILENCE IN HER EYES,  
 Armando Lucas Correa  
 THE HEIRESS, Rachel Hawkins  
 THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
 ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett

**Elle**

by Lauren Puckett-Pope

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
 THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
 ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
 THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
 K. T. Nguyen  
 MISSING WHITE WOMAN,  
 Kellye Garrett  
 ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
 Christina Lynch  
 DAUGHTER OF MINE,  
 Megan Miranda  
 LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 RABBIT HOLE, Kate Brody  
 CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
 Duane Swierczynski  
 WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
 Dervla McTiernan  
 ILIUM, Lea Carpenter  
 MY FAVORITE SCAR, Nicolas Ferraro  
 DEAD IN LONG BEACH,  
 CALIFORNIA, Venita Blackburn  
 DO WHAT GODMOTHER SAYS,  
 L. S. Stratton  
 SINCE SHE'S BEEN GONE,  
 Sagit Schwartz  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 ORDINARY HUMAN FAILINGS,  
 Megan Nolan  
 EVERYONE WHO CAN FORGIVE ME  
 IS DEAD, Jenny Hollander  
 THE SPLIT, Kit Frick  
 NO ONE DIES YET, Kobby Ben Ben  
 A STEP PAST DARKNESS, Vera Kurian

THE FIVE YEAR LIE, Sarina Bowen  
 THE EYES ARE THE BEST PART,  
 Monika Kim  
 THE EXTINCTION OF IRENA REY,  
 Jennifer Croft  
 THE PRINCESS OF LAS VEGAS,  
 Chris Bohjalian  
 SHE'S NOT SORRY, Mary Kubica  
 WHILE WE WERE BURNING,  
 Sara Koffi  
 THE WINNER, Teddy Wayne  
 SAFE AND SOUND, Laura McHugh  
 A GAME OF LIES, Clare Mackintosh

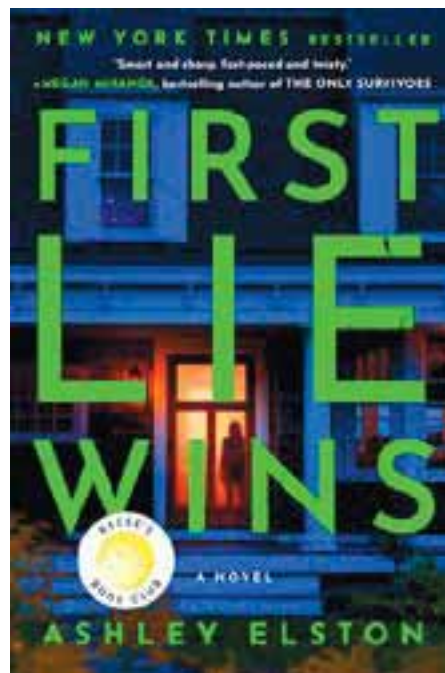
**GQIndia**

Best Thrillers  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH,  
 Robyn Gigl  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
 ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
 TELL ME WHO YOU ARE,  
 Louisa Luna  
 NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
 K. T. Nguyen

**Parade Magazine**

SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon  
 CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
 CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
 MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, Riley Sager  
 THE NEXT MRS. PARRISH,  
 Liv Constantine  
 FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
 ASH DARK AS NIGHT, Gary Phillips  
 A CALAMITY OF SOULS,  
 David Baldacci  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles  
 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
 K.T. Nguyen  
 THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
 OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
 EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
 John Shen Yen Nee and SJ Rozan  
 HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
 MURDER, Kristen Perrin  
 THE PRINCESS OF LAS VEGAS,

Chris Bohjalian  
 LONG ISLAND COMPROMISE,  
 Taffy Brodesser-Akner  
 THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE,  
 Jo Piazza  
 THIS IS WHY WE LIED,  
 Karin Slaughter  
 DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
 ROOK, Kate Atkinson  
 THE DARK WIVES, Ann Cleves  
 FATAL INTRUSION,  
 Jeffery Deaver and Isabella Maldonado  
 THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
 Laura Dave  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
 Marcie R. Rendon  
 WORST CASE SCENARIO,  
 T.J. Newman  
 PRECIPICE, Robert Harris  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner



**The Globe and Mail**

BLOOD RUBIES, Milan Doquang  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
 ROOK, Kate Atkinson  
 HOUSE OF GLASS, Sarah Pekkanen  
 ONLY ONE SURVIVES,  
 Hannah Mary McKinnon  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
 ONE PERFECT COUPLE,

Ruth Ware  
 THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
**Literary Fiction**  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner

**The Toronto Star**

THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
 ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 ONLY ONE SURVIVES,  
 Hannah Mary McKinnon  
**Literary Fiction**  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner

**AudioFile Magazine**

Best Mystery & Suspense Audiobooks  
 THE BRIAR CLUB, Kate Quinn  
 THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
 A NEST OF VIPERS,  
 Harini Nagendra  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon  
 YOU'LL NEVER FIND ME,  
 Allison Brennan

**Woman's World**

Mystery  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS, Liz  
 Moore – Best Mystery

Runners-Up  
 ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
 Laura Dave

**Thriller**

DARLING GIRLS, Sally Hepworth –  
 Best Thriller  
 Runners-Up  
 ONE OF US KNOWS, Alyssa Cole  
 THE TEACHER, Freida McFadden

**Audiobook**

CHER: PART 1, Cher – Best Audiobook  
 Runners-Up  
 HERE ONE MOMENT,  
 Liane Moriarty  
 LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera

# Websites' Lists

## Best Mysteries of 2024

### Audible

([audible.com](https://www.audible.com))

Best Mysteries & Thrillers

LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
 WE PLAY GAMES,  
 Sarah A. Denzil – audible original  
 THE TEACHER, Freida McFadden  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 THE SAFE MAN, Michael Connelly –  
 audible original  
 AFTER YOU'VE GONE, Margot Hunt  
 – audible original

### Tertulia

([tertulia.com](https://www.tertulia.com))

THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
 KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Hardaway  
 THE AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO  
 MURDER, Beatriz Williams  
 THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
 WILD HOUSES, Colin Barrett  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty  
 THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 THE WINNER, Teddy Wayne  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
 YOU LIKE IT DARKER: STORIES,  
 Stephen King  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 THE PUZZLE BOX, Danielle Trussoni  
 BURN, Peter Heller  
 IT HAD TO BE YOU, Eliza Jane Brazier  
 THE FURY, Alex Michaelides  
 WE LOVE THE NIGHTLIFE,  
 Rachel Koller Croft  
 THE UNWEDDING, Ally Condie

NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra

ILIUM, Lea Carpenter

ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS,  
 Araminta Hall

ONE OF OUR KIND, Nicola Yoon  
 DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE,  
 Ace Atkins

YOU'RE SAFE HERE, Leslie Stephens

MISSING WHITE WOMAN,  
 Kellye Garrett

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, Riley Sager  
 A TALENT FOR MURDER,  
 Peter Swanson

THE EXTINCTION OF IRENA REY,  
 Jennifer Croft

RABBIT HOLE, Kate Brody

BUTCHER, Joyce Carol Oates

WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND,  
 Wanda M. Morris

ASSASSINS ANONYMOUS, Rob Hart

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston

LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera

ALMOST SURELY DEAD,  
 Amina Akhtar

THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean

BROILER, Eli Cranor

### Goodreads Choice Awards

([goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com))

**Mystery and Thriller**

WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman

HOME IS WHERE THE BODIES ARE,  
 Jeneva Rose

THE HEIRESS, Rachel Hawkins

THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
 Jason Rekulak

NOT WHAT SHE SEEMS,  
 Yasmin Angoe

THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore

THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean

DARLING GIRLS, Sally Hepworth

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,

Chris Whitaker

THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
 Laura Dave

THE TEACHER, Freida McFadden

THE HOUSE OF GLASS,  
 Sarah Pekkanen

HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
 MURDER, Kristen Perrin

LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston

SOCIETY OF LIES, Lauren Ling Brown

THE BOYFRIEND, Freida McFadden

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, Riley Sager

THE MYSTERY GUEST, Nita Prose

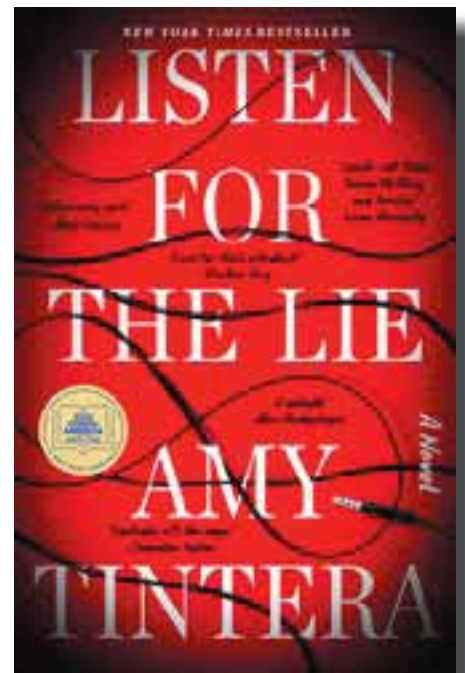
**Historical Fiction**

THE FROZEN RIVER, Ariel Lawhon

THE BRIAR CLUB, Kate Quinn

**Literary Fiction**

HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty



### NPR

([npr.org](https://www.npr.org))

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley

LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera

THE ANTIQUE HUNTER'S GUIDE  
 TO MURDER, C. L. Miller

PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
 Christina Lynch

THE KAMOGAWA FOOD DETEC-  
 TIVES, Hisashi Kashiwai

WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman

THE BRIAR'S CLUB, Kate Quinn

PHANTOM ORBIT, David Ignatius

CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
 A BETTER WORLD, Sarah Langan  
 A TALENT FOR MURDER,  
 Peter Swanson  
 THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
 John Shen Yen Nee & S. J. Rozan  
 HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
 MURDER, Kristen Perren  
 NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
 LILITH, Eric Rickstad  
 BABY X, Kira Peikoff  
 THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner  
 HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty

**BookPage**

([bookpage.com](http://bookpage.com))

A RUSE OF SHADOWS, Sherry Thomas  
 DEADLY ANIMALS, Marie Tierney  
 EXPOSURE, Ramona Emerson  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon  
 THE CLOSE-UP, Pip Drysdale  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 THINGS DON'T BREAK ON THEIR  
 OWN, Sarah Easter Collins  
 TRUST HER, Flynn Berry  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman

**Booklist Queen**

([booklistqueen.com](http://booklistqueen.com))

WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
 Marcie R. Rendon  
 SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles  
 ONE OF US KNOWS, Alyssa Cole  
 THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
 OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner

**CrimeReads**

([crimereads.com](http://crimereads.com))

**Best Crime**

CROOKED SEEDS, Karen Jennings  
 WILD HOUSES, Colin Barrett  
 ONE OF OUR KIND, Nicola Yoon  
 SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon

ORDINARY HUMAN FAILINGS,  
 Megan Nolan  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 BUTTER, Asako Yuzuki  
 HAVOC, Christopher Bollen  
 WHAT DOESN'T KILL US, Ajay Close  
 BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy

**Best Espionage**

SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon  
 THE STORM WE MADE,  
 Vanessa Chan  
 TRUST HER, Flynn Berry  
 KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Harkaway  
 GABRIEL'S MOON, William Boyd

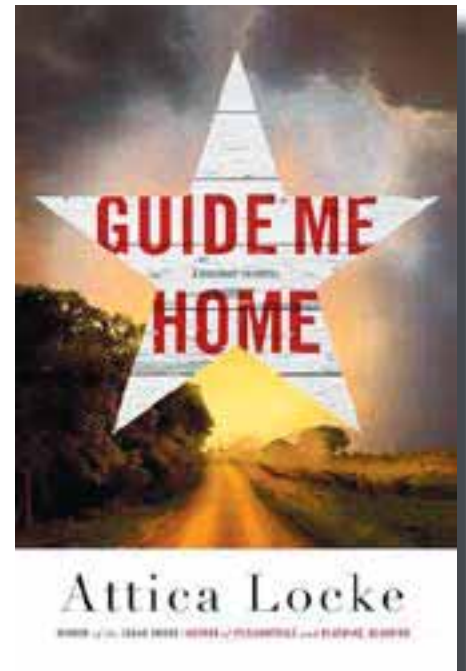
**Best Psychological Thrillers**

WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
 Dervla McTiernan  
 THE MOST FAMOUS GIRL IN THE  
 WORLD, Iman Hariri Kia  
 YOU WILL NEVER BE ME,  
 Jesse Q. Sutanto  
 WHILE WE WERE BURNING,  
 Sara Koffi  
 THE MANY LIES OF VERONICA  
 HAWKINS, Kristina Perez  
 THE SNAP, Elizabeth Staple  
 BODIES TO DIE FOR, Lori Brand  
 MADWOMAN, Chelsea Bieker  
 THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
 Jason Rekulak  
 SUCH A BAD INFLUENCE,  
 Olivia Muentert

**Best Traditional**

EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
 ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
 ROOK, Kate Atkinson  
 WHAT TIME THE SEXTON'S SPADE  
 DOTH RUST, Alan Bradley  
 CABARET MACABRE, Tom Mead  
 A MIDNIGHT PUZZLE, Gigi Pandian  
 CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
 THE STARS TURNED INSIDE OUT,  
 Nova Jacobs  
 GUILT AND GINATAAN,  
 Mia P. Manansala  
 DEATH IN THE AIR, Ram Murali  
 SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE  
 TELEGRAM FROM HELL,  
 Nicholas Meyer  
**Best Debut**  
 THE LIONS' DEN, Iris Mwanza

LISTEN TO THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 SERAPHIM, Joshua Perry  
 THE STONE WITCH OF FLORENCE,  
 Anna Rasche  
 THOSE OPULENT DAYS,  
 Jacquie Pham  
 SHORT WAR, Lily Meyer  
 NO ONE DIES YET, Kobby Ben Ben  
 THE STORM WE MADE,  
 Vanessa Chan  
 LIGHTBORNE, Hesse Phillips  
 TEDDY, Emily Dunlay



**Marilyn's Mystery Reads**

by Marilyn Brooks

([marilynmysteryreads.com](http://marilynmysteryreads.com))

ECHO, Tracy Clark  
 LAST SEEN IN HAVANA,  
 Teresa Dovalpage  
 THE BEST LIES, David Ellis  
 IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME,  
 Alex Finlay  
 THE SLATE, Matthew Fitzsimmons  
 THE FINAL CURTAIN,  
 Keigo Higashino  
 LIKE IT NEVER HAPPENED,  
 Jeff Hoffman  
 HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
 NOTHING BUT THE BONES,  
 Brian Panowich  
 A BLOOD RED MORNING,  
 Mark Pryor  
 WORDHUNTER, Stella Sands  
 DEATH IN THE DETAILS,

Katie Tietjen  
DARK RIDE, Lou Berney (2023 title)

### DeadGood Books

(www.deadgoodbooks.co.uk)

THE SUSPECT, Rob Rinder  
THE WRONG SISTER, Claire Douglas  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
A REFINER'S FIRE, Donna Leon  
IN TOO DEEP,  
Lee Child & Andrew Child  
MURDER ON LAKE GARDA,  
Tom Hindle  
THE SPY COAST, Tess Gerritsen  
(2023 title in U.S.)  
EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
THE WOMAN ON THE LEDGE,  
Ruth Mancini  
BREAKING THE DARK, Lisa Jewell  
FIVE BY FIVE, Claire Wilson  
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?,  
Shari Lapena  
THE MISSING FAMILY, Tim Weaver  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
THE LAGOS WIFE, Vanessa Walters  
THINK TWICE, Harlan Coben  
PRECIPICE, Robert Harris  
THE SWITCH, Lily Samson

### Jen Ryland

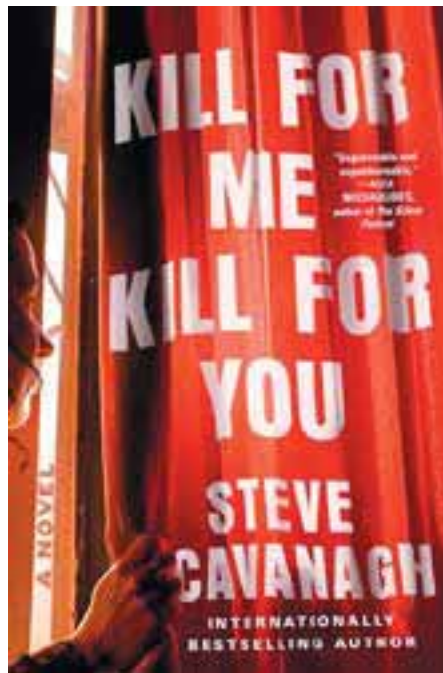
(www.jenryland.com)

THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
DAUGHTER OF MINE,  
Megan Miranda  
DEADLY ANIMALS, Marie Tierney  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
HOME IS WHERE THE BODIES ARE,  
Jeneva Rose  
KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,  
Steve Cavanagh  
MURDER ROAD, Simone St. James  
THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
Emiko Jean

### Shereads

(shereads.com)

BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy  
DARLING GIRLS, Sally Hepworth  
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston



KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,  
Steve Cavanagh  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
Emiko Jean  
WATCH WHERE THEY HIDE,  
Tamron Hall  
WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
Dervla McTiernan  
WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND,  
Wanda M. Morris  
LEAVE THE GIRLS BEHIND,  
Jacqueline Bublitz  
ONLY IF YOU'RE LUCKY,  
Stacy Willingham  
RABBIT HOLE, Kate Brody  
ZETAS TILL WE DIE,  
Amber & Danielle Brown  
A LOVELY LIE, Jaime Lynn Hendricks  
THE HOLLYWOOD ASSISTANT,  
May Cobb  
SOCIETY OF LIES, Lauren Ling Brown  
PROVIDENCE, Craig Willse  
THE MAN ON THE TRAIN,  
Debbie Babitt  
THE LAST PARTY, A. R. Torre  
THE HUNTER'S DAUGHTER,  
Nicola Solvinic  
**Fiction**  
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,

Chris Whitaker  
THE FROZEN RIVER, Ariel Lawhon  
HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty  
THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE,  
Jo Piazza  
THE BRIAR CLUB, Kate Quinn

### Crime Fiction Lover Awards

(crimefictionlover.com)

**Best Crime Book**  
MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
- Winner  
GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
- Editor's Choice  
THE MERCY CHAIR, M.W. Craven  
THE EXAMINER, Janice Hallett  
THE DEATH WATCHER, Chris Carter  
ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
**Best Crime Debut**  
THE LIST OF SUSPICIOUS THINGS,  
Jennie Godfrey - Winner  
DEADLY ANIMALS, Marie Tierney  
- Editor's Choice  
HELLE AND DEATH, Oskar Jensen  
KNIFE SKILLS FOR BEGINNERS,  
Orlando Murrin  
CROW MOON, Suzy Aspley  
A RELUCTANT SPY, David Goodman  
**Best Crime Novel in Translation**  
DEATH AT THE SANATORIUM,  
Ragnar Jónasson; translated Victoria  
Cribb - Winner  
THE NIGHT OF BABA YAGA, Akira  
Otani; translated Sam Bett  
- Editor's Choice  
BLACK WOLF, Juan Gómez-Jurado;  
translated Nicolas Caistor  
THE SNOW ANGEL, Anki Edvinsson;  
translated Paul Norlen  
THE LOVER OF NO FIXED ABODE,  
Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini;  
translated Gregory Dowling  
THE KITCHEN, Simone Buchholz;  
translated Rachel Ward  
**Best Indie Crime Novel**  
A KILLER OF INFLUENCE, J.D. Kirk  
- Winner  
THE CORPSE WITH THE PEARLY  
SMILE, Cathy Ace - Editor's Choice  
BRONCO BUSTER, A.J. Devlin  
WESTERWICK, George Paterson  
NAMASTE MART CONFIDENTIAL,  
Andrew Miller

DYING FOR CRYSTAL,  
Katherine Black

### Beyond The Bookends

([beyondthebookends.com](http://beyondthebookends.com))

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
Jason Rekulak  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
THE MOST WONDERFUL CRIME OF  
THE YEAR, Ally Carter  
WE SOLVE MURDER, Richard Osman  
THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE,  
Jo Piazza  
SUCH A BAD INFLUENCE,  
Olivia Muenster  
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
ONE OF OUR KIND, Nicola Yoon  
ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
THE RESORT, Sara Ochs  
KILL FOR ME KILL FOR YOU,  
Steve Cavanagh  
THE HEIRESS, Rachel Hawkins  
THE NIGHT OF THE STORM,  
Nishita Parekh

### Air Mail

([airmail.news/books](http://airmail.news/books))

by Lisa Henricksson

THE DROWNED, John Banville  
HAVOC, Christopher Bollen  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
THE EXAMINER, Janice Hallett  
THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
BURN, Peter Heller  
GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
Dervla McTiernan

### Bibliolifestyle

([bibliolifestyle.com](http://bibliolifestyle.com))

**Thriller Books, Suspense & Mysteries**  
EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
THE SILENCE IN HER EYES,  
Armando Lucas Correa  
UNDER THE STORM,  
Christopher Carlsson  
THE NEW COUPLE IN 5B, Lisa Unger  
WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,

Dervla McTiernan  
DAUGHTER OF MINE,  
Megan Miranda

CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
THE LAST WORD, Elly Griffiths  
THE MAIN CHARACTER,  
Jaclyn Goldis  
SWIPED, L. M. Chilton  
IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME,  
Alex Finlay  
THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
A TALENT FOR MURDER,  
Peter Swanson  
LOVE LETTERS TO A  
SERIAL KILLER, Tasha Coryell  
THE UNWEDDING, Ally Condie  
JOE HUSTLE, Richard Lange  
THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
TELL ME WHO YOU ARE,  
Louisa Luna  
ONCE MORE FROM THE TOP,  
Emily Layden  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
THE HITCHCOCK HOTEL,  
Stephanie Wrobel  
THE TRAP, Ava Glass  
WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
Marcie R. Rendon  
THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
Jason Rekulak  
YOU CAN'T HURT ME, Emma Cook  
SHELL GAMES, Bonnie Kistler  
THE RIVALS, Jane Pek  
MIDNIGHT ON BEACON STREET,  
Emily Ruth Verona

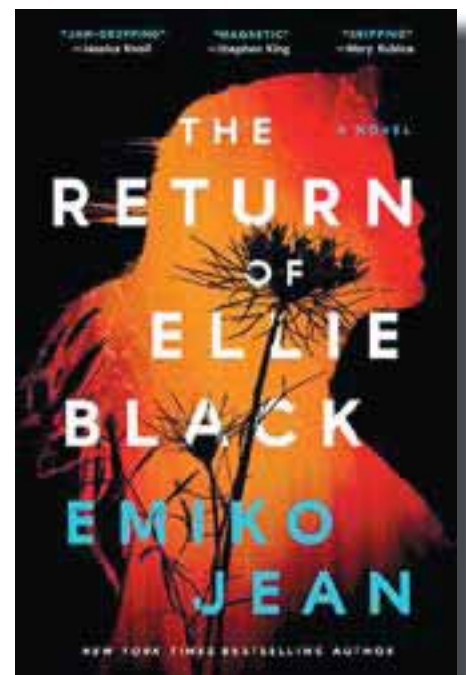
### Cozy Mysteries

THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES,  
Kat Ailes  
FINLAY DONOVAN ROLLS  
THE DICE, Elle Cosimano  
HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
MURDER, Kristen Perrin  
MURDER MARKS THE PAGE,  
Karen Rose Smith  
NOSY NEIGHBORS, Freya Sampson  
NONNA MARIA AND THE CASE OF  
THE LOST TREASURE,  
Lorenzo Carcaterra  
A CYCLIST'S GUIDE TO CRIME &  
CROISSANTS, Ann Claire  
THE PERILS OF LADY CATHERINE  
de BOURGH, Claudia Gray  
PEG AND ROSE PLAY THE PONIES,  
Laurien Berenson

A VERY WOODSY MURDER,  
Ellen Byron  
PUZZLE ME A MURDER, Roz Noonan  
FIVE FURRY FAMILIARS,  
Lynn Cahoon  
THE MURDERS IN GREAT  
DIDDLING, Katarina Bivald  
A FATAL FEAST AT BRAMSFORD  
MANOR, Darci Hannah  
THE MISTLETOE MYSTERY,  
Nita Prose  
MURDER ON THE PAGE,  
Daryl Wood Gerber  
PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
Christina Lynch  
MADRIGALS AND MAYHEM,  
Elizabeth Penney

### Bookreporter Reviewers' Favorites

THE STARS TURNED INSIDE OUT,  
Nova Jacobs  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
Laura Dave  
THE AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO  
MURDER, Beatriz Williams, Lauren  
Willig & Karen White  
THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
Jason Rekulak  
HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty  
WORDHUNTER, Stella Sands



**Five Books**

([fivebooks.com](http://fivebooks.com))

THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 THE ALASKA SANDERS AFFAIR,  
 Joel Dicker  
 LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
 THE PROFILER, Helen Fields  
 (2025 title in U.S.)

**Indigo**

([indigo.ca](http://indigo.ca))

THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?,  
 Shari Lapena  
 THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
 Laura Dave  
 EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 THE REAPPEARANCE OF RACHEL  
 PRICE, Holly Jackson  
 ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
 THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
 THE TREASURE HUNTERS CLUB,  
 Tom Ryan  
 THE BOYFRIEND, Freida McFadden  
 THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
 LOCKED IN, Jussi Adler-Olsen  
 THE YEAR OF THE LOCUST,  
 Terry Hayes

**Fiction**

HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty  
 THE BRIAR CLUB, Kate Quinn

**OverDrive**

([overdrive.com](http://overdrive.com))

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
 THIS IS WHY WE LIED,  
 Karin Slaughter  
 THE REAPPEARANCE OF RACHEL  
 PRICE, Holly Jackson  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
 OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
 MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, Riley Sager  
 THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
 WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND,  
 Wanda M. Morris  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,

Richard Osman  
 THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore



**Stevereads**

by Steve Donohue

([openlettersreview.com](http://openlettersreview.com))

TOOTH AND CLAW, Craig Johnson  
 THE PHANTOM PATROL,  
 James R. Benn  
 DEATH BY MISADVENTURE,  
 Tasha Alexander  
 THE SAINT, Carin Gerhardsen  
 PEKING DUCK AND COVER,  
 Vivien Chen  
 THE RIVER WE REMEMBER,  
 William Kent Krueger – 2023 title  
 UNDER THE PAPER MOON,  
 Shaina Steinberg  
 THE LAST HOPE, Susan Elia MacNeal  
 A CHAIN OF PEARLS, Raemi A. Ray  
 THE WHARTON PLOT,  
 Mariah Fredericks

**Stop, You're Killing Me!**

([stopyourekillngme.com](http://stopyourekillngme.com))

by Lucinda Surber

**Best Debut Mysteries**

BURN IT ALL, Maggie Aufferth  
 THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES,  
 Kat Ailes  
 SWIPED, L. J. Chilton  
 TWICE THE TROUBLE, Ash Clifton  
 YOU CAN'T HURT ME, Emma Cook

OUR KIND OF GAME,  
 Johanna Copeland  
 THE OUTLIER, Elisabeth Eaves  
 EVERYONE WHO CAN FORGIVE ME  
 IS DEAD, Jenny Hollander  
 WHERE YOU END, Abbott Kahler  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 WHEN WE WERE SILENT,  
 Fiona McPhillips  
 SUCH A BAD INFLUENCE,  
 Olivia Muentert  
 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
 K. T. Nguyen  
 BLOOD IN THE CUT,  
 Alejandro Nodarse  
 NORTHWOODS, Amy Pease  
 HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
 MURDER, Kristen Perrin  
 THE ASCENT, Adam Plantinga  
 WORDHUNTER, Stella Sands  
 LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 BRIGHT OBJECTS, Ruby Todd  
 HOLY CITY, Henry Wise  
 THIRTEEN WAYS TO KILL LULA-  
 BELLE ROCK, Maud Woolf

**Bolobooks**

([www.bolobooks.com](http://www.bolobooks.com))

by Kristopher Zgorski

**WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND, Wanda**

**M. Morris – Top Read**

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 THE DANCER, Oskar Gudmundsson  
 EVERY TIME I GO ON VACATION  
 SOMEONE DIES, Catherine Mack  
 THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
 HALL OF MIRRORS, John Copenhaver  
 I DREAMED OF FALLING, Julia Dahl  
 A VERY BAD THING, J. T. Ellison  
 WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
 Dervla McTiernan  
 WHO TO BELIEVE,  
 Edwin Hill  
 Debuts  
 THE BUSY BODY, Kemper Donovan  
 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
 K. T. Nguyen  
 VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED,  
 Frances White

**Novel Suspects**

([novelsuspects.com](http://novelsuspects.com))

by Lauren Shade

WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,



Marcie R. Rendon  
 ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy  
 LOST MAN'S LANE, Scott Carson  
 THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
 THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
 THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
 GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
 LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 HALL OF MIRRORS, John Copenhaver  
 MADWOMAN, Chelsea Bieker  
 THE MOST, Jessica Anthony

### MSN

by Michael Giltz

SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon  
 CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
 CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
 MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, Riley Sager  
 THE NEXT MRS. PARRISH,  
 Liv Constantine  
 FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
 VIOLENT SPRING, Gary Phillips  
 ASH DARK AS NIGHT, Gary Phillips  
 A CALAMITY OF SOULS,  
 David Baldacci  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 THE HUNTER, Tana French  
 SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles  
 THE BRIGHTWOOD CODE,  
 Monica Hesse  
 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
 K. T. Nguyen  
 THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
 OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
 EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
 S. J. Rozan & John Shen Yen Nee  
 HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
 MURDER, Kristen Perrin  
 THE BULLET SWALLOWED,  
 Elizabeth Gonzalez James  
 THE PRINCESS OF LAS VEGAS,  
 Chris Bohjalian  
 LONG ISLAND COMPROMISE,  
 Taffy Brodesser-Akner

THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE,  
 Jo Piazza

### The Independent

(<https://www.independent.co.uk/>)

by Eleanor Harvey

MURDER ON LAKE GARDA,  
 Tom Hindle  
 THE FOUR, Ellie Keel  
 EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
 SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
 ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
 OUR HOLIDAY, Louise Candlish  
**Honorable Mention**  
 THE EXAMINER, Janice Hallett  
 THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
 THE BURIAL PLOT, Elizabeth Macneal

THE SOCIETY OF LIES,  
 Lauren Ling Brown  
 THE BOYFRIEND, Freida McFadden  
 THE PUZZLE BOX, Danielle Trussoni  
 THE FURY, Alex Michaelides  
 THE 24<sup>TH</sup> HOUR,  
 James Patterson & Maxine Paetro  
 PASSIONS IN DEATH, J. D. Robb  
**In Literature & Fiction**  
 CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner

### Mystery Tribune

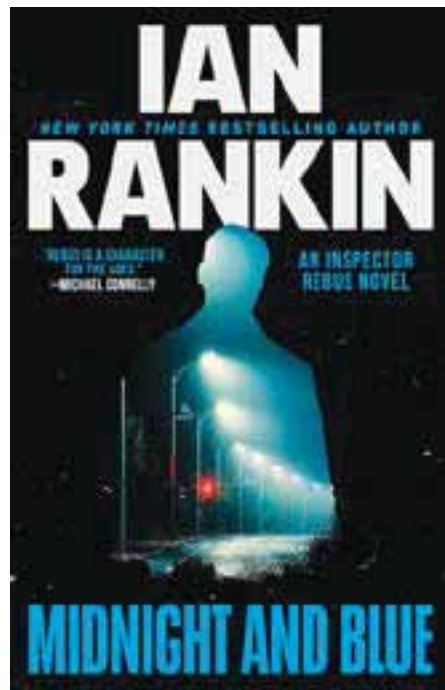
([mysterytribune.com](http://mysterytribune.com))

ALTER EGO, Alex Segura  
 THINK TWICE, Harlan Coben  
 GRAVEYARD SHIFT, M. L. Rio  
 PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
 Christina Lynch  
 BLIND TO MIDNIGHT,  
 Reed Farrel Coleman  
 THE WOMAN WHO LIED,  
 Claire Douglas  
 THE EXPAT, Hansen Shi  
 BUTTER, Asako Yuzuki  
 THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE  
 ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
 SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
 LILITH, Eric Rickstad

### Pile By the Bed

([pilebythebed.com](http://pilebythebed.com))

CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
 HIGHWAY 13, Fiona McFarlane  
 ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 THE CRACKED MIRROR,  
 Chris Brookmyre  
 SHADOW CITY, Natalie Conyer



### Thriftbooks

([thriftbooks.com](http://thriftbooks.com))

THE HOUSEMAID IS WATCHING,  
 Freida McFadden  
 THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
 THREE-INCH TEETH, C. J. Box  
 A CALAMITY OF SOULS,  
 David Baldacci  
 FIRST FROST, Craig Johnson  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 SPIRIT CROSSING,  
 William Kent Krueger  
 HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty

### Screen Rant

([screenrant.com](http://screenrant.com))

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
 THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
 Liz Moore  
 THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
 Chris Whitaker  
 LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
 WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
 Richard Osman  
 THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
 Emiko Jean  
 MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, Riley Sager  
 SOCIETY OF LIES, Lauren Ling Brown  
 HOUSE OF GLASS, Sarah Pekkanen  
 THE BOYFRIEND, Freida McFadden



## Libraries

### Chicago Public Library ([chipublib.bibliocommons.com](http://chipublib.bibliocommons.com))

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
BROILER, Eli Cranor  
CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
ROOK, Kate Atkinson  
EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A  
SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson  
FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE,  
Walter Mosley  
SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon  
GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke  
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz  
THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE,  
Jo Piazza  
WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
Marcie R. Rendon  
SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
BRIGHT OBJECTS, Ruby Todd  
CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
THE COMFORT OF GHOSTS,  
Jacqueline Winspear  
DISTURBING THE BONES,  
Andrew Davis

EXTINCTION, Douglas Preston  
LOST MAN'S LANE, Scott Carson  
HOUSE OF BONE AND RAIN,  
Gabino Iglesias  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
MADWOMAN, Chelsea Bieker  
THE MIGHTY RED, Louise Erdrich  
NOSY NEIGHBORS, Freya Sampson  
ROUGH TRADE, Katrina Carrasco  
THE RICH PEOPLE HAVE GONE  
AWAY, Regina Porter  
THE SILVER BONE, Andrei Kurkov  
**Fiction**  
CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
THE HEART IN WINTER,  
Kevin Barry  
WILD HOUSES, Colin Barrett

### New York Public Library ([www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org))

AGNES SHARP AND THE TRIP OF A  
LIFETIME, Leonie Swann  
A DAUGHTER OF FAIR VERONA,  
Christina Dodd  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield

### Iowa City Public Library

THE UNWEDDING, Ally Condie  
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
FINLAY DONOVAN ROLLS THE  
DICE, Elle Cosimano  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley  
HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
MURDER, Kristen Perrin  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
THE FOX WIFE, Yangsze Choo

### Los Angeles Public Library

THE ANTIQUE HUNTER'S GUIDE  
TO MURDER, C. L. Miller  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner  
DEATH AT THE SANATORIUM,  
Ragnar Jonasson

END OF STORY, A. J. Finn  
EXTINCTION, Douglas Preston  
FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE,  
Walter Mosley  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
PRECIPICE, Robert Harris  
THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
Emiko Jean  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly  
WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
Dervla McTiernan

### Sno-Isle Libraries Staff Favorites

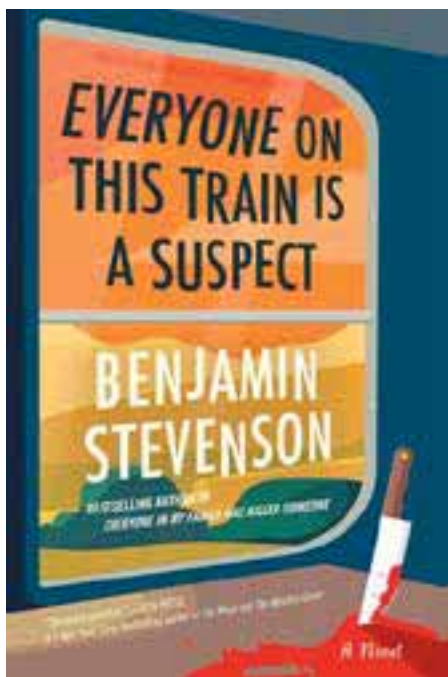
#### State of Washington

A BETTER WORLD, Sarah Langan  
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
MISSING WHITE WOMAN,  
Kellye Garrett  
DARLING GIRLS, Sally Hepworth  
DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
ROOK, Kate Atkinson  
ERUPTION,  
Michael Crichton & James Patterson  
DAUGHTER OF MINE,  
Megan Miranda  
EVERY TIME I GO ON VACATION,  
SOMEONE DIES, Catherine Mack  
FINLAY DONOVAN ROLLS THE  
DICE, Elle Cosimano  
HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN  
MURDER, Kristen Perrin  
A RUSE OF SHADOWS, Sherry Thomas  
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera  
BLOOD IN THE CUT,  
Alejandro Nodarse  
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?,  
Shari Lapena  
THE BLACK LOCH, Peter May  
THE EXAMINER, Janice Hallett  
LOVE LETTERS TO A SERIAL  
KILLER, Tasha Coryell

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEVLINS,  
Lisa Scottoline  
WHAT TIME THE SEXTON'S SPADE  
DOTH RUST, Alan Bradley  
YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
K. T. Nguyen  
THE CLINIC, Cate Quinn  
THE RESORT, Sara Ochs  
DEATH IN THE SPIRES, K. J. Charles

**Wellington City Libraries  
New Zealand**

WHAT A WAY TO GO, Bella Mackie  
THE KELLERBY CODE, Jonny Sweet  
THE LIST OF SUSPICIOUS THINGS,  
Jennie Godfrey  
NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra  
THE PEACOCK AND THE SPARROW,  
I. S. Berry (2023 title in U.S.)  
KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Harkaway  
BONEHEAD, Mo Hayder  
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DEAD,  
Chris Whitaker  
MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
MISSING PERSON: ALICE (THE  
FINDER MYSTERIES), Simon Mason  
THE HUNTER, Tana French  
BLACK WOLF, Juan Gomez-Jurado  
WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman  
THE DARK WIVES, Ann Cleeves  
DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE  
ROOK, Kate Atkinson



THE EXAMINER, Janice Hallett  
HOTEL LUCKY SEVEN, Kotaro Isaka  
THE LAST MURDER AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton  
ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware

**Authors' Favorites**

From the British newspaper *Express*.

**Ian Rankin**

WHITE CITY by Dominic Nolan  
MISSING PERSON: ALICE,  
Simon Mason

**Mick Herron**

DAY ONE, Abigail Dean

**Tony Kent**

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW,  
Neil Lancaster  
PROFILE K, Helen Fields (in the U.S. in  
2025 as THE PROFILER)

**M. W. Craven**

THE CRACKED MIRROR, Chris  
Brookmyre  
THINK TWICE, Harlan Coben

**Vaseem Khan**

KARLA'S CHOICE, Nick Harkaway  
THE RUSH, Beth Lewis

**Janice Hallett**

THE KING'S WITCHES, Kate Foster  
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee

**Charlotte Philby**

THE FINAL ACT OF JULIETTE  
WILLOUGHBY, Ellery Lloyd  
THE WAITING, Michael Connelly

**Mark Billingham**

THE INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS,

**John Connolly**

THE CRACKED MIRROR,  
Chris Brookmyre

**Stuart MacBride**

THE CHRISTMAS STOCKING  
MURDERS, Denzil Meyrick  
THE WILDS, Sarah Pearse

**Alan Johnson**

GABRIEL'S MOON, William Boyd

**Saima Mir**

ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker

**John Sutherland**

HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
THE DEVIL YOU KNOW,  
Neil Lancaster

**Michael Connelly**

MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
Marcie R. Rendon

**Alice Feeney**

THINGS DON'T BREAK ON THEIR  
OWN, Sarah Easter Collins  
THE DREAM HOME, T. M. Logan

**Anna Mazzola**

ROUGH JUSTICE, Wendy Joseph  
FINDING SOPHIE, Imran Mahmood

**Araminta Hall**

KNIFE RIVER, Justine Champine  
HOMECOMING, Kate Morton

**Fiona Cummins**

BLOOD LIKE MINE, Stuart Neville  
PROFILE K, Helen Fields

**Helen Fields**

LIGHTS OUT, Louise Swanson

**Jo Callaghan**

ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK,  
Chris Whitaker  
DEADLY ANIMALS, Marie Tierney

**Louise Candlish**

THE FINAL ACT OF JULIETTE WIL-  
LOUGHBY, Ellery Lloyd

**Neil Lancaster**

MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
THE SHADOW NETWORK,  
Tony Kent

**Peter James**

BROKEN TRUST,  
Robert B. Parker & Mike Lupica

# The Best of the Best

## 2024



No one compiling the aforelisted 107 “Best” lists has read every mystery, crime novel and thriller published in 2024. Hence, the lists are opinions based on the limited number of books each expert has read this past year, combined with personal tastes. In other words, these lists are very subjective. So where can we find objectivity?

The more agreement (consensus) we can find among the lists, the more objective conclusions can be drawn about which novels are the Best of 2024.

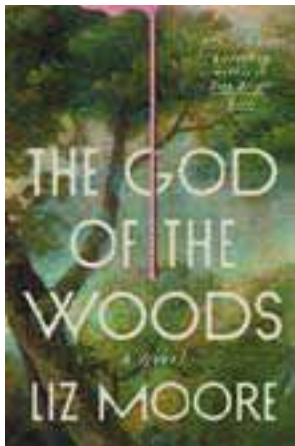
So the following is a list of the number of appearances particular novels made on the 107 “Best” Lists, most of which you find on the preceding pages. These are the Best of the Best.

Observations:

1. Psychological/Domestic Suspense reigned supreme again. Traditional mysteries are also in the ascendancy, spurred on by the success of such writers as Richard Osman and Anthony Horowitz.

2. The two top vote-getting debut novels, **LISTEN FOR THE LIE** by Amy Tintera and **FIRST LIE WINS** by Ashley Elston, are both written by authors who have written for the YA age group. These two books are their first mysteries for an adult audience and they are very popular. I liked **FIRST LIE WINS** more than **LISTEN FOR THE LIE**, but admired both for their creative plotting. – George Easter

### Compilation of Best Lists of 2024 Appearances



**37**

THE GOD OF THE WOODS, Liz Moore

**33**

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK, Chris Whitaker

WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman

**26**

THE HUNTER, Tana French

**24**

LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera – Debut

**23**

GUIDE ME HOME, Attica Locke

**21**

FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston – Debut

**19**

THE WAITING, Michael Connelly

**16**

THE RETURN OF ELLIE BLACK,  
Emiko Jean

**15**

SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield – Debut  
THE SEQUEL, Jean Hanff Korelitz

**14**

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST, Lucy Foley

**13**

EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN IS A SUSPECT, Benjamin Stevenson

**12**

MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin  
THE GREY WOLF, Louise Penny  
CREATION LAKE, Rachel Kushner  
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee  
ONE PERFECT COUPLE, Ruth Ware  
THE LAST MURDER AT THE END OF THE WORLD, Stuart Turton

**11**

KARLA’S CHOICE, Nick Harkaway

**10**

PONY CONFIDENTIAL,  
Christina Lynch  
CLOSE TO DEATH, Anthony Horowitz  
CITY IN RUINS, Don Winslow  
DEATH AT THE SIGN OF THE ROOK, Kate Atkinson  
THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE ALPERTON ANGELS, Janice Hallett  
NIGHTWATCHING, Tracy Sierra – Debut

**9**

HERE ONE MOMENT, Liane Moriarty  
THE BLUE HOUR, Paula Hawkins  
WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER,  
Marcie R. Rendon

**8**

HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER, Kristen Perrin – Debut  
THE FURY, Alex Michaelides  
THE NIGHT WE LOST HIM,  
Laura Dave  
BLACK RIVER, Nilanjana Roy – Debut Crime Novel  
THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING,  
Jason Rekulak  
THE EXAMINER, Janice Hallett

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT,  
Riley Sager

**7**

ORDINARY BEAR,  
C. B. Bernard – Debut  
YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
K. T. Nguyen – Debut  
CAHOKIA JAZZ, Francis Spufford  
WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND,  
Wanda M. Morris  
THE SICILIAN INHERITANCE,  
Jo Piazza  
KILL FOR YOU, KILL FOR ME,  
Steve Cavanagh  
FINDER MYSTERIES,  
Simon Mason  
SHANGHAI, Joseph Kanon  
MISSING WHITE WOMAN,  
Kellye Garrett  
DAUGHTER OF MINE,  
Megan Miranda  
WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?,  
Dervla McTiernan  
BLACK WOLF, Juan Gomez-Jurado  
THE MURDER OF MR. MA,  
S. J. Rozan & John Shen Yen Nee

**6**

WITNESS 8, Steve Cavanagh  
(in U.S. 2025)  
THE DARK WIVES, Ann Cleeves  
CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
Duane Swierczynski  
ALTER EGO, Alex Segura  
THE BRIAR CLUB, Kate Quinn  
THE CRACKED MIRROR,  
Chris Brookmyre – U.K.  
A CALAMITY OF SOULS,  
David Baldacci  
DEADLY ANIMALS,  
Marie Tierney – Debut  
WORDHUNTER,  
Stella Sands – Debut  
HOUSE OF GLASS,  
Sarah Pekkanen

**5**

MERCY CHAIR, M. W. Craven  
(In U.S. 2025)  
DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE,  
Ace Atkins  
HAVOC, Christopher Bollen  
THE PUZZLE BOX,  
Danielle Trussoni

SPIRIT CROSSING,  
William Kent Krueger  
DEAD MAN'S LANE, Scott Carson  
THE BOYFRIEND, Frieda McFadden  
THE TEACHER, Frieda McFadden  
BROILER, Eli Cranor  
THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES,  
Kat Ailes – Debut  
ERUPTION,  
Michael Crichton & James Patterson  
DARLING GIRLS, Sally Hepworth  
WHITE CITY,  
Dominic Nolan – U.K.  
WILD HORSES,  
Colin Barrett – Debut  
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?,  
Shari Lapena  
HOME IS WHERE THE BODIES ARE,  
Jeneva Rose  
A TALENT FOR MURDER,  
Peter Swanson  
SOUTHERN MAN, Greg Iles  
THE CALL, Gavin Strawhan  
(2025 in U.S.)

**4**

THE WRONG HANDS,  
Mark Billingham  
WHAT TIME THE SEXTON'S  
SPADE DOTHT RUST,  
Alan Bradley  
SOCIETY OF LIES, Laura Ling Brown  
THE INSTRUMENTS  
OF DARKNESS, John Connolly  
DAY ONE, Abigail Dean  
EXPOSURE, Ramona Emerson  
PROFILE K (U.S. title: THE  
PROFILER), Helen Fields  
THE HEIRESS, Rachel Hawkins  
EVERYONE WHO CAN FORGIVE ME  
IS DEAD, Jenny Hollander  
THE STARS TURNED INSIDE OUT,  
Nova Jacobs  
THE DROWNED, John Banville  
FAREWELL, AMETHYSTINE,  
Walter Mosley  
THE NIGHT OF BABA YAGA,  
Akira Otani  
ASH DARK AS NIGHT,  
Gary Phillips  
MURDER ROAD,  
Simone St. James  
THE HITCHCOCK HOTEL,  
Stephanie Wrobel  
ROUGH TRADE, Katrina Carrasco

**Edgar Award Nominees on  
Best of the Best 2024 Lists**

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

**Best Novel**

THE TAINTED CUP,  
Robert Jackson Bennett -- 0  
ROUGH TRADE,  
Katrina Carrasco -- 4  
THINGS DON'T BREAK ON THEIR  
OWN, Sarah Easter Collins -- 2  
MY FAVORITE SCAR,  
Nicolás Ferraro -- 1  
THE GOD OF THE WOODS,  
Liz Moore -- 37  
LISTEN FOR THE LIE,  
Amy Tintera -- 24  
THE IN CROWD,  
Charlotte Vassell -- 0

**Best First Novel  
By An American Author**

TWICE THE TROUBLE,  
Ash Clifton -- 2  
COLD TO THE TOUCH,  
Kerri Hakoda -- 0  
THE MECHANICS OF MEMORY,  
Audrey Lee -- 0  
A JEWEL IN THE CROWN,  
David Lewis -- 0  
THE PRESIDENT'S LAWYER,  
Lawrence Robbins -- 0  
HOLY CITY, Henry Wise -- 1

**Best Paperback Original**

THE PARIS WIDOW,  
Kimberly Belle -- 0  
THE VACANCY IN ROOM 10,  
Seraphina Nova Glass -- 0  
SHELL GAMES,  
Bonnie Kistler -- 1  
A FORGOTTEN KILL,  
Isabella Maldonado -- 0  
THE ROAD TO HEAVEN,  
Alexis Stefanovich-Thomson -- 0



# Most Anticipated Mysteries of 2025



There's something here for everyone's taste – and more information than you will find on any similar list for 2025. Of course, many, many 2025 titles have yet to be announced by publishers. And there is always a chance that a publisher will change the publication date on a title.

I have already read 32 of the 2025 titles (reviews to follow in the magazine) and if they are any indication of the quality of mystery/thriller fiction to be published this year, we are in a very favorable climate for reading enjoyment. What am I personally looking forward to? The new books by S. A. Cosby, Stephen King, Jo Callaghan, Cara Hunter, M. W. Craven, Vanda Symon, Dan Fesperman, Stella Rimington, Ajay Chowhury, Kim Hays, Anthony Horowitz, Carl Hiaasen, John Lawton, Bruce Borgos, Mick Herron and Val McDermid.

I'm also excited to read Dervla McTiernan's new one as she is returning to her Cormac Reilly series, which I especially like. And speaking of returns, we have P. J. Tracy coming out with a new Monkeewrench mystery after a 6-year series hiatus and 93-year-old Martha Grimes with a new Richard Jury puzzler.

There are also some good titles coming out in the U.K. They appear in **red**.

The titles in **blue** are ones that I have already read. **LEO** by Deon Meyer and **THE WHITE CROW** by Michael Robotham are the best of the lot so far.

Psychological/domestic suspense is still dominating mystery publication. I could have listed a lot more of those titles. I included herein what I guessed were highlights of that subgenre, as I am not an expert. I wait to the end of the year and read 2 or 3 of them that are

considered the best. I much prefer novels of detection and action thrillers.

– George Easter

## 2025 Titles

(In order of publication)

**THE BROKEN RIVER**, Chris Hammer  
(January 2 – in the U.K.)

Detective Nell Buchanan #4

A body has been discovered on the riverbanks of The Valley, a remote community in the hills of New South Wales, Australia. The gold mine at the heart of The Valley was once the lifeblood of this region, but it has been flooded for decades. Over the years, many have tried and failed to bring it back to life. The victim is Wolfgang Burnside, deputy mayor -- a champion of change or local schemer, depending on who you ask. He had been working on plans to take the Valley off-grid with hydro-power using the lake surrounding the abandoned mine. Until he was poisoned.

**HOLMES IS MISSING**,

James Paterson & Brian Sitts

(January 6)

Holmes, Marple & Poe #2

Success has come quickly to Holmes, Marple & Poe Investigations. The New York City agency led by three detectives—Brendan Holmes, “the brain,” Margaret Marple, “the eyes,” and Auguste Poe, the “muscle”—with famous names and mysterious pasts is one major case away from cementing its professional reputation. But as a series of child abductions tests the PIs' legendary skills, the cerebral Holmes's absence leaves a gaping hole in the agency roster.

**LEAVE NO TRACE**, Jo Callaghan

(January 7)

(AIDE Lock/Kat Frank #2)

When the body of a man is found crucified at the top of a hill in the British Midlands, AIDE Lock—the world's first AI detective—and Detective Kat Frank are thrust into the spotlight as they are given their first live case.



**THE NOTE**, Alafair Burke

(January 7)

When it comes to May's friendship with Lauren and Kelsey, she's had her fair share of secrets and regrets. Their bond—forged when May was just twelve years old—has withstood a tragic accident, individual scandals, heartbreak and loss. Now the three friends have reunited for the first time in years for a few days of sun and fun in the Hamptons. But a chance encounter with a pair of strangers leads to a drunken prank that goes horribly awry.

**THE BIG EMPTY**, Robert Crais  
(January 14)  
Elvis Cole #20

Traci Beller was thirteen when her father disappeared in the sleepy town of Rancho, not far from Los Angeles. The evidence says Tommy Beller abandoned his family, but Traci never believed it. Now, ten years later, Traci is a high-profile influencer with millions of followers and the money to hire the best detective she can find: Elvis Cole. Elvis heads to Rancho where an ex-con named Sadie Givens and her daughter, Anya, might have a line on the missing man. **Kirkus & DP**

**PRO BONO**, Thomas Perry  
(January 14)  
Standalone

Charles Warren, Los Angeles attorney, has dedicated his career to aiding people in financial straits. He is particularly skilled at the art of recovering assets that have been embezzled or hidden. In his newest case, helping a beautiful young widow find the money missing from her late husband's investment accounts, Charlie recognizes a familiar scheme—one that echoes the con job that targeted his own widowed mother many years before, and that led him, as a teenager, to commit a crime of retribution that still weighs on his conscience. **DP**

**GRAVE DANGER**, James Grippando  
(January 14)  
Jack Swyteck #19

Jack Swyteck's new client fled Iran to Miami with her daughter, and has been accused of kidnapping by her husband. The seasoned attorney must not only plan a winning defense, but to stop the father from taking the girl back to Tehran, Jack must also build a case under international law and prove that returning the child would put her at risk.

**PRESUMED GUILTY**, Scott Turow  
(January 14)  
Rusty Sabich #3

Rusty is a retired judge attempting a third act in life with a loving soon-to-be wife, Bea, with whom he shares both a restful home and a plaintive hope that

this marriage will be his best, and his last. But the peace that's taken Rusty so long to find evaporates when Bea's young adult son, Aaron, living under their supervision while on probation for drug possession, disappears. If Aaron doesn't return soon, he will be sent back to jail. **BL, PW & AZ**

**BEAUTIFUL UGLY**, Alice Feeney  
(January 14)

Grady calls his wife to share some exciting news as she is driving home. He hears Abby slam on the brakes, get out of the car, then nothing. When he eventually finds her car by the cliff edge, but his wife has disappeared. A year later, Grady is still overcome with grief and desperate to know what happened to Abby. He can't sleep, and he can't write, so he travels to a tiny Scottish island to try to get his life back on track. Then he sees the impossible – a woman who looks exactly like his missing wife. **BL & AZ**

**KARMA DOLL**, Jonathan Ames  
(January 14)  
Happy Doll #3

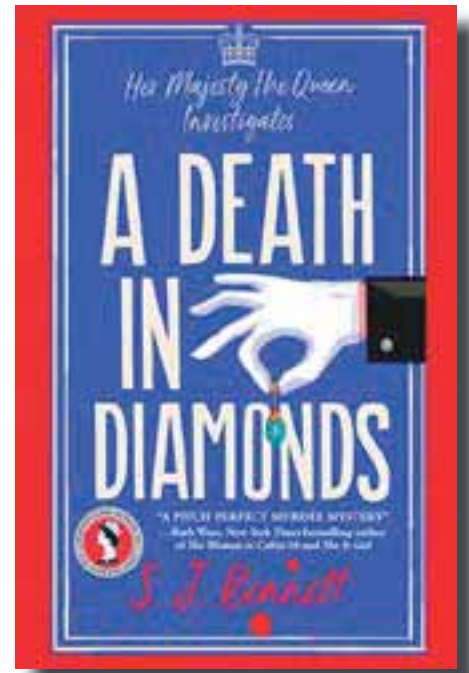
After narrowly escaping with his life at the hands of a murderous Hollywood pimp, detective Happy Doll, bullet-ridden but healing, has landed on a remote Mexican beach. In a humble shack and with his dog for company, Doll settles into a peaceful idyll of Buddhist study. But then trouble, as it always does, comes to paradise. Doll is the witness to a murder for which he is framed, and now, with an expired passport and the Mexican authorities on his tail, he must sneak across the border back to L.A. by any means necessary, with the goal of bringing the true murderer to justice. **PW & DP**

**A VOICE IN THE NIGHT**,  
Simon Mason  
(January 21)  
DI Wilkins #4

The Oxford team of mismatched detectives – DI Ryan Wilkins and DI Ray Willkins – are assigned the case of a missing elderly man who eventually found dead – suspiciously dead. **DP**

**MASK OF THE DEER WOMAN**,  
Laurie L. Dove  
(January 21)  
Debut Mystery

In the past decade, too many young women have disappeared from the rez. Some have ended up dead, others just... gone. Now local college student Che-noa Cloud is missing, and ex-Chicago Detective Carrie Starr falls into an investigation that leaves her drowning in memories of her daughter—the girl she failed to save. **AZ**



**A DEATH IN DIAMONDS**,  
S. J. Bennett  
(January 21)

Her Majesty the Queen #4  
1957 - A young woman is found dead in a mews house a mile from Buckingham Palace, wearing only silk underwear and a diamond tiara. An older man is discovered nearby, garrotted and pierced through the eye with a long, sharp implement. According to the police, a high society card game was going on downstairs that night. One of the players surely committed the murders, but each of them can give the others an alibi. When someone very close to her is implicated, the young Queen is drawn in to the investigation. **AZ & DP**

**THE ENIGMA GIRL**, Henry Porter  
(January 28)

## Standalone

Slim Parsons is all but burned. When her last deep-cover job for MI5 ended with a life-and-death struggle on a private jet, she went on the run from her deadly target – a conniving businessman and money launderer codenamed “Hagfish.” Now she’s back at home, in hiding from her angry bosses in the Security Service, who have accused her of being overly violent and unsuitable for the role of an MI5 operative. But after several months off the grid, Slim is called back to another job – Operation Linesman – where she is asked to infiltrate a news website Middle Kingdom whose explosive articles clearly show that they’ve hacked into the most high-security government databases. **DP**

**THE MAILMAN,**

Andrew Welsh-Huggins  
(January 28)

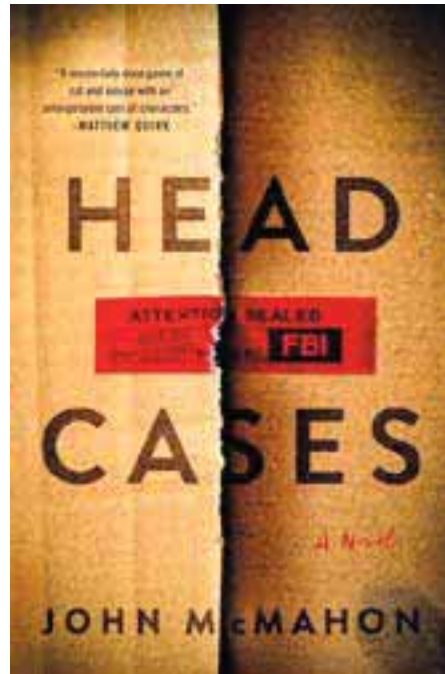
Mercury Carter is a deliveryman and he takes his job very seriously. When a parcel is under his care, he will stop at nothing to deliver it directly to its intended recipient. Not even, as in the current case, when he finds a crew of violent men at the indicated address that threaten his life and take the woman who lives there hostage. A problem for most delivery men but not Carter -- because Carter has special skills from his former life as a federal agent with the postal inspection service. After Carter dispatches the goons sent to kill him, he enters a home besieged by criminals – but the leader of the gang escapes with attorney Rachel Stanfield before the mailman can complete his assignment. A chase ensues. **LJ**

**THE OLIGARCH’S DAUGHTER,**

Joseph Finder  
(January 28)  
Standalone

Paul Brightman is a man on the run, living under an assumed name in a small New England town with a million-dollar bounty on his head. When his security is breached, Paul is forced to flee into the New Hampshire wilderness to evade Russian operatives who can seemingly predict his every move. Six years ago, Paul was a rising star on Wall

Street who fell in love with a beautiful photographer named Tatyana—unaware that her father was a Russian oligarch and the object of considerable interest from several U.S. intelligence agencies. Now, to save his own life, Paul must unravel a decades-old conspiracy that extends to the highest reaches of the government. **BL & LJ**



**HEAD CASES,** John McMahon  
(January 28)  
PAR Unit #1

FBI Agent Gardner Camden is an analytical genius with an affinity for puzzles. He also has a blind spot on the human side of investigations, a blindness that sometimes even includes people in his own life, like his beloved seven-year-old daughter Camila. Gardner and his squad of brilliant yet quirky agents make up the Patterns and Recognition (PAR) unit, the FBI’s hidden edge, brought in for cases that no one else can solve. When DNA links a murder victim to a serial killer long presumed dead, the team springs into action. A second victim establishes a pattern, and the murderer begins leaving a trail of clues and riddles especially for Gardner. **PW**

**BEEN WRONG SO LONG IT FEELS LIKE RIGHT,** Walter Mosley  
(January 28)  
King Oliver #3

Joe King Oliver’s beloved Grandma B has found a tumor, and at her age, treatment is high-risk. She’s lived life fully and without regrets, and now has only a single, dying wish: to see her long-lost son. King has been estranged from his father, Chief Odin Oliver, since he was a young boy. He swore to never speak to the man again when he was taken away in handcuffs. But now, Grandma B’s pure ask has opened King’s heart, and through his hunt, he gains a deeper understanding of his father as a complicated, righteous man—a man defined by women, a man protected by women, a man he wants to know. Although Chief was released from prison years ago, he’s been living underground ever since. **LJ**

**JOHNNY CARELESS,** Kevin Wade  
(January 28)

Police Chief Jeep Mullane has been bounced back home to Long Island’s North Shore by a heartbreaking case that both earned him his NYPD detective’s shield and burned him out of the Job. Now heading up a small local police department, he finds himself navigating the same geography he did growing up there as the son of an NYPD cop. Jeep is a “have-not” among the glittering “haves,” a sharp-witted, down-to-earth man in a territory defined and ruled by multigenerational wealth and power and the daunting tribal codes and customs that come with it.

When the corpse of Jeep’s childhood friend Johnny Chambliss – born into privilege and known as “Johnny Careless” for his reckless, golden-boy antics – surfaces in the Bayville waters, past collides with present, and Jeep is pulled into a treacherous web. **PW**

**THE CRASH,** Freida McFadden  
(January 28)

Tegan is eight months pregnant, alone, and desperately wants to put her crumbling life in the rearview mirror. So she hits the road, planning to stay with her brother until she can figure out her next move. But she doesn’t realize she’s heading straight into a blizzard. She never arrives at her destination. Stranded in rural Maine with a dead car and broken ankle, Tegan worries she’s



made a terrible mistake. Then a miracle occurs: she is rescued by a couple who offers her a room in their warm cabin until the snow clears. But something isn't right. Tegan believed she was waiting out the storm, but as time ticks by, she comes to realize she is in grave danger.

**CHAIN REACTION**, James Byrne  
(January 28)  
Dez Limerick #3

Knocking around the country, picking up the occasional gig as a guitarist, Dez is contacted by a friend in urgent need of his musical skills. At his behest, Dez flies to the East Coast to a gig at the brand new massive complex, the Liberty Center. But he's barely landed before he finds himself in the midst of a terrorist attack, a group has taken over the whole center and thousands of hostage lives are in danger. With the semi-willing help of a talented thief, Dez takes on the impossible task of outfighting and outwitting a literal army.

**THE HIDDEN HAND**,  
Stella Rimington  
(January 30 in U.K.)  
Manon Tyler #2

Li Min, a Chinese student, is forced by her government to transfer from Harvard to Oxford University, where she is recruited to an elite Chinese study centre based out of St Felix's College.

Meanwhile, the centre's newly recruited head stumbles on its more sinister purpose: recruiting Chinese and sympathetic British students to steal high-value research and intellectual property. Unsure who at the university he can trust, he turns to CIA agent Manon Tyler for help.

**DEAD IN THE FRAME**,  
Stephen Spotswood  
(February 4)  
Pentecost & Parker #5

NEW YORK CITY, 1947: Wealthy financier and ghoulish connoisseur of crime, Jessup Quincannon, is dead, and famed detective Lillian Pentecost is under arrest for his murder. Means, motive, and a mountain of evidence leave everyone believing she's guilty.

Everyone, that is, except Willowjean "Will" Parker, who knows for a fact her boss is innocent. She just doesn't know if she can prove it.

**A LONG TIME GONE**,  
Joshua Moehling  
(February 4)  
Ben Packard #3

Ben Packard was just a boy when his older brother disappeared. His brother was never seen again. Decades later, Deputy Packard finds himself with too much time on his hands. A shooting has him on leave and under investigation, and all he can do is dwell on the past. For the first time in years, new information about his brother has surfaced that may lead them to the location of a body.

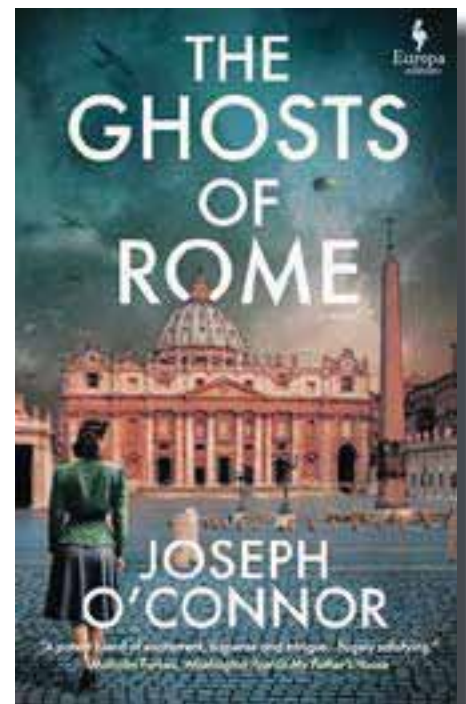
**OPEN SEASON**, Jonathan Kellerman  
(February 4)  
Alex Delaware #40

The body of an aspiring actress is found dumped near a hospital emergency room. She's been drugged and murdered and the motive for the callous crime remains maddeningly out of reach. Until, a prime suspect materializes. Another Hollywood hopeful. Only to be shot dead by a sniper using a weapon that turns out to have been catalogued in a previous murder. And another, before that. It's not long before more bodies begin piling up.

**Robert B. Parker's BURIED SECRETS**,  
Christopher Farnsworth  
(February 4)  
Jesse Stone #22

Chief of Police Jesse Stone is on his way home from a long shift when a call comes in for a welfare check on an elderly resident of the wealthy seaside town of Paradise, Massachusetts. Inside a house packed with junk and trash is a man's dead body. It's a sad, lonely end, but nothing criminal . . . until Jesse finds the photos of murder victims strewn around the corpse, on top of a treasure trove of \$2 million in cash.

**GHOSTS OF ROME**, Joseph O'Connor  
(February 4)  
The Choir #2  
In the final months of World War



II, a clandestine group known as The Choir successfully smuggles thousands of escapees out of Nazi-occupied Rome via a secret route known as the Escape Line. When an unidentified airman falls wounded from the sky, The Choir is plunged into danger and the survival of the Escape Line itself is threatened. The Escape Line's collapse would leave thousands stranded. Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, its architect and the acknowledged leader of The Choir, broods inside the Vatican, paralyzed by the perils of keeping his Roman underground railroad functioning. Meanwhile, SS Commander Paul Hauptmann has been tasked with destroying the entire operation, and the price of failure is high—his wife and children are under Gestapo lock-and-key in Berlin. **PW, BL & Kirkus**

**SAINT OF THE NARROWS STREET**,  
William Boyle  
(February 4)

Gravesend, Brooklyn, 1986: Risa Franzone lives in a ground-floor apartment on Saint of the Narrows Street with her bad-seed husband, Saverio, and their eight-month-old baby, Fabrizio. On the night Risa's younger sister, Giulia, moves in to recover from a bad breakup, a fateful accident occurs: Risa,

boiled over with anger and fear, strikes a drunk, erratic Sav with a cast-iron pan, killing him on the spot. The sisters are left with a choice: notify the authorities and make a case for self-defense, or bury the man's body and go on with their lives as best they can. In a moment of panic, in the late hours of the night, they call upon Sav's childhood friend—the sweet, loyal Christopher "Chooch" Gardini—to help them, hoping they can trust him to carry a secret like this. **PW & Kirkus**

**SHOOT THE MOON**, Ava Barry  
(February 4)  
Rainey Hall #2

While in high school, Rainey spent a summer taking advantage of the wildfires near Los Angeles to break into the empty houses of the rich and famous with her best friends, Alice and Spencer, committing small acts of larceny. These acts of rebellion culminated in a big theft from a powerful, well-connected musician with underworld ties. Days later, Alice went missing.

Now—nine years later—Rainey is a private detective chasing a missing person case. Chloe, a young vulnerable artist with a history of substance abuse, disappeared from her parents' house without a trace.

**BAPTISTE: THE BLADE MUST FALL**, David Hewson  
(February 4)

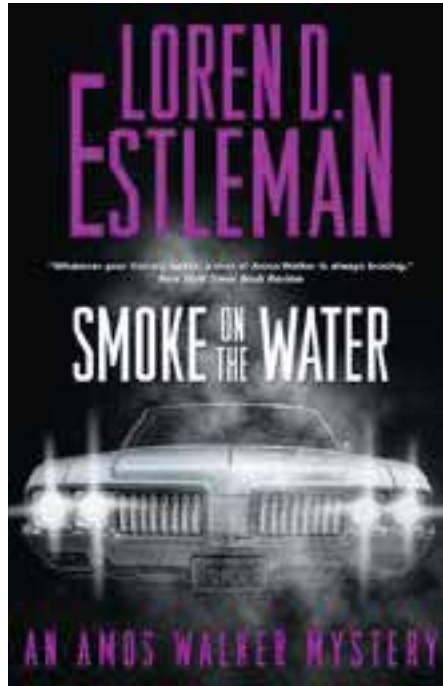
Prequel to TV show

France, 1976. Baptiste is an intelligent but somewhat naive detective, sent to work in Clermiers, a town filled with corruption. A girl goes missing, presumed dead after bloody clothes are found close to an illicit party near an abandoned chateau. Baptiste believes he's nailed the culprit, the eccentric Gilles Mailloux. When he appears in court, the public call for the guillotine—and that's the sentence Mailloux gets. But as Mailloux awaits an appeal for clemency, he asks to see Baptiste, who's still haunted by the fact the girl's body remains missing. As the clock ticks towards execution hour, Baptiste begins to realise he may have made a terrible mistake.

**PARANOIA**,

James Patterson & James O. Born  
(February 10)  
Michael Bennett #17

At every death scene, Bennett says a prayer over the victim. But recently, too many of the departed have been fellow cops. "I want you to look at these deaths on special assignment," NYPD Inspector Celeste Cantor says. "Report only to me." Bennett excels as a solo investigator.



**SMOKE ON THE WATER**,

Loren D. Estleman  
(February 11)  
Amos Walker #32

Detroit PI Amos Walker probes a hit-and-run that killed a junior law associate who was guarding a file of top-secret papers.

**NEMESIS**, Gregg Hurwitz  
(February 11)  
Orphan X #10

Tommy Stojack might be Evan Smoak's best friend in the world. He's a gifted gunsmith who has created much of Evan's own weapons and combat gear. But now, he has apparently crossed one of Evan's hardest lines and their argument explodes into open warfare. Now Evan has no choice but to track and face down his only friend.

**BLOOD TIES**, Jo Nesbo  
(February 11)  
Kingdom #2

Nesbø's sequel to *The Kingdom* follows murderous Norwegian brothers Carl and Roy Opgard as they interfere with plans for a new highway while dodging a suspicious sheriff. **PW & BL**

**THE QUEENS OF CRIME**,  
Marie Benedict  
(February 11)

Inspired by an actual incident in the life of crime novelist Dorothy L. Sayers, this historical mystery features five renowned women authors who decide to tackle a real-life murder case in 1930s London. Agatha Christie is in the mix, too.

**YOU ARE FATALLY INVITED**,  
Ande Pliego  
(February 11)

On a dark and stormy island, six thriller novelists assemble for a week of games and puzzles hosted by legendary author J. R. Alastor. The inevitable dead body appears—really and truly and quite messily dead. And the party is just getting started.

**THE MEDICI RETURN**, Steve Berry  
(February 11)  
Cotton Malone #19

Cotton Malone is on the hunt for a forgotten 16th century Pledge of Christ—a sworn promise made by Pope Julius II that evidences a monetary debt owed by the Vatican, still valid after five centuries—now worth in the trillions of dollars. But collecting that debt centers around what happened to the famed Medici of Florence—a family that history says died out, without heirs, centuries ago.

**THE CALL**, Gavin Strawhan  
(February 11 – 2024 title in Australia)

Auckland New Zealand DS Honey Chalmers is on health leave in her hometown taking care of her mother. A local gang is looking for an informant and Honey becomes involved in protecting the informant's life. A very promising debut novel, which I've read and liked. **DP**

**LEO**, Deon Meyer

(February 18)

Benny Griessel #8

Detectives Benny Griessel and Vaughn Cupido are languishing in Stellenbosch. Run-of-the-mill police work in the leafy university town is a far cry from their previous life in Cape Town fighting crime and government corruption at the highest level. Then a student is found dead on a mountain trail, and the key suspect, a local businessman, is found murdered in what looks like a professional hit delivering a message—suffocated by fast-action filler foam sprayed down his throat.

On the other side of the country, a beautiful wildlife guide is recruited by a group of special forces soldiers to act as a honeytrap, part of a dangerous multi-million-dollar heist that goes tragically wrong. A single link connects the murdered businessman to the special forces, making Benny and Vaughn's case all the more mysterious. Another former soldier is soon killed, as is an agent of the country's disgraced former president; and then the heist crew reorganizes with an even more audacious theft in mind. **PW & DP**

**MIDNIGHT BLACK**, Mark Greaney

(February 18)

Gray Man #14

The Gray Man is determined to rescue his partner and lover Zoya Zakharova from a Russian prison camp. The task proves to be even more difficult than imagined. My early pick for best thriller of 2025. **DP**

**THE QUIET LIBRARIAN**, Allen

Eskens

(February 18)

Standalone

Hana Babic is a quiet, middle-aged librarian in Minnesota who wants nothing more than to be left alone. But when a detective arrives with the news that her best friend has been murdered, Hana knows that something evil has come for her, a dark remnant of the past she and her friend had shared.

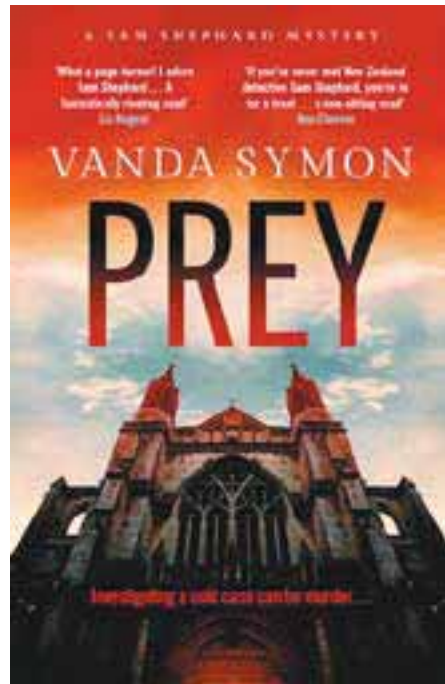
Thirty years before, Hana was someone else: Nura Divjak, a teenager growing up in the mountains of war-

torn Bosnia—until Serbian soldiers arrived to slaughter her entire family before her eyes. The events of that day thrust Nura into the war, leading her to join a band of militia fighters, where she became not only a fierce warrior but a legend—the deadly Night Mora. But a shattering final act forced Nura to flee to the United States with a bounty on her head. **BL & DP**

**PREY**, Vanda Symon

(February 18)

Sam Shephard #6



On her first day back from maternity leave, Detective Sam Shephard is thrown straight into a cold-case investigation – the unsolved murder of a highly respected Anglican Priest in Dunedin.

The case has been a thorn in the side of the Police hierarchy, and for her boss it's personal. With all the witness testimony painting a picture of a dedicated church and family man, what possible motive could there have been for his murder? But when Sam starts digging deeper into the case, it becomes apparent someone wants the sins of the past to remain hidden. And when a new potential witness to the crime is found brutally murdered, there is pressure from all quarters to solve the case before anyone else falls prey.

**THE ANTIQUE HUNTER'S DEATH****ON THE RED SEA**, C. L. Miller

(February 18)

Freya &amp; Aunt Carole #2

When a painting vanishes from a maritime museum and a dead body is found nearby, the newly established Lockwood Antique Hunter's Agency, Freya Lockwood and her Aunt Carole, are called to investigate. Following a lead that takes them aboard a glamorous antiques cruise sailing toward the Red Sea in Jordan, they quickly discover that the ship's art gallery is filled with stolen antiquities. Each antique is also listed in Freya's late mentor's journals that detail unsolved cases

**UNTOUCHABLE**, Mike Lawson

(February 25)

Joe DeMarco #18

Brandon Cartwright was a rich guy worth a couple billion bucks—inherited, of course—meaning he hadn't worked a day in his life. But he sure knew how to party, and the people he rubbed shoulders with were all sorts of rich and famous: politicians and movie stars and British royalty and Russian oligarchs. So when Brendan Cartwright is executed in his own home, the cops quickly conclude that he was most likely killed by one or more of the rich, powerful people he partied with. But when John Mahoney, the former Speaker of the House, emerges from a clandestine meeting with the head of the National Archives, he learns there's evidence suggesting that the President of the United States was somehow involved with Cartwright's death. Mahoney needs someone who can investigate from the shadows—enter Joe DeMarco, Mahoney's fixer. **PW & DP**

**AN ISLAND OF SUSPECTS**,

Jean-Luc Bannalec

(February 25)

Brittany #10

An August heat wave has all of Brittany in its grasp, and the only chance to cool down for Commissaire Georges Dupin is his daily swim in the ocean. Until one morning his routine is interrupted because a body has been found in the harbor with clear signs of

foul play. Patric Provost was from one of the long-established families on the island of Belle-Île, Breton's biggest and most famous island. Provost owned and operated a company dealing in an island delicacy: the famous Belle-Île-sheep. Dupin has barely stepped foot on the utopia-like island before it comes to light that Provost was not well liked. And someone was blackmailing him for one million euros, the deadline for payment the night before Provost's body was caught on the buoy. **PW**

**BATTLE MOUNTAIN**, C. J. Box  
(February 25)  
Joe Pickett #25

The campaign of destruction that Axel Soledad and Dallas Cates wreaked on Nate Romanowski and Joe Pickett left both men in tatters, especially Nate, who lost almost everything. Wondering if the civilized life left him vulnerable to attack, Nate dropped off the grid with his falcons in tow to prepare for vengeance. When Joe gets a call from the governor asking for help finding his son-in-law, who has gone missing in the Sierra Madre mountain range, he enlists the help of a local, a rookie game warden named Susan Kany.

**FAMOUS LAST WORDS**,  
Gillian McAllister  
(February 25)  
Standalone

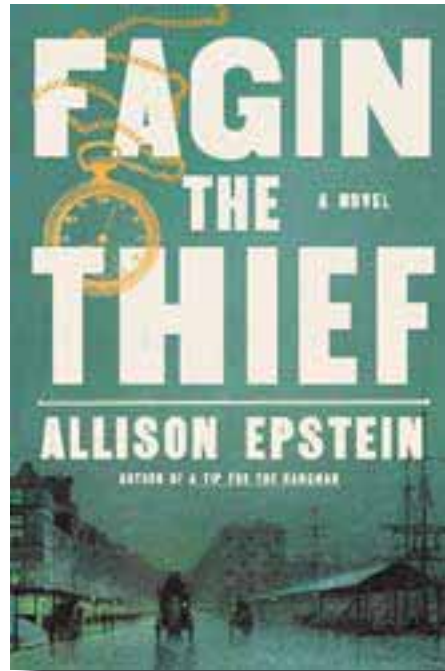
Imagine you've just dropped off your daughter at the nursery when you discover that your husband is part of a hostage situation in the city. Then imagine your surprise when you discover your husband isn't a hostage. He's the gunman.

**THE PROFILER**  
(in UK **PROFILE K**), Helen Fields  
(February 25)

Midnight Jones is an analyst trained to understand the human mind. But everything changes when, in the course of her work, she discovers Profile K's file – because K stands for killer, and she knows that someone more dangerous than she could have ever imagined walks among them.

**Stuart Woods' SMOLDER**, Brett Battles  
(February 25)  
Stone Barrington #65

Finally enjoying some downtime in Santa Fe, Stone Barrington agrees to attend an art exhibit with a dear friend. There, he encounters an intriguing woman who is on the trail of a ring of art thieves. Always one to please, Stone offers his help.



**FAGIN THE THIEF**, Allison Epstein  
(February 25)

Long before *Oliver Twist* stumbled onto the scene, Jacob Fagin was scratching out a life for himself in the dark alleys of nineteenth-century London. Born in the Jewish enclave of Stepney shortly after his father was executed as a thief, Jacob's whole world is his open-minded mother, Leah. But Jacob's prospects are forever altered when a light-fingered pickpocket takes Jacob under his wing and teaches him a trade that pays far better than the neighborhood boys could possibly dream.

**CLOSE YOUR EYES AND COUNT TO 10**, Lisa Unger  
(February 25)  
Standalone

Charismatic daredevil and extreme adventurer Maverick Dillan invites you to the ultimate game of hide-and-seek. But as the players gather on Falcao

Island, the event quickly spirals into a chilling test of survival. A storm rages as a deadly threat stalks the contestants, turning the challenge into something far more sinister than the social media stunt it was intended to be. **Kirkus**

**BOYSTOWN**, John Shannon  
(February 25)  
Jack Liffey #15

Legendary LA sleuth Jack Liffey is back, and facing down a changing world, when his brazen daughter Maeve enlists him to help find Benjy—a gay social justice activist gone missing. Meanwhile, a needless act of violence sets off an urban range war between a group of gun-happy poachers and former Soviet paramilitary soldiers in an unlikely location: West Hollywood. Jack, still recovering from heart surgery and grappling with Maeve's aspirations to follow in his footsteps, must save the day before the entire community goes up in flames.

**THE HOUSEMATE**, Sarah Bailey  
(February 25)

This was a 2023 title in the U.K and Australia. I read it in that year and it was on my Best of 2023 list. I'm glad it finally made it to the U.S.

Dubbed the Housemate Homicide, it's a mystery that has baffled Australians for almost a decade. Melbourne-based journalist Olive Groves worked on the story as a junior reporter and became obsessed by the case. Now, nine years later, the missing housemate turns up dead on a remote property. Olive is once again assigned to the story, this time reluctantly paired with precocious millennial podcaster Cooper Ng.

**THE DAUGHTER**, T. M. Logan  
(February 27 – U. K.)  
Standalone

(I was very impressed with the author's 2023 suspense title *THE MOTHER*. I'm going to give him another try.)

Lauren can't wait to see her daughter again, to pick her up from university at the end of her first term. But when she arrives at her hall and knocks on the door to her room, a stranger opens it.

At first, Lauren thinks she must have

the wrong room, or the wrong floor. Maybe even the wrong building. But she soon realizes the truth: Evie's not there. She hasn't been there for weeks. So where is she?

**BLOOD MOON**, Sandra Brown  
(March 4)  
Standalone

Detective John Bowie is one misstep away from being fired from the Auclair Police Department in coastal Louisiana. Recently divorced and slightly heavy-handed with his liquor, Bowie does all that he can to cope with the actions taken (or not taken) during the investigation of Crissy Mellin, a teenage girl who disappeared more than three years prior. But now, *Crisis Point*, a long-running true crime television series, is soon to air an episode documenting the unsolved Mellin case. Bowie has been instructed by his unscrupulous boss to keep to himself his grievances and criticisms over the mishandling of the investigation.

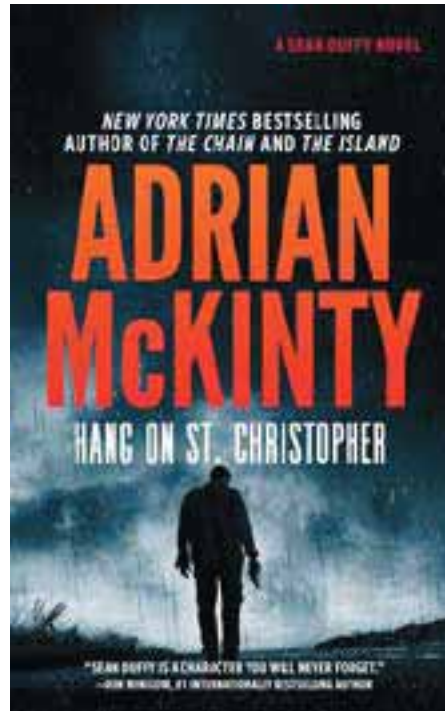
**THE LAST DAYS OF KIRA MULLAN**, Nicci French  
(March 4)  
Standalone

Nancy North is ready to put her life back together. After suffering a psychotic break that ruined friendships, stalled her fledgling restaurant, and forced her to move out of her comfortable flat, she'll do anything to get back to normal. She and her partner Felix—who has been a saint through her recent troubles—move into a new flat for a fresh start. Nancy is taking her pills, seeing her therapist, and avoiding unnecessary stress. She's doing absolutely everything right, but something is still very, very wrong. On the first day in the new flat, she hears them again; the mysterious voices that triggered her first episode

**BROKEN FIELDS**, Marcie R. Rendon  
(March 4)  
Cash Blackbear #4

Minnesota, 1970s: It's spring in the Red River Valley and Cash Blackbear is doing fieldwork for a local farmer—until she finds him dead on the kitchen floor of the property's rented farmhouse. The

tenant, a Native field laborer, and his wife are nowhere to be found, but Cash discovers their young daughter, Shawnee, cowering under a bed. The girl, a possible witness to the killing, is too terrified to speak.



**HANG ON ST. CHRISTOPHER**, Adrian McKinty  
(March 4)  
Sean Duffy #8

Rain slicked streets, riots, murder, chaos. It's July 1992 and the Troubles in Northern Ireland are still grinding on after twenty-five apocalyptic years. Detective Inspector Sean Duffy got his family safely over the water to Scotland. Duffy's a part-timer now, only returning to Belfast six days a month to get his pension. But then a murder case falls into his lap while his protegee is on holiday in Spain. A carjacking gone wrong and the death of a solitary, middle-aged painter. But something's not right, and as Duffy probes he discovers the painter was an IRA assassin. So, the question becomes: Who hit the hitman and why?  
LJ & DP

**GLORY DAZE**, Danielle Arceneaux  
(March 4)  
Glory Broussard #2  
In the sequel to the Edgar-winning Glory Be, small-time, churchgoing

bookie Glory Broussard investigates the murder of her ex-husband with the help of his new wife.

**FINLAY DONOVAN DIGS HER OWN GRAVE**, Elle Cosimano  
(March 4)

Finlay Donovan #5  
Finlay Donovan and her nanny/partner-in-crime, Vero, have not always gotten along with Finlay's elderly neighbor, Mrs. Haggerty, the community busybody and president of the neighborhood watch. But when a dead body is discovered in her backyard, Mrs. Haggerty needs their help. At first a suspect, Mrs. Haggerty is cleared by the police, but her house remains an active crime scene. She has nowhere to go . . . except Finlay's house, right across the street.

**FIFTY-FIFTY**, Steve Cavanagh  
(March 4)  
Eddie Flynn #5

Two sisters on trial for murder. They accuse each other. Who do you believe?

**GALWAY'S EDGE**, Ken Bruen  
(March 4)  
Jack Taylor #18

A secretive vigilante group called Edge cleanses Galway of its worst criminals. But when someone starts picking off Edge members, private detective Jack Taylor steps in to investigate.

**IF IT ISN'T ONE THING...**, Steven F. Havill  
(March 4)  
Posadas County #27

When a pickup truck pulling a horse trailer collides with a loaded semi, it seems like a straightforward accident. Undersheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman presumes the most complicated part of the clean-up will be getting thirty tons of unsplit firewood off of Posadas County's state highway. But the plot thickens when the mangled vehicles are wrenched apart and the pickup's deceased driver is not who Estelle was expecting. Who is the dead man – and where was he heading with his cargo, a prized stallion whose owner is frantic to get him back?

**A SCANDALOUS AFFAIR,**

Leonard Goldberg

(March 4)

Daughter of Sherlock Holmes #8

In 1918, during the height of the Great War, Joanna Holmes and the Watsons receive a late-night, clandestine visit from Sir William Radcliffe, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who brings with him an agonizing tale of blackmail; a case so sensitive that it can only be spoken of in the confines of 221B Baker Street.

**THE WHITE FORTRESS,**

Boyd Morrison &amp; Beth Morrison

(March 6)

Lawless Land #3

Croatia, 1351. Daring knight Gerard Fox and his adventurous wife Willa, fresh from a dangerous quest across Italy and Greece, soon find themselves embroiled in a new intrigue as they sail toward the walled city of Dubrovnik. Having inadvertently hindered a rescue mission, Fox and Willa make amends by helping a desperate Croatian couple forced into a terrible dilemma: either they betray their hometown to a treacherous nobleman and the brutal warlord he serves, or their abducted child will be murdered.

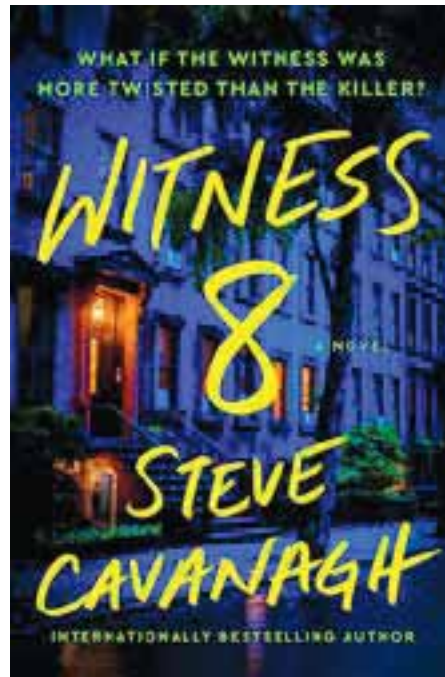
**WHITE KING,** Juan Gomez-Jurado

(March 11)

Antonia Scott #3

The Red Queen project is under attack on all fronts. Across Europe, its agents are murdering each other and cases from the past, long believed resolved, are rearing their deadly heads again. At the center of it is the mysterious Mr. White, who has been weaving a web around Antonia for a very long time. He is as smart and capable as her but, unlike her, he's a psychotic killer who has isolated Antonia Scott. Jon Gutierrez, Antonia's protector and the only person she trusts, has been kidnapped. Antonia's husband has been killed and her remaining family is in hiding. With Jon's life at stake, Mr. White gives her a seemingly innocuous challenge: solve three crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. The only way to keep Jon alive is to play Mr. White's

game, but can even Antonia win a game when she can only see part of the board?

**WITNESS 8,** Steve Cavanagh

(March 11)

(Eddie Flynn #8)

A former resident of the ultra-elite Manhattan upper class, Ruby now works as a maid in the type of houses she used to live in. Unassuming, she sees everyone's dirty secrets from the inside of their beautiful, renovated brownstones. But when Ruby witnesses a murder, she has wicked plans in mind that don't involve telling the authorities the truth. Eddie Flynn, streetwise ex con-artist-turned-defense attorney, is the only lawyer in New York City willing to take on hopeless cases. And none is more hopeless than John Jackson's—the gun that killed his neighbor found, with Jackson's DNA, in his own home.

**KILLS WELL WITH OTHERS,**

Deanna Raybourn

(March 11)

Killers of a Certain Age #2

After more than a year of laying low, Billie, Helen, Mary Alice, and Natalie are called back into action. They have enjoyed their time off, but the lack of excitement is starting to chafe: a professional killer can only take so many watercolor classes and yoga sessions without itching to strangle someone...

literally. When they receive a summons from the head of the elite assassin organization known as the Museum, they are ready to tackle the greatest challenge of their careers.

Someone on the inside has compiled a list of important kills committed by Museum agents, connected to a single, shadowy figure, an Eastern European gangster with an iron fist, some serious criminal ambition, and a tendency to kill first and ask questions later. This new nemesis is murdering agents who got in the way of their power hungry plans and the aging quartet of killers is next.

**A MOTHER'S LOVE,** Sara Blaedel

(March 11)

Louise Rick #11

When innkeeper Dorthe Hylsted is found murdered, the police are surprised and puzzled to discover a concealed nursery in her upstairs apartment. As far as her friends and family knew, the recently widowed Dorthe was childless—so who lived in this secret toy-strewn room? And more importantly, where is the child now?

**THE SOCIALITE'S GUIDE TO SLEUTHING AND SECRETS,**

S. K. Golden

(March 11)

Pinnacle Hotel #3

New York, 1958. When Evelyn's mail is delivered during a luncheon in the Gold Room, she's surprised to find she has received a diamond tiara, which catches the attention of a costume jewelry sales team lunching nearby. Their leader, Lois Mitchel, is especially interested, but by the end of the lunch, Lois has choked and fallen into Evelyn's lap—and by the end of the day, she's dead.

**ALL THE OTHER MOTHERS HATE ME,** Sarah Harman

(March 11)

When 10-year-old Alfie Risby goes missing during a class trip, everyone starts pointing fingers. The boy's rich parents land on former party girl and disgraced girl-band member Florence Grimes' son, Dylan, who was merciless-

ly bullied by Alfie. Now Florence must do the unthinkable: make nice with the other school moms in order to clear her kid's name.

**PAPERBOY**, Callum McSorley  
(March 13 – U.K.)

DI Alison McCoist #2

DCI Alison McCoist is back: newly promoted and even less popular. Chuck Gardner is the proud owner of both a confidential paper-shredding business and a serious betting habit. When Chuck finds some scandalous paperwork and McCoist investigates a rat-nibbled corpse under a flyover, they are both sucked into a deadly stramash of gangland wars and police corruption.

**THE SHADOW**, Ajay Chowdhury  
(March 13 – U.K.)

Kamil Rahman #5

After a bruising encounter with a terrorist group, Detective Kamil Rahman has decided to hand in his resignation to the Met and set up a detective agency with his friend Anjoli. But when his boss asks him to go to India to investigate the murder of a British engineer who was found with eighteen arrows stuck in his body, Kamil agrees to take the case, as long as Anjoli can accompany him.

**THE SUMMER GUESTS**,

Tess Gerritsen  
(March 18)

Maggie Bird #2

Retired spy Maggie Bird leaps back into action when a teenager in her quiet Maine neighborhood vanishes, and Maggie's friend becomes the primary suspect. **DP**

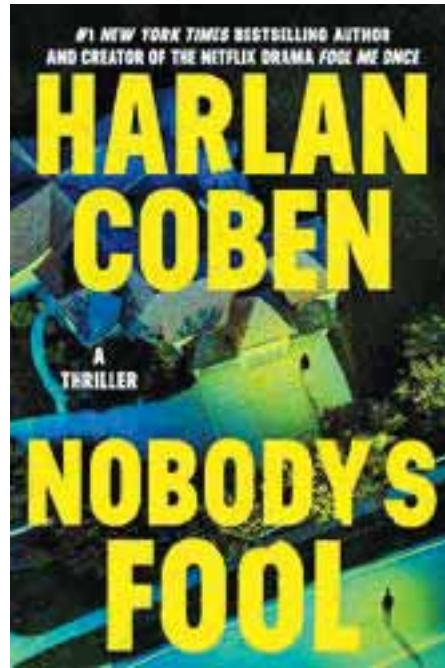
**THE MAN WHO SWORE HE'D NEVER GO HOME AGAIN**,

David Handler  
(March 18)

Stewart Hoag #16

Stewart "Hoagy" Hoag always swore that he would never return to Oakmont, Connecticut, the small mill town where his family lived for generations. He certainly has no desire to interrupt his high life as the newest great American novelist to revisit the town that hates his family and will only bring back memo-

ries of his unhappy childhood. But when his childhood sweetheart phones to say that her mother, Mary McKenna, the librarian who inspired Hoagy's dream to be a writer, has died, Hoagy knows he has to return for her funeral. Especially when Maggie adds that her mother didn't die of natural causes.



**NOBODY'S FOOL**, Harlan Coben  
(March 25)

Sami Kierce #2

The sequel to Fool Me Once centers on a man who runs into his former girlfriend 20 years after her supposed death—for which he's long believed he was responsible.

**Ted Bell's MONARCH**, Ryan Steck  
(March 25)

Alex Hawke #13

Former Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard Ambrose Congreve calls Alex Hawke with stunning news. Just days away from a controversial vote threatening to tear the United Kingdom apart at the seams, King Charles has disappeared while vacationing at Balmoral Castle. The prime minister believes she can keep the news quiet for no more than 72 hours. After that, Britain will be plunged into chaos.

**LETHAL PREY**, John Sandford  
(March 25)

Davenport & Flowers

Lucas Davenport and Virgil Flowers join forces to track down a ruthless killer who will do whatever it takes to keep the past buried.

**THE RELUCTANT SHERIFF**,

Chris Offutt

(March 25)

Mick Hardin #4

Mick Hardin never wanted to be sheriff. An ex-Army CID officer, he's supposed to be retired—or he was until his sister, Linda, was shot in the line of duty, requiring him to step in as interim sheriff while she recovered. Now he's stuck in Rocksalt, the place he was most hoping to escape. Back in uniform, Mick is chafing at the sudden dissolution of his retirement plans, wearied by the petty squabbles of Rocksalt's townsfolk. It's all business as usual, until the murder of a local bar owner draws an unlikely suspect who threatens to fan the flames of Mick's past.

**THE UNLUCKY ONES**, Hannah

Morrissey  
(March 25)

Black Harbor #4

The scene to which Sergeant Nikolai Kole responds is anything but a rote homicide. In the back of a clubhouse lies a body wrapped in garbage bags and doused in bleach. It isn't just any body. Tommy Greenlee, the ex-husband of Kole's former lover, Hazel, has been shot several times and left for dead. What's more...the killer left what appears to be a calling card.

**I WOULD DIE FOR YOU**, Sandie Jones  
(March 25)

Standalone

California, 2011: Nicole Forbes lives a quiet life in the small seaside town of Coronado with her husband and daughter. She is not expecting a writer to knock on her door asking for her personal insight into the downfall of the biggest British band of the 1980s?unveiling the threads of a life she left behind years ago. The same day, her daughter goes missing and the school claims her aunt picked her up . . . but she doesn't have an aunt. Convinced of a link be-

tween the two, Nicole is forced to revisit long-abandoned memories from her past to protect everything she now holds dear.

**HOMICIDE IN THE INDIAN HILLS,**

Erica Ruth Neubauer

(March 25)

Jane Wunderly #6

Intrepid American newlywed Jane Wunderly learns that tigers aren't the only dangers lurking in 1920s India, when a murder in a popular resort town threatens to destabilize the local government and undermine the resistance movement for Indian self-rule.

**INTO THE GRAY ZONE,**

Brad Taylor

(March 26)

Pike Logan #19

While on a routine security assessment in India, Taskforce operator Pike Logan foils an attempted attack on a meeting between the CIA and India's intelligence service. Both government agencies believe it's nothing more than a minor terrorist attack, but Pike suspects that something much more sinister is at play.

**A SPY AT WAR,** Charles Beaumont

(March 27 – U.K.)

Oxford Spy Ring #2

Simon Sharman is out for revenge, pursuing the assassin of his former colleague across war-torn Ukraine. Back in London, a Russian spy ring at the heart of the British Establishment remains active and a secret, yet desperate, struggle is underway to limit its attempts to sabotage the West's support for Ukraine. On the battlefields of the Donbas, Simon may have a chance to locate the assassin but larger forces are at work and he finds himself sucked into a terrifying shadow conflict between Russia and the West.

**VERA WONG'S GUIDE TO SNOOPING (ON A DEAD MAN),**

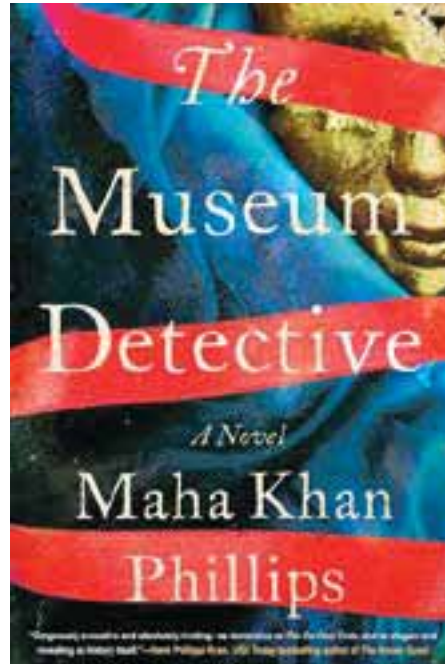
Jesse Q. Sutanto

(April 1)

Vera Wong #2

San Francisco tea shop owner Vera Wong agrees to help a young woman find her missing friend, then discov-

ers a dossier on that friend among the possessions of her son's police officer girlfriend.



**THE MUSEUM DETECTIVE,**

Maha Khan Phillips

(April 1)

When Dr. Gul Delani receives a call in the middle of the night from the Sindh police, she thinks they may have finally found her niece, Mahnaz—a precocious, politically conscious teenage girl who went missing three years prior. Gul has been racked with grief since Mahnaz's disappearance and distracts herself through work: a talented curator at the Museum of Heritage and History in Karachi, she is one of the country's leading experts in archaeology and ancient civilizations, a hard-won position for a woman.

**OVERKILL,** J. A. Jance

(April 1)

Ali Reynolds #18

Chuck Brewster, the former business partner of Ali Reynolds's husband B. Simpson, once carried on an affair with Clarice, B.'s first wife. So when he's found murdered with Clarice standing nearby covered in blood, it seems an open and shut case. But Clarice swears she's innocent and begs for Ali's help.

**THE RAILWAY CONSPIRACY,**

S. J. Rozan & John Shen Yen Nee

(April 1)

Dee & Lao #2

Judge Dee and Lao She must use all their powers of deduction—and kung fu skills—to take down a sinister conspiracy between Imperial Russia, Japan, and China in a rollicking new mystery set in 1920s London.

**THE CHOW MANIAC,** Vivien Chien

(April 1)

Noodle Shop #11

When Lydia brings Lana onto the case, three of the members of an elite Asian order known as the Eight Immortals have already been murdered. Each member of the order holds one item that represents their immortal counterpart, and someone is dying to get their hands on them all. Lydia's client insists he – and only he – knows who will be next and wants the murderer captured before there is another victim.

**HARD TOWN,** Adam Plantinga

(April 8)

Kurt Argentio

A former Detroit police officer is taking a breather in a small Arizona town when a woman asks him to help find her missing husband in this sequel to *The Ascent*.

**THE MAID'S SECRET,** Nita Prose

(April 8)

Molly the Maid #3

When an Antiques Roadshow–esque TV program starts filming at the Regency Grand, Molly the Maid brings in jewelry for appraisal. It turns out to be hugely valuable, and then it's stolen, pointing Molly toward a mystery with links to her late grandmother's past.

**THE IMPOSSIBLE THING,**

Belinda Bauer

(April 8)

Standalone

1926. On the cliffs of Yorkshire, men are lowered on ropes to steal the eggs of the sea birds who nest there. The most beautiful are sold for large sums. A small girl—penniless and neglected by her family—retrieves one such treasure.



Its discovery will forever alter the course of her life.

A century later. In a remote cottage in Wales, Patrick Fort finds his friend, Nick, and his mother tied up and robbed. The only thing missing: a carved case containing an incredible scarlet egg. Doggedly attempting to retrieve it, Patrick and Nick discover the cruel world of egg trafficking, and soon find themselves on the trail of a priceless collection of eggs lost to history. Until now.

### STRANGERS IN TIME,

David Baldacci  
(April 15)

Historical Standalone

Fourteen-year-old Charlie Matters is up to no good, but for a very good reason. Without parents, peerage, or merit, he steals what he needs, living day-to-day until he's old enough to enlist to fight the Germans. After barely surviving the Blitz, Charlie knows there's no telling when a falling bomb might end his life.

Fifteen-year-old Molly Wakefield has just returned to a nearly unrecognizable London. One of millions of children to have been evacuated to the countryside Molly has been away from her home for nearly five years. Her return, however, is not the homecoming she'd hoped for as she's confronted by a devastating reality: neither of her parents are there.

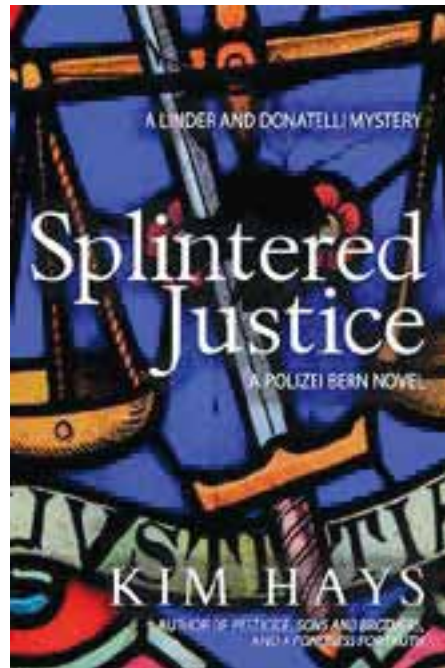
Without guardians and stability, Charlie and Molly find an unexpected ally and protector in Ignatius Oliver, and solace at his book shop, The Book Keep. Mourning the recent loss of his wife, Ignatius forms a kinship with both children, and in each other they rediscover the spirit of family each has lost.

**THE DEATH OF US,** Abigail Dean  
(April 15)

A divorced couple reunites for the trial of the home invader who nearly killed them 28 years earlier. In the decades since, they've had vastly different responses to the trauma.

**WHO WILL REMEMBER,** C. S. Harris  
(April 15)  
Sebastian St. Cyr #20

August 1816. England is in the grip of what will become known as the Year Without a Summer. Facing the twin crises of a harvest-destroying volcanic winter and the economic disruption caused by the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the British monarchy finds itself haunted by the looming threat of bloody riots not seen since the earliest days of the French Revolution. Amidst the turmoil, a dead man is found hanging upside down by one leg in an abandoned chapel, his hands tied behind his back.



**SPLINTERED JUSTICE,** Kim Hays  
(April 15)

Linder & Donatelli #4

Swiss homicide detective Giuliana Linder of the Bern Police and her investigating partner Renzo Donatelli are facing cases that may not be what they appear. Renzo is on the scene near the Bern cathedral when a young man repairing a medieval window is injured by falling from a scaffold—a fall deliberately caused by a teenage boy. Finding evidence that the boy's attack on the glassworker is linked to his mother's suicide fifteen years earlier, Renzo decides to reexamine the woman's death, hoping his work on the case will help get him promoted to homicide detective. He learns that the apparent suicide still haunts the injured glassworker, although he was a child of ten when the

boy's mother died.

### HIDDEN IN SMOKE,

Lee Goldberg  
(April 22)

Sharpe & Walker #3

After dozens of Hollywood apartment buildings erupt in flames during a single night of terror, arson investigators Walter Sharpe and Andrew Walker are assigned to catch the serial torcher and end his spree. But then a catastrophic fire destroys a major freeway, crippling the city and forcing Sharpe and Walker to take on another massive case.

Desperate for help, they know exactly who to call: homicide detectives Eve Ronin and Duncan Pavone. Together the four detectives must quickly figure out whether the freeway disaster was a tragic accident...or the work of a mastermind with a horrific plan.

**SHADOW OF THE SOLSTICE,** Anne Hillerman  
(April 22)

Leaphorn, Chee & Manuelito #10

The Navajo Nation police are on high alert when a U.S. Cabinet Secretary schedules an unprecedented trip to the little Navajo town of Shiprock, New Mexico. The visit coincides with a plan to resume uranium mining along the Navajo Nation border. Tensions around the official's arrival escalate when the body of a stranger is found in an area restricted for the disposal of radioactive uranium waste.

**SEASON OF DEATH,** Will Thomas  
(April 22)

Barker & Llewelyn #16

The sudden collapse of a railway tunnel in the East End of London kills dozens and shuts down services all over the city. Meanwhile, a mysterious beggar calling herself "Dutch" guides Barker and Llewelyn to an attempt by a powerful aristocrat to take over London's criminal underworld. With a missing heiress and a riot at a women's shelter acting as distractions designed to stop the duo from getting to the truth, Barker must relentlessly fight to reach the trust while Llewelyn wonders how a simple beggar woman can be the cata-

lyst for such destruction.

**THE SECRET ROOM**, Jane Casey  
(April 24)

Maeve Kerrigan #12

2:32 p.m. Wealthy, privileged Ilaria Cavendish checks into a luxury London hotel and orders a bottle of champagne. Within the hour, her lover discovers her submerged in a bath of scalding water, dead. At first glance it looks like an accident. No one went in with her. No one came out. But all the signs point to murder. For DS Maeve Kerrigan, the case is a welcome distraction. But when shock news hits close to home, affecting her partner, DI Josh Derwent, she faces the toughest challenge of her career.

**2 SISTERS MURDER INVESTIGATION**,

James Patterson, Candice Fox  
(April 22)

2 Sisters #2

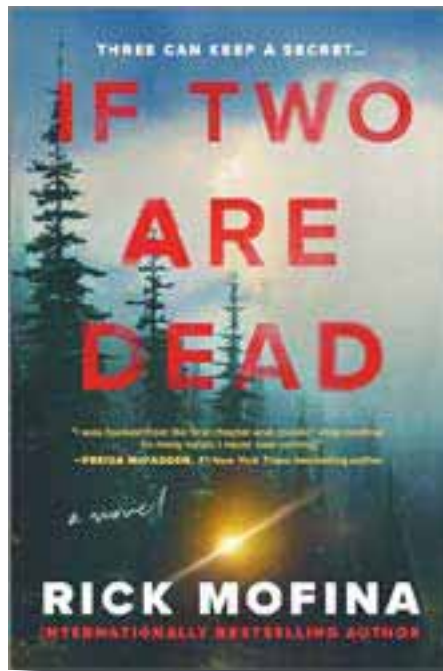
Rhonda and Barbara “Baby” Bird are half-sisters—and full partners in their Los Angeles detective agency. They agree on nothing. Rhonda, a former attorney, takes a by-the-book approach to solving crimes, while teenage Baby relies on her street smarts. But when they take a controversial case of a loner whose popular wife has gone missing, they’re accused of being PIs who can’t tell a client from a killer.

**HUMAN REMAINS**, Jo Callaghan  
(April 24 – U.K. only)

AIDE Lock & Kat Frank #3

Fresh from successfully closing their first live case, the Future Policing Unit are called in to investigate when a headless, handless body is found on a Warwickshire farm. But as they work to identify the victim and their killer, the discovery of a second body begins to spark fears that The Aston Strangler is back. And as the stakes rise for the team, so do the tensions brewing within it.

When DCS Kat Frank is accused of putting the wrong man behind bars all those years ago, AIDE Lock – the world’s first AI Detective – pursues the truth about what happened with relentless logic.



**IF TWO ARE DEAD**, Rick Mofina  
(April 29)

Standalone

Driving alone at night in a wild rainstorm, Luke Conway strikes something—or someone. He and his wife, Carrie, recently moved back to Clear River to help take care of her ailing father, and after a tragedy at his previous job, this move is their last chance at a new life. Now, standing in the downpour on this Texas road, Luke, an off-duty cop, has a decision to make—and he has to make it fast. No one else is around. No witnesses. And he can’t find a body.

**HOW TO SEAL YOUR OWN FATE**,

Kristen Perrin  
(April 29)

Castle Knoll #2

Annie Adams is caught in a new web of murder that spans decades, returning us to the idyllic English village that holds layers of secrets.

**JULIE CHAN IS DEAD**,

Liann Zhang  
(April 29)

Debut mystery

Julie Chan, a supermarket cashier with nothing to lose, finds herself thrust into the glamorous yet perilous world of her late twin sister, Chloe VanHuusen, a

popular influencer. Separated at a young age, the identical twins were polar opposites and rarely spoke, except for one viral video that Chloe initiated (Finding My Long-Lost Twin And Buying Her A House #EMOTIONAL). When Julie discovers Chloe’s lifeless body under mysterious circumstances, she seizes the chance to live the life she’s always envied.

**THE UNQUIET GRAVE**,

Dervla McTiernan  
(April 30 – I think)

Cormac Reilly #4

When a corpse is found in a bog in Galway, Cormac Reilly assumes the find is historical. But closer examination reveals a more recent story. The dead man is Thaddeus Grey, a local secondary school principal who disappeared two years prior. There’s nothing in Grey’s past that would explain why he was murdered, or why his body was mutilated in a ritual manner. At first, progress on the case is frustratingly slow and Cormac struggles to keep his mind on the job. His ex-girlfriend, Emma Sweeney, is in trouble, and she’s reached out to him for help—Emma’s new husband has gone missing in Paris, and the French police are refusing to open an investigation into his disappearance.

**SOUTH OF NOWHERE**,

Jeffery Deaver  
(May 6)

Colter Shaw #5

When a levee collapses in Hinowah, a small town in Northern California, Colter Shaw is brought on by his sister, Dorion, a disaster response specialist, to help locate a family swept away by the raging water, with mere hours to survive. But after a surprise attack along the river obstructs Colter’s urgent search, the siblings are forced to consider a new reality: Is the levee at risk of failing from natural causes, or is someone sabotaging it?

**THE POET’S GAME**,

Paul Vidich  
(May 6)

Standalone Espionage Novel  
Alex Matthews thought he had left

it all behind: his CIA career, the viper's den of bureaucracy at headquarters, the deceptions of the cat-and-mouse game of double agents, and the sudden trips to Russia, which poisoned his marriage and made him an absentee husband and father, with tragic results. But then the Director came asking for a favor. Something that only Alex could do because it involved the asset Byron—a Russian agent whom Alex had recruited. Byron had something of great interest to the CIA; the Director said it was a matter of grave national security that implicated the White House, and that Byron would hand over the kompromat once he was extricated from Russia.

**BIG BAD WOOL,**

Leonie Swann

(May 6)

Sheep Detective #2

With one solved mystery under their woolly belts, the time has come for the sheep of Glennkill to explore Europe. Together with their new shepherdess, Rebecca, they move into their winter quarters in the shadow of a French chateau. But their new home is far from idyllic. A number of sheep from a previous flock have disappeared, and deer are dying unnatural deaths in the forest. Then a human dies and the Sheep Detective investigates.

**PARENTS WEEKEND,** Alex Finlay

(May 6)

Five college students disappear from their Northern California campus while their families are visiting, prompting a media storm that illuminates their class differences and the sins of their parents.

**THE LADIES ROAD GUIDE  
TO UTTER RUIN,**

Alison Goodman

(May 6)

Ill-Mannered Ladies #2

To most of Regency high society, forty-two-year-old Lady Augusta Colebrook, or Gus, and her twin sister, Julia, are just unmarried ladies of a certain age—hardly worth a second glance. But the Colebrook twins are far from useless old maids. They are secretly protecting women and children ignored by soci-

ety and the law. When Lord Evan—a charming escaped convict who has won Gus's heart—needs to hide his sister and her lover from their vindictive brother, Gus and Julia take the two women into their home. They know what it is like to have a powerful and overbearing brother. But Lord Evan's complicated past puts them all in danger. Gus knows they must clear his name of murder if he is to survive the thieftakers who hunt him.

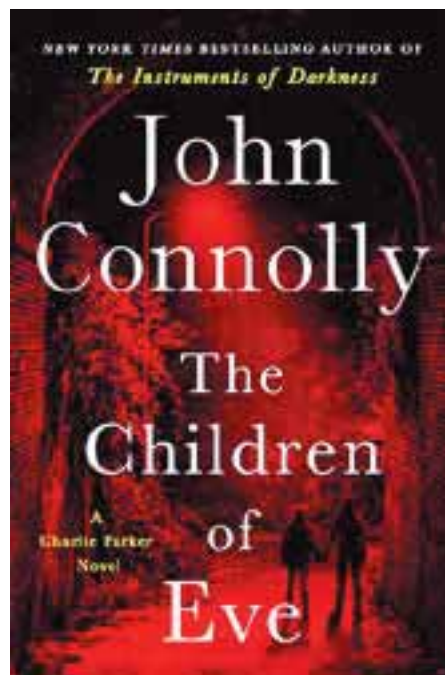
**THE CHILDREN OF EVE,**

John Connolly

(May 6)

Charlie Parker #22

Wyatt Riggins, the boyfriend of rising Maine artist Zetta Nadeau, has gone missing, leaving behind a cell phone containing a single-word message: RUN. Private investigator Charlie Parker is hired to find out why Riggins has fled, and from whom. Parker discovers that Riggins, an ex-soldier, has been involved in the abduction of four children from Mexico: three girls and a boy, all belonging to the cartel boss Blas Urrea—except Urrea's family is safe and well in Mexico, which means the abductees cannot be his children. Yet whoever they are, Urrea wants them back, and has dispatched his agents to secure them, even if it means butchering everyone who stands in their way.



**THE TENANT,** Freida McFadden

(May 6)

After getting fired from his high-paying marketing job, Blake Porter decides to take in a beautiful roommate. Soon, her behavior alarms the neighbors, and she hints at knowing secrets about Blake's past.

**THE MISSING HALF,**

Ashley Flowers

(May 6)

Two women connect to solve the long-ago disappearances of their sisters only two weeks apart.

**MARBLE HALL MURDERS,**

Anthony Horowitz

(May 13)

Susan Ryland – Magpie #3

Book editor Susan Ryland starts working on the manuscript for a new mystery by a promising young writer, only to discover that its pages are filled with clues about the murder of his famous grandmother. Then the author himself is killed.

**SLAYING YOU,** Michelle Gagnon

(May 13)

Amber Jamison #2

Grace and Amber's first encounter was anything but ordinary—they bonded over being stalked by the same psychopath. After narrowly escaping that ordeal they went their separate ways, determined to get back to their lives. Surprise: neither of them is very good at being "normal." Despite their best efforts, they both feel an irresistible pull toward the dark side. So when they reunite for a Vegas wedding and discover that an even more dangerous killer is targeting their friends, it's time to get the gang back together.

**SILENT HORIZONS,** Chad Robichaux

with Jack Stewart

(May 13)

Standalone Action Thriller

Foster Quinn is more than a former Force Recon Marine. He's a husband. A father. A faithful brother to his teammates. When one of them is killed during a high-risk operation to track down a dangerous arms dealer, Foster

struggles to balance his roles as a dedicated family man and an elite warrior. Despite his inner demons—or maybe because of them? Foster can't walk away from his brothers. Then he gets the chance to step in where his best friend left off, assuming a cover identity in Iran that will get him close to the arms dealer and pave the way for a critical mission. On his own in a new country, he must carefully choose who to trust. An Iranian taxi driver. An American hunter. A British oil executive. One wrong move could spell disaster. Not just for the mission, but for Foster.

**FEVER BEACH**, Carl Hiaasen  
(May 13)

Hiaasen's latest comic crime saga features an ex-Proud Boy, an angry environmentalist, an inept congressman, and scheming billionaires.

**DARK MAESTRO**,  
Brendan Slocumb  
(May 13)

A cello prodigy from the Washington, D.C., projects is forced into witness protection after his drug dealer father informs on his cartel bosses. When the Feds prove inept, the cellist and his family take matters into their own hands.

**THE MAN MADE OF SMOKE**,  
Alex North  
(May 13)

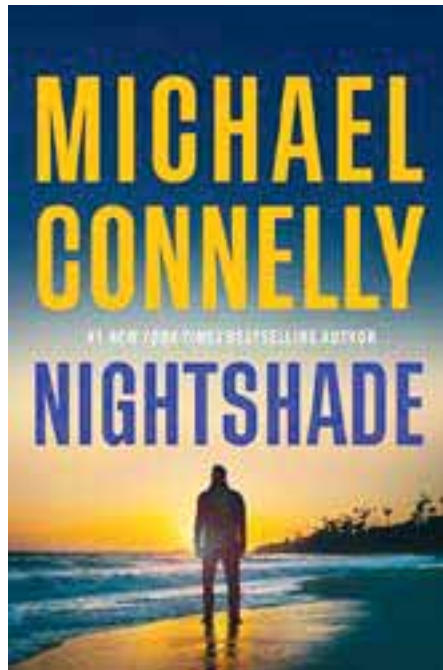
After escaping from a serial killer as a child, Dan Garvie makes a career as a criminal profiler. When his dad dies, he returns to his island hometown and starts to suspect the killer has returned.

**THE SILVERSMITH'S PUZZLE**,  
Nev March  
(May 13)  
Jim & Diana #4

In 1894 colonial India, Lady Diana's family has lost their fortune in a global financial slump, but even worse, her brother Adi is accused of murder. Desperate to save him from the gallows, Captain Jim and Lady Diana rush back to Bombay. However, the traditional Parsi community finds Jim and Diana's marriage taboo and shuns them.

**SMOKE AND EMBERS**,  
John Lawton  
(May 13)  
Inspector Troy #9

**SMOKE AND EMBERS** opens in 1950, when Scotland Yard Chief Inspector Troy learns that his sergeant has been conducting an affair with the known mistress of infamous London racketeer Otto Ohnherz. Troy is immediately intrigued by the mysterious origins of Ohnherz's second-in-command, Jay Fabian, who is a major contributor to all three British political parties and claims to have survived the concentration camps—yet he lacks proof beyond his word.



**NIGHTSHADE**,  
Michael Connelly  
(May 20)  
Detective Stilwell

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Detective Stilwell has been "exiled" to a low-key post policing rustic Catalina Island, after department politics drove him off a homicide desk on the mainland. But while following up the usual drunk-and-disorderlies and petty thefts that come with his new territory, Detective Stilwell gets a report of a body found wrapped in plastic and weighed down at the bottom of the harbor. Crossing all lines of protocol and jurisdiction, he starts doggedly working the

case. Soon, his investigation uncovers closely guarded secrets and a dark heart to the serene island that was meant to be his escape from the evils of the big city.

**MAKING A KILLING**,  
Cara Hunter  
(May 20)  
DI Fawley #7

When Nick Vincent, producer of true-crime show *Infamous*, hears about an explosive new angle on a high-profile case—the 2016 murder of an eight-year-old girl in Oxford—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 the corpse 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.

**KAUA'I STORM**,  
Tori Eldridge  
(May 20)

Ranger Makalani Pahukula #1  
After ten years as a national park ranger in Oregon, Makalani Pahukula is back on Kaua'i for her grandmother's birthday. Having been gone for so long, Makalani finds the disconnect with her people and her struggles have never been more profound. Neither has her need to reacquaint herself with everything she left behind. When she reaches the homestead, she finds a bickering family and the disconcerting news that her cousins – a failed college football player and a rebellious teenage girl – have gone missing.

**THE DOORMAN**,  
Chris Pavone  
(May 20)

The doorman at a ritzy New York City apartment building bridges the divide between its residents and staff when violent protests erupt across the city. Before the end of his shift, someone will die.

**NEVER FLINCH**, Stephen King  
(May 20)

Holly Gibney #5

When the Buckeye City Police Department receives a disturbing letter from a person threatening to “kill thirteen innocents and one guilty” in “an act of atonement for the needless death of an innocent man,” Detective Izzy Jaynes has no idea what to think. Are fourteen citizens about to be slaughtered in an unhinged act of retribution? As the investigation unfolds, Izzy realizes that the letter writer is deadly serious, and she turns to her friend Holly Gibney for help.

**Stuart Woods’ GOLDEN HOUR**,

Brett Battles

(May 27)

Teddy Fay #7

Teddy Fay is ready to embark on the European press tour of Peter Barrington’s latest film *Storm’s Eye*, when he receives an unexpected visit from Lance Cabot, director of the CIA. Several CIA agents have been turning up dead. The commonality? They were all part of a mission Teddy was involved in: *Golden Hour*. Lance wants Teddy to use his trip as a cover to investigate who is behind these killings.

**A DEAD DRAW**, Robert Dugoni

(May 27)

Tracy Crosswhite #11

Detective Tracy Crosswhite isn’t one to lose her cool. Until her interrogation of the taunting and malicious Erik Schmidt, a suspect in two cold case killings. Schmidt also has unnerving ties to the monster who murdered Tracy’s sister, stirring memories of the crime that shaped Tracy’s life. After a critical mistake during a shooting exercise, Tracy breaks.

**RETURN TO SENDER**,

Craig Johnson

(May 27)

Longmire #21

The Sheriff of Absaroka confronts a cabal of devious outlaws who are hell bent on getting what they want, even though they have to bend and break the law. Walt is stretched to his physical

limits to try to stop them, and has to answer the question of just how far he will go to stop these outlaws.

**THE BLACK HIGHWAY**,

Simon Toyne

(May 28)

Laughton Rees #3

Forensic specialist Laughton Rees is not ashamed of her checkered past—after all, her youthful indiscretions led to the birth of her daughter Gracie, the person she loves most in the world—but when Gracie’s father unexpectedly turns up in their lives again, Laughton is automatically wary.

Shelby Facer is a dangerous man, formerly imprisoned for his involvement in an international drug trafficking ring, and no matter what Laughton once felt for him, she doesn’t want him anywhere near Gracie. But when Shelby claims that he has information about an especially difficult murder case she is working, she can’t turn him down.

**THE GOOD LIAR**, Denise Mina

(June 3)

As a doctor prepares to deliver a speech about the faulty evidence she gave in a high-profile murder case, flashbacks reveal how she and her colleagues pieced together the inaccurate testimony.

**ONE FINAL TURN**, Ashley Weaver

(June 3)

Electra McDonnell #5

Ellie McDonnell is about to embark on her most perilous mission yet: go to Lisbon, Portugal to save her beloved cousin Toby who has reportedly escaped from a German prisoner of war camp. Toby has been missing since the Battle of Dunkirk and Ellie had all but lost hope in ever seeing him again until Major Ramsey, the British military intelligence officer she had been working closely with over the past few months, shared the news he’d intercepted.

**THE GHOSTWRITER**,

Julie Clark

(June 3)

For decades, horror writer Vincent Taylor has been plagued by rumors that

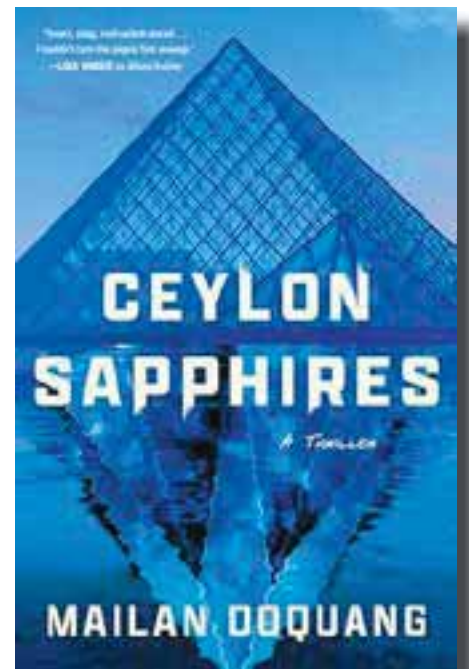
he killed two of his siblings. When he hires his daughter to ghostwrite his latest project, she’s shocked to learn it’s a true crime tell-all about what really happened.

**DON’T FORGET ME, LITTLE BESSIE**, James Lee Burke

(June 3)

Holland Family #5

This novel continues the author’s Holland Family series with a thriller about 14-year-old Bessie Holland standing up to a nefarious Texas oil company.



**CEYLON SAPPHIRES**,

Mailan Doquang

(June 3)

Rune Sarasin #2

At a private showing in the Louvre, Napoleon Bonaparte’s great-great-grand niece Margot Steiner admires the painting of her famous ancestor while wearing a precious Ceylon sapphire necklace commissioned by the emperor himself. After getting caught in a commotion on the crowded staircase, however, Mrs. Steiner discovers that her necklace is gone and the suspicious young woman who started the commotion has melted away into the throng.

Rune Sarasin is new to Paris, but not new to stealing priceless jewels. She has spent the last few years plying her trade in the fast-paced city of Bangkok,

but after unwittingly stealing from the ruthless smuggler Charles Lemaire, she now must hunt down the gems that he requests until she repays what she owes. But when Lemaire demands that she now steal sapphire earrings to match the necklace, Rune realizes that he will never willingly let her go.

**THE BACHELORETTE PARTY**, Camilla Sten  
(June 10)

A disgraced true crime podcast host attends her best friends bachelorette party on a remote island and discovers clues to a famous cold case.

**CRY HAVOC**, Jack Carr  
(June 10)

Tom Reese #1

Just before the Tet Offensive changes the dynamic in Vietnam, before President Johnson announces he will not run for reelection, before the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, as riots and protests rage across the nation, a spy ship, the USS Pueblo, is captured by communist forces off the coast of North Korea. The crew thought they had destroyed everything of intelligence value. They were wrong.

As a KGB “illegal” elicits information from a high-ranking CIA official, and teams of special operators infiltrating into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam disappear without a trace, an ambitious Soviet advisor launches an ingenious plan with consequences that reach far beyond the battlefields of Southeast Asia, one that will forever alter the world balance of power.

Tom Reece, a SEAL operator attached to the highly classified and shadowy MACV-SOG is about to be thrust into a bloody battle to discover the truth.

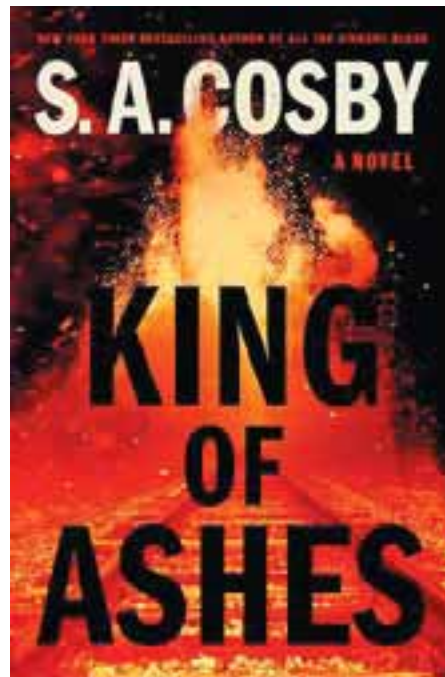
**AN ENEMY IN THE VILLAGE**,  
Martin Walker  
(June 10)  
Bruno #18

When Bruno stumbles upon a motionless figure in a car parked at a scenic overpass on the ridge of the Vézère valley, he’s ready to investigate. Inside, he finds a suicide note and the dead

body of Monique, a successful businesswoman who rented châteaux to wealthy expats. It seems like an open-and-shut case. But Bruno can’t shake the feeling that something sinister lurks underneath this tidy narrative

**DEATH AT THE WHITE HART**,  
Chris Chibnall  
(June 10)

The creator of the TV series *Broadchurch* spins a small-town detective story about the brutal murder of a pub owner.



**KING OF ASHES**, S. A. Cosby  
(June 10)

When eldest son Roman Carruthers is summoned home after his father’s car accident, he finds his younger brother, Dante, in debt to dangerous criminals and his sister, Neveah, exhausted from holding the family—and the family business—together. Neveah and their father, who run the Carruthers Crematorium in the run-down central Virginia town of Jefferson Run, see death up close every day. But mortality draws even closer when it becomes clear that the crash that landed their father in a coma was no accident and Dante’s recklessness has placed them all in real danger.

**KILL YOUR DARLINGS**,

Peter Swanson  
(June 10)

Told in reverse, this unconventional domestic thriller explains why a poet develops a plan to murder her English professor husband.

**A SHIPWRECK IN FIJI**,  
Nilima Rao  
(June 10)

Sergeant Akal Singh #2

Sergeant Akal Singh, an unwilling transplant to Fiji, is just starting to settle into his life in the capital city of Suva when he is sent to the neighboring island of Ovalau on a series of fool’s errands. First: investigate strange reports of Germans, thousands of miles from the front of World War I. Second: chaperone two strong-willed European ladies, Mary and Katherine, on a sight-seeing tour. And third: supervise the only police officer currently on Ovalau, an eighteen-year-old constable with a penchant for hysterics.

**WITH A VENGEANCE**,  
Riley Sager  
(June 10)

In the 1950s, a woman lures six people onto a train from Philadelphia to Chicago in hopes of getting them to confess to conspiring against her family. When one of them is murdered, the stakes skyrocket.

**GONE DARK**, Ryan Steck  
(June 17)

Matthew Redd #4

Late-summer wildfires are a fact of life in Montana. But as an inferno nears Wellington, Matthew Redd gets the unusual call that a team of smoke jumpers has suddenly gone dark. As head of the county’s fledgling search and rescue team, Redd drops into the fire zone and finds way more than he bargained for: a killer has taken out the smoke jumper team along with two civilians, and only a terrified young boy is left as witness. Redd and little Jack narrowly escape the raging fire, and Redd calls in Gavin Kline, now acting director of the FBI, to investigate the bigger forces at play.

**MURDER TAKES A VACATION**,

Laura Lippman  
(June 17)

A prim grandmother and ex-PI falls for a handsome stranger on a flight to France. When he's found dead a day later, she reignites her investigative instincts to find out what happened.

**DON'T OPEN YOUR EYES,**  
Liv Constantine  
(June 17)

The pseudonymous authors of *The Last Mrs. Parrish* deliver a standalone thriller featuring a woman who struggles with disturbing dreams about her family's safety. Eventually, she realizes she's seeing the future.

**THE PROTEST,** Rob Rinder  
(June 19 in U.K.)  
Adam Green #3

At a star-studded opening night for the Royal Academy's celebration of renowned artist Max Bruce, someone is hiding a dark secret. As the night reaches its climax and Max addresses his admirers, the occasion takes a shocking turn when a protester runs from the crowd and sprays the artist with blue paint. Max collapses and it soon turns out that the paint was laced with cyanide. Someone has been plotting to kill him. All evidence points to the protestor – and newly qualified barrister Adam Green is assigned the impossible task of their defence. But could there be others who wanted Max dead?

**EL DORADO DRIVE,**  
Megan Abbott  
(June 24)

When Harper moves in with her sister Pam, she's surprised to find Pam doing so well financially after her messy divorce. After all, Pam's ex-husband wiped their bank accounts, even stole from their kids. But Pam managed to find her way back. Thanks to the Wheel... Twice a month, the women of the Wheel meet. New members bring cash to the party that is pooled together and then gifted to one lucky member. It's all about giving back. Lifting each other up. As women should. As they must. But when Harper is invited, with the promise of an end to her finan-

cial burdens, the sisters inadvertently unleash a darkness lurking within the group. If they're not careful, it might just get them killed.

**THEM BONES,**  
David Housewright  
(June 24)  
Mac McKenzie #22

There are two things that Rushmore McKenzie hates to turn down—a request from a friend and a challenge. Both of them show up in his wife's nightclub in the person of Angela Bjork, who has come to request McKenzie's help. McKenzie, once a homicide detective, now through a series of unlikely events, is a retired millionaire. But occasionally, for friends, he will do some unofficial private detective work. Over the years, he's hunted down a stolen Stradivarius, the hoard of 1930's gangster, and recovered a stolen, apparently cursed, artifact but McKenzie never imagined a case like this. An exceedingly rare dinosaur skull has been stolen.

**THE BLACK HIGHWAY,**  
Simon Toyne  
(June 24)  
Laughton Rees #3

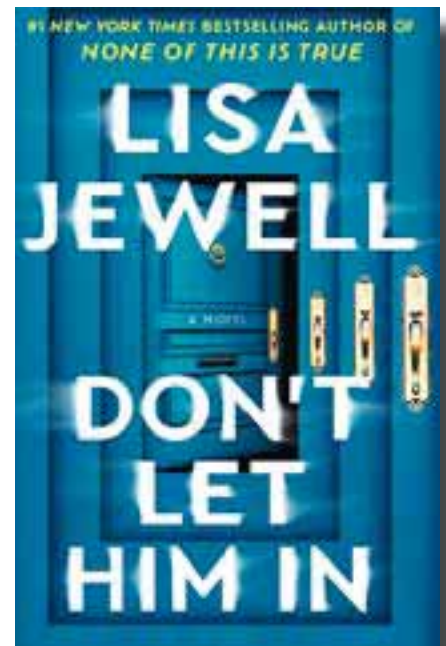
Forensic specialist Laughton Rees is not ashamed of her checkered past—after all, her youthful indiscretions led to the birth of her daughter Gracie, the person she loves most in the world—but when Gracie's father unexpectedly turns up in their lives again, Laughton is automatically wary.

Shelby Facer is a dangerous man, formerly imprisoned for his involvement in an international drug trafficking ring, and no matter what Laughton once felt for him, she doesn't want him anywhere near Gracie. But when Shelby claims that he has information about an especially difficult murder case she is working, she can't turn him down.

**THE MEDUSA PROTOCOL,**  
Rob Hart  
(June 24)

Assassins Anonymous #2  
When Astrid, known in her assassin days as Azrael, stopped showing up to Assassins Anonymous, the group

assumed her past had caught up with her. Only her sponsor Mark, formerly the deadliest killer in the world, holds out hope that she's okay. Then, during a meeting, the group gets a sign, or rather, a pizza delivery. Is there another psychopath out there who actually likes olives on their pizza, or is Astrid trying to send Mark a message? Meanwhile, Astrid wakes up in the cell of a black site prison, on a remote island. A doctor subjects her to mysterious experiments, plumbing the depths of her memory and looking for a vital clue from her past. She'll do anything to escape, except... killing anyone.



**DON'T LET HIM IN,**  
Lisa Jewell  
(June 24)

Restaurateur Paddy Swann was the life of the party until the day a man pushed him in the path of an oncoming train, leaving his twenty-something daughter Ash and wife Nina devastated. Shortly after Paddy's funeral, the two women receive a surprise in the mail: a note and package from Nick Radcliffe, an old friend of Paddy's, and a nondescript lighter that once belonged to him decades ago. This unexpected gift draws Nick and Nina closer together—much to Ash's dismay.

Martha is a small-town florist with dreams of expansion. She lives with her second husband Al, her baby, and two

sons from her prior marriage. But they never seem to have any money, and with his constant traveling for work, she feels like a single parent—especially when an emergency makes her realize something needs to change.

But Nick and Al may not be who they say they are, leading these three women on a shocking collision course, wishing they had heeded a warning: Don't let him in.

**INTO THE LEOPARD'S DEN,**

Harini Nagendra

(July 1)

Kaveri & Ramu #4

Bangalore, 1922: Pregnant and confined to the house by her protective mother-in-law, Kaveri Murthy has resolved to take a break from detection. But when an elderly woman is stabbed at night and dies clutching a photograph of Kaveri while asking for her help—how can she refuse? Missing the assistance of her husband Ramu, who is working in Coorg, Kaveri investigates her new case with her able assistants, milk boy Venu and housemaid Anandi. They find a trail of secrets that lead them to suspect the killer may be in Coorg.

**EDGE OF HONOR,** Brad Thor

(July 1)

Scot Harvath #24

No plot summary available

**THE RED QUEEN,**

Martha Grimes

(July 1)

Richard Jury #26

One calm night in Twickenham, a businessman named Tom Treadnor is shot off his barstool at The Queen pub. Superintendent Richard Jury is called in to investigate, and quickly realizes that everyone in Treadnor's life – from his widow, Alice, to the staff at his manor, to his business partner had differing opinions of him. And to complicate things further, Jury has just happened upon a photo in a newspaper of a man in the United States, who is a dead ringer for Treadnor.

Meanwhile, Wiggins, Jury's partner at New Scotland Yard, becomes side-tracked by an investigation of his own:

His sister, missing for years and presumed dead, has just sent a postcard to their mother. When Wiggins takes off in search of his sister, the two investigations begin to converge.



**THE WHITE CROW,**

Michael Robotham

(July 1)

Philomena McCarthy #2

A young London police officer—whose family are well-known criminals—tackles two intertwined cases involving a child who may have killed their parent and a violent jewel theft.

**DOGGED PURSUIT,**

David Rosenfelt

(July 1)

Andy Carpenter #31

Andy Carpenter has spent the three years since graduating law school working as a prosecutor in Paterson. But having seen how the system never looks out for the little guy, he leaves to start his own practice as a defense attorney. His office might be a little bit of a dump, but he's excited to make a change.

Andy goes to the shelter to adopt a dog, where he meets his beloved golden retriever, Tara, for the first time and feels an immediate connection. The shelter is crowded and Tara's been sharing space with a dog named Sunny;

Andy hates to break them up and so asks to take Sunny, too, but since there's a pending criminal case involving the owner, he'll need to get written permission for temporary possession.

Andy discovers that Sunny's owner, Frank Tierney, has been arrested for the murder of his ex-boss. But he takes an immediate liking to Frank and his clear dedication to his dog, and ends up with his first case along with the two dogs.

**THE RED SHORE,** William Shaw

(July 3 in the U.K.)

DS Eden Driscoll #1

Met detective Eden Driscoll never wanted a child, but when his estranged sister vanishes from her sailboat, he is asked to look after her son Finn – the nephew he hadn't even known existed.

Resettled in the seaside town of Teignmouth, Eden adjusts to his new-found parenthood. Then Finn disappears from school, and Eden knows something is dreadfully wrong.

When Eden's sister's body is finally found, floating in the sea, local police rule her death an accident, but Eden isn't convinced. She was an experienced sailor and would never sail without a life jacket. Eden starts searching his sister's life for answers, and what he discovers changes everything.

**WHAT THE NIGHT BRINGS,**

Mark Billingham

(July 8)

Tom Thorne #19

The targeted murder of four officers is only the first in a series of attacks that leaves police scared, angry and, most disturbingly of all, vengeful. As Tom Thorne and Nicola Tanner dig into the reasons for the violence, a deeper darkness begins to emerge: the possibility that these murders are payback. The price paid for an unspeakable betrayal.

**THE FROZEN PEOPLE,**

Elly Griffiths

(July 8)

Ally Dawson #1

Ali Dawson and her cold case team investigate crimes so old, they're frozen—or so their inside joke goes. Ali's work seems like a safe desk job, but what



her friends—and even her beloved son—don't know is that her team has a secret: they can travel back in time to look for evidence.

### OUR LAST RESORT,

Clémence Michallon

(July 7)

Frida and Gabriel arrive seeking a fresh start at the stunning Ara Hotel in the secluded desert of Escalante, Utah. Once so close they were able to finish each other's sentences, they've grown apart in recent years after a sudden, unspeakable tragedy. Now, at the luxe resort, they are ready to reconnect between dips in the pool and hikes on spectacular desert trails. It all feels like paradise—until the dead body of a beautiful young woman who was vacationing at the Ara with her powerful, much older husband is discovered. When the local police arrive and put the resort into lockdown, Gabriel and Frida are forced to revisit memories from their upbringing in a cloistered cult in upstate New York, led by a charismatic and fanatical leader. It was their dramatic, fiery escape from his control fifteen years earlier that bonded them for life—or so Frida thought.

### THE BLUE HORSE, Bruce Borgos

(July 8)

Porter Beck #3

A controversial wild horse round-up in the high desert of Nevada results in two murders and too many suspects for Sheriff Porter Beck to deal with.

### THE GIRL IN CELL A,

Vaseem Khan

(July 8)

Convicted of murder at seventeen, infamous killer and true crime celebrity Orianna Negi has always maintained her innocence. Orianna has a blind spot over that fateful day: she can't remember what happened. Forensic psychologist Annie Ledet is tasked with unlocking the truth.

### THE WOMAN IN SUITE 11,

Ruth Ware

(July 8)

A former travel journalist tries to re-

ignite her career with a trip to a luxury Swiss hotel, where she meets a desperate woman who claims to be the mistress of the hotel's billionaire owner.

### CARVED IN BLOOD,

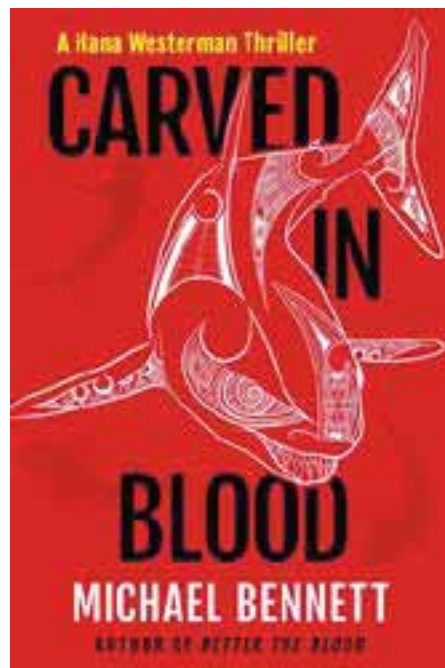
Michael Bennett

(July 15)

Hana Westerman #3

When Detective Inspector Jaye Hamilton stops at an Auckland liquor store for a bottle of champagne, it is supposed to be celebratory: his daughter Addison has just gotten engaged. Instead, he is suddenly gunned down at the register by a balaclava-clad assailant in what appears at first to be a random act. The getaway car is quickly recovered, containing the cell phone of a young Maori man, Toa Davis, who is immediately the object of an all-out police search.

Jaye's ex-wife, former Maori detective Hana Westerman, asks in on the investigation. Her instincts suggest that the vehicle was meant to be found, and that Jaye had been targeted.



### THE HOUSE AT DEVIL'S NECK,

Tom Mead

(July 15)

Joseph Spector #4

An apparent suicide in a London townhouse uncannily mirrors a similar incident from twenty-five years ago, prompting Scotland Yard's George Flint

to delve deep into the past in search of the solution to a long-forgotten mystery.

Meanwhile, Joseph Spector travels with a coach party through the rainy English countryside to visit an allegedly haunted house on a lonely island called Devil's Neck. The house, first built by a notorious alchemist and occultist, was later used as a field hospital in the First World War before falling into disrepair. The visitors hold a seance to conjure the spirit of a long-dead soldier. But when a storm floods the narrow causeway connecting Devil's Neck to the mainland, they find themselves stranded in the haunted house. Before long, the guests begin to die one by one, and it seems that the only possible culprit is the phantom soldier.

### PARIAH, Dan Fesperman

(July 22)

Hal Knight, a comedian and movie star-turned politician, is no stranger to controversy. But after a disastrous #MeToo encounter on set, Knight resigns from Congress, quits social media, and disappears to the tiny Caribbean island of Vieques to drink dirty martinis and nurse his wounds. Shortly after his arrival, he is approached by a trio of CIA operatives hoping to recruit him to infiltrate the power structure of Bolrovia—a hostile, Eastern European country whose despotic president, Nikolai Horvatz, happens to be a longtime fan of Knight's adolescent male humor. Knowing that Horvatz plans to invite the disgraced star for an official visit, the CIA coaxes Knight to accept. Skeptical, but with little to lose, Knight accepts the challenge, sensing this might be his one chance to do something worthwhile, even if no one else ever finds out.

### THERE WILL BE BODIES,

Lindsey Davis

(July 22)

Flavia Albia #13

In first century Rome, Flavia Albia's daughter and successor to Marcus Didius Falco is once again faced with uncovering the truth. Quite literally. Only ten years' previous, Mount Vesuvius erupted and rained ash down about the Roman cities and towns along the

Bay of Naples. But while some cities were destroyed, others were merely badly damaged. And the uncle of Flavia Albia's husband seizes the opportunity to buy a villa...cheap! It just has to be dug out of the ash, and restored. Oh, and any bodies uncovered, including the previous owner, given a proper burial.

And as the Villa is being renovated, there are indeed bodies found. But one is not like the others – instead of buried in the ash, the previous owner's body is found in a locked storeroom and Albia is immediately suspicious that he didn't die in the eruption.

**DEAD LINE**, Marc Cameron  
(July 29)

Arliss Cutter #7

Deputy U.S. Marshal Arliss Cutter and his partner brave the unforgiving, brutal Alaskan wilderness of snow and ice to save a government witness from cold-blooded assassins.

**SHE DIDN'T SEE IT COMING**,  
Shari Lapena  
(July 29)

Bryden and Sam have it all: thriving careers, a smart apartment in a luxury condominium, supportive friends and a cherished daughter. The perfect life for the perfect couple.

Then Sam receives a call at his office. Bryden – working from home that day – has failed to collect their daughter from daycare. Arriving home with their little girl, he finds his wife's car in the underground garage. Upstairs in their apartment her laptop is open on the table, her cell phone nearby, her keys in their usual place in the hall. Except Bryden is nowhere to be seen. It's as if she just walked out.

**MEAN MOMS**,  
Emma Rosenblum  
(July 29)

Meet Frost, Morgan, and Belle? a wealthy, gorgeous group of New York City moms, the queen bees of downtown Manhattan. Their children attend Atherton Seminary, the top private school in the city, and their social lives revolve around elaborate themed parties. On the first day of school, the arrival of a new

mom and mysterious beauty from Miami named Sofia shakes up their world. When Sofia quickly integrates herself into their clique, inexplicably bad things start to happen to the women.

**YOU BELONG HERE**,  
Megan Miranda  
(July 29)

A decades-old secret that drove a mother from her hometown now threatens her college-bound daughter.

**GUESS AGAIN**,  
Charlie Donlea  
(July 29)

Ten years ago, 17-year-old high school volleyball star Callie Jones vanished from her quiet Wisconsin lake community. A highly publicized search followed but her body was never found. The case went cold, but the echoes still linger.

Ethan Hall, a former renegade detective turned ER doctor, left law enforcement to escape the horrors of the kid crime division. But on the tenth anniversary of Callie's disappearance, his former partner, Pete Kramer, makes a desperate request. Pete is the veteran detective who originally investigated the case. Now he's dying, and to ease his conscience and get closure for the Jones family, he needs Ethan to return to the haunting work he left behind—and solve what happened to Callie, once and for all.

**MISSISSIPPI BLUE 42**,  
Eli Cranor  
(August 5)

FBI Special Agent Rae Johnson #1  
Special Agent Rae Johnson grew up on football fields alongside her father, a national-championship-winning coach. Which is exactly why, fresh out of Quantico, she is sent down to Compson, Mississippi, to investigate the illicit money flowing into a bustling football program in the heart of the Delta. But two days into the assignment, things take a dire turn when UCM's star quarterback is flung off a college bar's roof, lands on a bag of money, and dies.

**FOR DUCK'S SAKE**,

Donna Andrews  
(August 5)

Meg Langslow #37

Meg is in the backyard of the house her brother Rob, Delaney, and their new baby have moved into, supervising some workmen who are using a bulldozer to start digging out a duck pond. She wants to get away from her own house, which has become the staging site for Caerphilly's first Mutt March, which will be held the next day. Meg thinks it will be more peaceful at Rob's house—and it is until the bulldozers uncover a skeleton whose skull has a hole and a bullet rattling around inside.

**EVIL BONES**, Kathy Reichs  
(August 5)

Temperance Brennan #24

Small creatures—a rat, a rabbit, a squirrel—have been turning up throughout Charlotte, North Carolina, mutilated and displayed in the same bizarre manner. But one day, as Tempe is relaxing at home alongside her aimless, moody great-niece Tory, she's diverted by a disturbing call. Now, it seems, the perp is upping the ante. This find is larger. Could the remains be human?



**KISS HER GOODBYE**,  
Lisa Gardner  
(August 12)  
Frankie Elkin #4

Recent Afghan refugee Sabera Ahmadi was last seen exiting her place of work three weeks ago. The local police have yet to open a case, while her older, domineering husband seems unconcerned. Sabera's closest friend, however, is convinced Sabera would never willingly leave her three-year old daughter. At her insistence, missing persons expert Frankie Elkin agrees to take up the search through the broiling streets of Tucson. Just in time for a video of the young mother to surface—showing her walking away from the scene of a brutal double murder.

**GONE IN THE NIGHT,**

Joanna Schaffhausen

(August 12)

Annalisa Vega #5

Detective Annalisa Vega hasn't forgiven her brother for his role in a murder, and he hasn't forgiven her for turning him in, so she's surprised when he asks her to visit him in prison. Turns out, he has a possible case for her: one of his fellow inmates, Joe Green, may be innocent of the murder that landed him behind bars.

**THE FINAL VOW,** M. W. Craven

(August 14 – in U.K – I think)

Poe & Tilly #7

No plot summary available

**HATCHET GIRLS,** Joe R. Lansdale

(August 19)

Hap & Leonard #14

When Hap and Leonard are called in on a strange request (subduing a meth-hopped hog) by a desperate young lady, they quickly learn this woman is part of a fringe group: The Hatchet Girls, who have pledged their allegiance to a crazed and grudge-bearing leader bent on bloody societal revenge. The timing couldn't be worse to be caught in such a vile, sticky wicket of a case: both boys are wrapped up in their domestic lives: Leonard is in the midst of wedding planning with fiancée, Pookie. And meanwhile, Hap and Brett are hard at work on their new home. Homemaking bliss will have to wait as Hap and Leonard are driven to stop the danger in its tracks and better understand the

group's mission and the plans they have already set in place for helter-skelter esque mayhem.

**EVERYBODY WANTS TO RULE THE**

**WORLD,** Ace Atkins

(August 19)

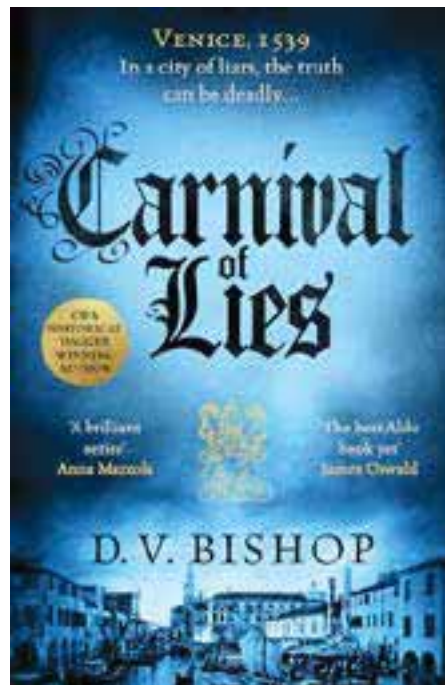
No plot summary available

**THE TOURISTS,** Christopher Reich

(August 26)

Mac Decker #2

No plot summary available



**CARNIVAL OF LIES,** D. V. Bishop

(August 26)

Cesare Aldo #5

Venice. Winter, 1539. When Cesare Aldo learns of a conspiracy to assassinate Duke Cosimo de' Medici, he is hired to protect the ruler of Florence. The deadly attack leads to bodies, bloodshed – and something far more dangerous. The instigators obtain a secret journal of Cosimo's thoughts and strategies that – in the wrong hands – could destroy all of Florence. Aldo must hunt down those responsible and reclaim the journal, or face banishment from the city and everyone he loves.

**CLOWN TOWN,** Mick Herron

(September 2)

Slow Horses #9

“Old spies grow ridiculous, Riv-

er. Old spies aren't much better than clowns.” Or so David Cartwright used to say, but he forgot to add they can be dangerous too, especially if they've fallen on hard times—as Diana Taverner learns when the past lands on her desk. An operation carried out during the height of the Troubles laid bare the ugly side of state security, and those involved are threatening to expose details. But every threat hides an opportunity, and the would-be blackmailer is soon being used as Taverner's solution to a much newer problem.

The O.B. himself is long buried, and has left his library to the Spooks' College, where it turns out that one of the books has gone missing. Or perhaps never existed . . . River Cartwright has time to kill while waiting to be passed fit for work, and investigating the secrets his grandfather's library hid seems a harmless activity. But nothing involving the slow horses stays harmless for long.

**KANE,** Graham Hurley

(September 2 – in U.K.)

Spoils of War #10

1941. Quincy Kane, former star of the Boston Police Department and scourge of organised crime, finds himself guarding the most important man in the country: President Roosevelt. Kane's trusted position reflects his meteoric rise in the Secret Service. Then Imperial Japan attacks the US naval base at Pearl Harbor. For Kane, US entry to World War Two means he is soon tasked with the most crucial mission of his career: a complex scheme of bribery and subterfuge that could change the course of the conflict and save thousands of Allied lives. To succeed, he will have to return to the world of organised crime, a web that is spun from the home of Hollywood, Tinseltown itself: Los Angeles, where every gangster has Quincy Kane in their crosshairs. His mission is set to take him across the Atlantic... but first Kane must survive the City of Angels.

**THE HALLMARKED MAN,**

Robert Galbraith

(September 9)

Cormoran Strike #8

No plot summary available

**THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE MISSING CRIME WRITER,**

Ragnar Jonasson  
(September 9)

One winter evening, bestselling crime author Elín S. Jónsdóttir goes missing. There are no clues to her disappearance and it is up to young detective Helgi to crack the case before its leaked to the press. As Helgi interviews the people closest to her – a publisher, an accountant, a retired judge – he realizes that Elín’s life wasn’t what it seemed. In fact, her past is even stranger than the fiction she wrote. As the case of the missing crime writer becomes more mysterious by the hour, Helgi must uncover the secrets of the writer’s very unexpected life.

**THE DEEPEST CUT,** P. J. Tracy  
(September 9)

Monkeewrench #11

Minneapolis homicide detectives Leo Magozzi and Gino Rolseth arrest a sadistic pair of killers for the murder of several women with the help of Monkeewrench, their eccentric, cyber-sleuth friends and partners. One of the killers dies in custody and the other, Wolfgang Mauer, is sent to a maximum security mental hospital in a rural corner of Minnesota. There, Mauer plots his escape—and his vengeance. With the help of his mother, a former militia leader and assassin living an extravagant, reclusive life, he schemes to get out of the mental hospital and hunt down the detectives and the Monkeewrench crew that got him a life sentence.

**MURDER ON THE MARLOW BELLE,** Robert Thorogood  
(September 16)

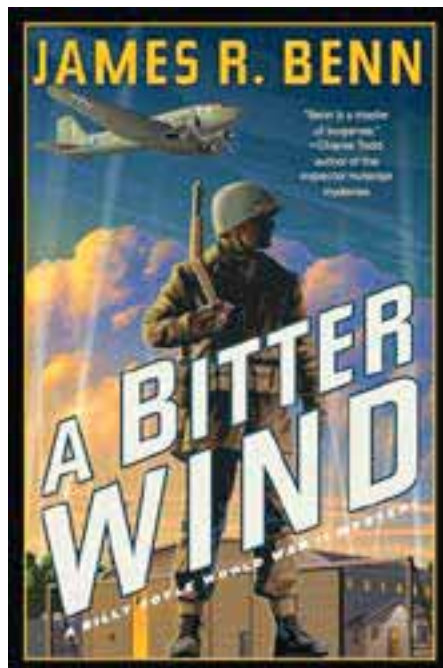
Marlow Murder Club #4

Verity Beresford is worried about her husband. Oliver didn't come home last night, so of course Verity goes straight to Judith Potts, Marlow's resident amateur sleuth, for help. Oliver, founder of the Marlow Amateur Dramatic Society, had hired The Marlow Belle, a private pleasure cruiser, for an exclusive party with the MADS committee but no one remembers seeing him disembark. And then Oliver's body washes up on the

Thames with two bullet holes in him. It's time for the Marlow Murder Club to leap into action.

**OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES,** Clare Mackintosh  
(September 16)

The Hill is the kind of place everyone wants to live: luxurious, exclusive and safe. But now someone is breaking and entering these Cheshire homes one by one, and DS Leo Brady suspects the burglar is looking for something, or someone, in particular. Over the border in Wales, DC Ffion Morgan recovers the body of an estate agent from the lake. There's no love lost between Ffion and estate agents, but who hated this one enough to want her dead - and why? As their cases collide, Ffion and Leo discover people will pay a high price to keep their secrets behind closed doors



**A BITTER WIND,** James R. Benn  
(September 23)

Billy Boyle #20

After his last mission put him in the tailspin of the Battle of the Bulge, Captain Billy Boyle travels to southeast England to visit his girlfriend, Diana Seaton, for a brief holiday respite. Diana is engaged in classified work at RAF Hawkinge, including Operation Corona, which recruits German-speaking Women's Auxiliary Air Force members—

many of them Jewish refugees from the Kindertransport rescue mission—to countermand German orders and direct night fighters away from Allied combat bombers. It's fascinating and critical espionage work, but it's laced with peril, as Billy is soon to find out.

**Clive Cussler's THE SERPENT'S EYE,**

Robin Burcell  
(September 30)  
Fargo #13

No plot summary available.

**UNTITLED,** Richard Osman  
(September 30)

Thursday Murder Club #5

No plot summary available

**SILENT BONES,** Val McDermid  
(October 7)

Karen Pirie #8

No plot summary available

**FALLEN STAR,** Lee Goldberg  
(October 14)

Eve Ronin #6

No plot summary available

**ICARUS 17,** Charles Cumming  
(October 25)

Box 88 #4

In Stockholm, BOX 88 intelligence chief Lachlan Kite has barely finished dealing with the lone gunman shot dead on the doorstep when his former girlfriend, Martha Raine, comes knocking. Her 24-year-old son, Max, has disappeared and Martha is desperate to track him down.

Together with the BOX 88 team, Lachlan discovers Max is in a relationship with a woman operating under a false identity, and the young couple have a team of Balkan mercenaries on their tail. As the mission hurtles toward a collision between rival spy networks, Lachlan finds himself at the intersection of his past and his present. To save Max and prevent a geopolitical catastrophe, he must navigate a world where loyalty is fluid, danger is constant, and even BOX 88's unparalleled reach may not be enough.

**THE BLACK WOLF,**

Louise Penny  
(October 28)

Armand Gamache #20  
No plot summary available

**THE KING'S RANSOM**, Janet Ev-  
novich  
(October 28)

Recovery Agent #2

Gabriela Rose, recovery agent extraordinaire, can find just about anything. Too bad she can't seem to lose her gorgeous-but-infuriating ex-husband Rafer Jones. And now he needs her help. His cousin, Harley, is in trouble...big trouble. As the president of a too-big-to-fail bank, Harley invested an astronomical amount of money in insuring some of the world's most priceless artifacts at the urging of his board. It seemed like a low-risk, high-reward business move, so he jumped in with both feet. But recently, these insured pieces started going missing and worse, there's no paper trail of Harley being directed to make these risky investments.

**WILD INSTINCT**,  
T. Jefferson Parker  
(November 11)

Lew Gale, a former Marine sniper, now an Orange County California Sheriff's detective, is assigned to track and shoot a mountain lion that has killed a man in Caspers Park, located in the rugged country east of Laguna Beach, California. The victim is Bennet Tarlow, a rich developer and man-about-town in upscale coastal Orange County.

The investigation takes an unexpected—and chilling—turn when Lew and his deputy sheriff arrive at the kill site in the Santa Ana mountains, only to discover that Bennet was dead before the lion got to him. And while Bennet might have been the first to die, he certainly will not be the last.

**THE QUEEN WHO CAME IN FROM  
THE COLD**, S. J. Bennett  
(November 11)

Her Majesty the Queen #5  
It's 1961 and the Queen is planning

her state visit to Italy aboard Britannia. But before she goes, an unreliable witness claims to have seen a brutal murder from the royal train. Did it really happen, and could the victim be a missing friend of Princess Margaret's new husband, Tony Armstrong Jones? The Queen and her assistant private secretary, Joan McGraw, get to work on their second joint investigation, little imagining that this time it will take them all the way to Venice in a tale of spies, lies and Cold War skulduggery.

**BLOOD OATH**, Steve Unszenyi  
(November 18)

Alexandra Martel #3

CIA Special Agent Alexandra Martel is on safari in Tanzania with her father, a retired US Army general, when they encounter a group of wildlife rangers under attack. After a gunfight, Alex and her father return to their camp, where they discover the unexpected arrival of Alex's boss, CIA Branch Chief Caleb Copeland.

The following day, Alex's father is kidnapped. Feeling guilty for not anticipating the danger, Alex assembles a crack team of mercenaries to track down her father. With the help of Caleb's elite unit and another CIA paramilitary officer, they embark on a dangerous mission to rescue the general from a terrorist network that has plans to sell him to a major African-based terrorist organization in exchange for deadly technology.

**THE QUIET MOTHER**,  
Arnaldur Indridason  
(December 9)

Detective Konrad #3

A woman is found murdered in her home. On her desk is a note with a phone number and a name: Detective Konrad. Called in to investigate, Konrad realizes he met the woman shortly before her death when she asked him for help locating the child she'd given up for adoption fifty years earlier. Distressed at having declined her request, Konrad vows to make up for it. Could her murder and the search for her missing child be linked?

## On George's Nightstand

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

**MARBLE HALL MURDERS**,

Anthony Horowitz

**MAKING A KILLING**,

Cara Hunter

**KING OF ASHES**, S. A. Cosby

**SPLINTERED JUSTICE**,

Kim Hays

**THE BLUE HORSE**, Bruce Borgos

**CEYLON SAPPHIRES**,

Mailan Doquang

**THE GHOSTS OF ROME**,

Joseph O'Connor

**MR WHISPER**,

Andrew Mayne

**NO MAN'S LAND**,

Neil Broadfoot

**THE BROKEN RIVER**,

Chris Hammer

*Already read for the next issue --*

**IN THE GRAY ZONE**,

Brad Taylor

**THE MURDER SHOW**,

Matt Goldman

**NOT DEAD YET**,

Jeffrey Siger

**HARD TOWN**,

Adam Plantinga

**SOUTH OF SOMEWHERE**,

Jeffery Deaver

**NIGHTSHADE**, Michael Connelly

**GONE DARK**, Ryan Steck

**DEATH AT THE WHITE HART**,

Chris Chibnall

**WHAT THE NIGHT BRINGS**,

Mark Billingham

**CARVED IN BLOOD**,

Michael Bennett

**THE WHITE CROW**,

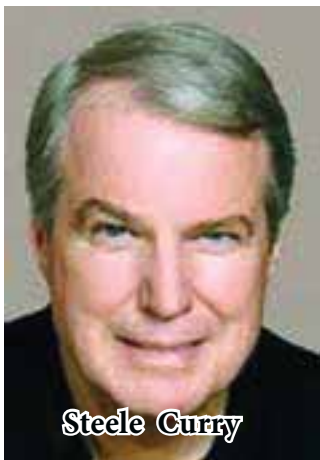
Michael Robotham

## Editor's Message



**The Passing of Steele Curry.** This is a sad time for the mystery/thriller community. Steele had spinal cancer that metastasized and became untreatable. His passing was a blessing because he was in a lot of pain.

Steele was a good friend and a great champion of mystery/thriller fiction. And most importantly, he was a good person, who helped a lot of people along life's way. I'll miss hearing Steele's booming base voice telling me, with an edge of excitement, what I should read next.



Steele Curry

As a contributor to *Deadly Pleasures*, he was the "go-to" guy when it came to spy fiction. But he also enjoyed a good mystery or action thriller. I would often get e-mails from him with recommendations for good reading. And, as our tastes were similar, I often read what he recommended. Jeff Pople, another *DP* contributor, had similar experiences.

For several years Steele would provide us with annual columns called My Greek Reading Feast, in which he would give us short reviews of about thirty books that he had read while in residence at his family's Greek villa that he and his wife Judy visited each summer.

Steele was influential in urging me to create the Barry Award for Best Thrill-

er and it was my pleasure in 2017 to present him with The Don Sandstrom Award for Lifetime Achievement in Mystery Fandom.

He also served on the Barry Award nominating committees for a number of years and would frequently proof-read sections of *Deadly Pleasures* for me.

Steele also served for a couple of years as the Co-Chair of the National Bouchercon Board (along with Mystery Mike Bursaw) during which time he whipped it into shape so it ran as a non-profit should be run. He, with the help of others, created a Best Practices Manual so that future Bouchercons could operate more smoothly.

A few years ago his large collection of espionage and mystery fiction was donated to the University of Calgary. It was so large and comprehensive that the University has added a wing onto its library to house the collection. I look forward to visiting it when I attend the Calgary Bouchercon in two years.

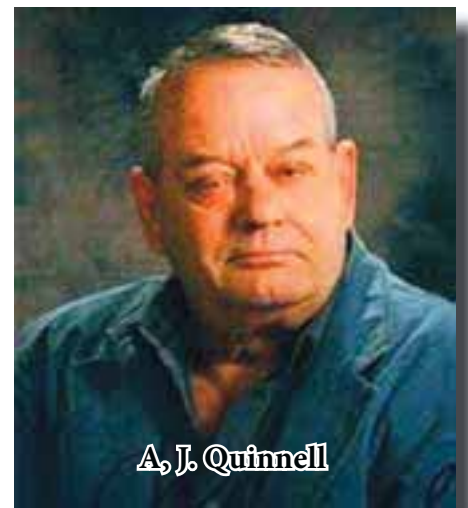
Steele will be remembered for years to come and will be greatly missed by his friends and family.

**The Creasy Novels of A. J. Quinnell.** My good friend "Mystery" Mike Bursaw has been tactfully nudging me for some time to read a series of thrillers published in the '80s and '90s. They all feature the ex-Marine, ex-French legionaire, ex-mercenary known simply by his last name Creasy. Many of you are probably familiar with the first book in the series, **MAN ON FIRE** (1980) which was made into two movies, the latter one starring Denzel Washington as a washed-up bodyguard (Creasy) charged with protecting the daughter of a wealthy Italian businessman. When she is kidnapped, Creasy reverts to his dormant skill set and seeks her return. The book and subsequent movies were successful and the author went on to write five more standalone thrillers

in the 1980s, the most prominent one being **THE MAHDI** (1981).

Then in 1992, A. J. Quinnell returned to his Creasy character and wrote four books in the series – **THE PERFECT KILL** (1992), **THE BLUE RING** (1993), **BLACK HORN** (1994), and **MESSAGE FROM HELL** (1996) – all published in the U.K., but not the U.S. So these are not very well known on this side of the Atlantic – but should be.

In **THE PERFECT KILL** Creasy seeks revenge for loved ones that died in the Lockerbie terrorist bombing. In **THE BLUE RING** Creasy works to take down a high level sex-trafficking ring. **BLACK HORN** finds Creasy hired to find the killers of a young American woman who died in Zimbabwe. And finally in **MESSAGE FROM HELL** Creasy seeks an American MIA in Cambodia. A. J. Quinnell passed away in 2005 at the age of 65.



A. J. Quinnell

I knew that getting physical copies of the series would be difficult, not to say expensive, so I went the Kindle route. Each title is available on Kindle for \$2.99 (trade paperbacks are \$14.99). I read the whole series for \$15.00 total, an absolute bargain! And what an exciting series it proved to be. I highly recommend these books to those of you who are fans of good action thrillers. Quinnell's clear writing and attention to detail really stood out to me. But be advised that bad things often happen to good people in Quinnell's books. But I really liked this series despite that.

**What's Not in this Issue.** One of my challenges, as I start a new year, is coming up with an initial list of best books for the Deadly Pleasures Best of the Year list. So instead of publishing a short list in this issue, I've decided to hold off until the next issue. In its place I've included in this issue the Most Anticipated Mysteries of 2025 list that I posted on the website. That will also take the place of our normal Sneak Previews column for this issue. Everything will return to normal in Issue 107. There are a lot of lists in this issue, but mystery readers like lists – right?

**Craig Sistrerson's Contribution.** Our reviewer/contributor Craig Sistrerson was too tied up with other things to contribute to the last issue of *DP*. But with this issue he came through in spades! Not only did he provide his own column, newly named "Digging Into the Global Crime Spree," but also provided reviews for the Down Under column and the British Review column. Then to top it all off he has also submitted two author interviews. Thanks Craig. You know that I'll expect something like this for every future issue, right?

**Amazon Editors' Monthly Picks.** At the beginning of each month amazon.com posts a list of 20 books which are the Amazon Editors' Picks for the month's Best Mystery, Thriller & Suspense novels. I take that list and re-post it on [www.deadlypleasures.com](http://www.deadlypleasures.com) along with book cover art, plot summaries and a little personal commentary. Also indicated are titles which have garnered starred reviews in the four library journals. The amazon editors do a good job of picking titles, some of which I've already read with advanced reading copies supplied by mystery publishers. But each month there are a few titles about which I'm unaware, so it's a good exercise for me to acquaint myself with new books coming out. I learn a lot and you might also – so I invite you to come visit the website at the beginning of each month.

## Letters



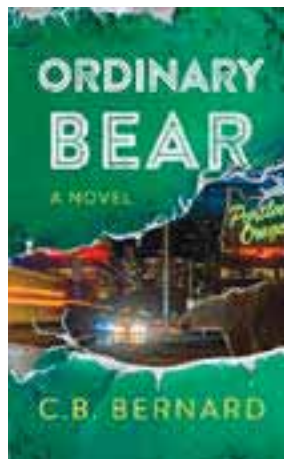
### Bill Custis

I greatly appreciate your list of new 2025 mysteries and thrillers. This gives me a heads up for new titles of authors I usually read and a chance to find new authors that I might try. I know it takes a great deal of time and effort on your part, so I just wanted to let you know that I find this list very useful.

Actually, I don't know how you do everything that you do with *Deadly Pleasures*. It's a great publication and I look forward to each issue. Looking at the cover for the upcoming issue, I've decided to purchase three of the books shown on the cover. These three are in the top ten of your Best of the Best for 2024 and most likely to be in the running for this year's Barry Award.

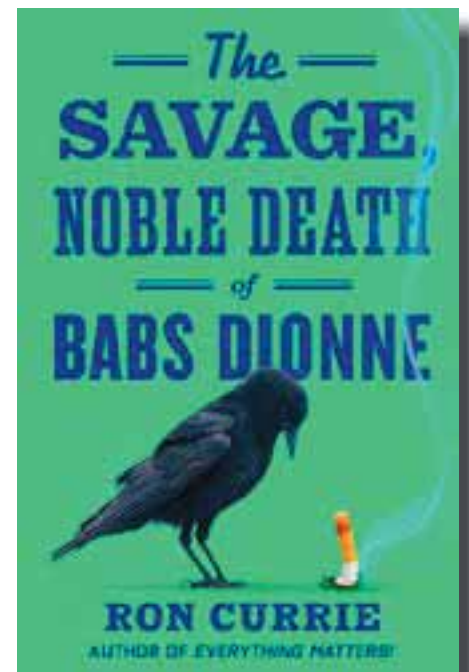
Keep up the good work. I feel very fortunate to be a subscriber to *DP*. I enjoy all the contributors and the reviews.

### Chris Bernard (Author of ORDINARY BEAR)



I wanted to put a book on your map in case it's not already there, though I suspect it is. I'm interviewing Ron Currie on stage at the Newburyport Literary Festival in Massachusetts in April, and I got an ARC of his upcoming novel, *THE SAVAGE, NOBLE DEATH OF BABS*

*DIONNE*. It's slated for a late March publication, and it's fantastic. Weird in some of the same ways as *ORDINARY BEAR*, peopled with unexpected characters, and just a page turner from start to finish.



I also wanted to thank you and the *Deadly Pleasures* team for all the attention you gave *ORDINARY BEAR* last year. The book flew somewhat under the radar and failed to find the foothold I'd hoped it would, but audiences connected with it and that's what matters most to me. It thrilled me to get such kind words from so many of your reviewers. (except Larry.) That meant a lot to me and I'm grateful.

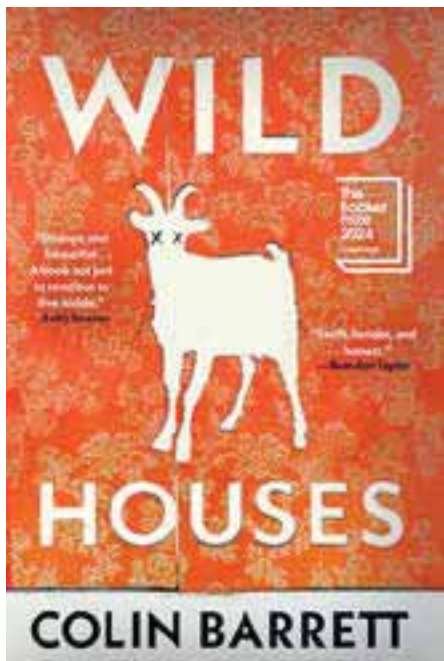
The work you all do is valuable. Thank you.

[*Thanks for your kind words and for the great tip. I see that THE SAVAGE, NOBLE DEATH OF BABS DIONNE has received two starred reviews, so it will be included in the DP Best of 2025 List starting in the next issue. I've downloaded a copy and have started to read it. I see what you mean. ]*

## Associate Editor's Message



Over the last few years, I have gotten away from reading strictly crime fiction. I do read a lot more literary fiction. Ideally, I would read literary crime fiction. Is this a subgenre? If not, I think it should be. Books such as **THE DROWNED** by John Banville, **WILD HOUSES** by Colin Barrett and **THE TREES** by Percival Everett are excellent examples of books in this category. Specifically, these are stories in which a crime is the central part of the story. However, the books are more carefully constructed with realistically created characters, spot on dialogue, a very plausible plot and beautiful depictions of the locale. In other words, the authors take great care and effort in their writing. I look for these types of books and do spotlight them.



George has mentioned, after reading 157 books last year -- all crime fiction -- that he still finds crime fiction books rewarding and has not lost his enthusiasm for them. I find so many of the books in the genre imitations of each other. Reading several P.I. novels in

a row would drive me mad. I would consider a lower level of Dante's Hell to consist of spending eternity in a library filled with nothing but P.I. novels, although someone like our reviewer Kevin Burton Smith might consider it heaven. Psychological suspense novels used to be unique and I often enjoyed them for their clever plot full of twists. Now, it seems every other book is a psychological suspense novel with so many having multicolored covers with flowers on them. The writing is often uneven which is fine because the readers are there only for entertainment. They remain incredibly popular and our bestseller lists are filled with them. Action thrillers, though entertaining, can be downright silly at times. When it comes to these types of books, I can tolerate suspending reality in small doses when I totally want to shut my brain off. Speaking of suspending reality -- with cozies that is a given. These books are also very popular but I really do not feel fulfilled when I read them. However, I will admit that after reading a few literary books in a row, any crime fiction book feels like a true breath of fresh air. I feel like I am home again!

I still love reading from a list so with the Edgar shortlist being announced, I now have my reading list for the next few months with crime fiction. For thirty years I have read and reviewed every book from the Edgar shortlist for Best Novel, Best First Novel by an American Author and Best Paperback original. I will no longer read the Paperback list as it now includes E-book originals. I will not read an E-book original. These books likely do not go through the editing process that a book from a major publisher would have been through. I am just not interested.



This year, both Best Novel and Best First Novel by an American Author are almost completely filled with books I've never heard of. Even George, having spent weeks compiling a list of the Best of the Bests, has heard of only a few of these books (**THE GOD OF THE WOODS** by Liz Moore and **LISTEN FOR THE LIE** by Amy Tintera). It does seem strange that the books most mentioned as the best of the year by many critical or authoritative sources are largely ignored by the Edgar Nominating Committees. However, books that are relatively unknown that have been read by every member of the particular Edgar committee and agreed upon as being a superior read, have the potential to be exciting reads for me. I can almost guarantee I will discover a book that is quite excellent but hasn't received much publicity until now. We shall see.

One more point -- The Edgars, and I assume, the International Thriller Writer's Thriller Awards and The Strand Awards are the only awards where the judges read every book on the shortlist before deciding on a winner. For that reason, I have to respect those awards.



# A Visit From the Book Broad

*Meredith Anthony*



**Editor's Note:** Without intentionally synchronizing our reading, Meredith and I independently read several of the “best of the best” books appearing on the cover of this issue. To avoid duplication, I have just added my opinions on a few books at the end of Meredith’s reviews.

## SMOKE KINGS

By Jahmal Mayfield

Melville House, February 2024, \$19.99  
Debut

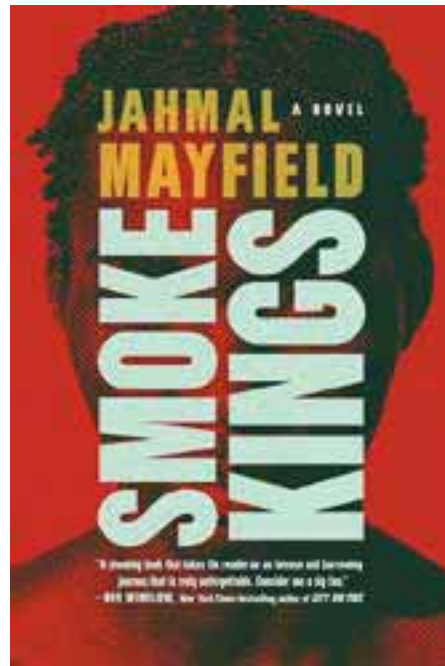
**Rating: A**

**First line:** The victim’s advocate meets them on the sidewalk in front of the hospital.

Jamal Mayfield’s powerful debut novel, **SMOKE KINGS**, is by turns absorbing, frustrating, mesmerizing, disgusting, heart-wrenching, stomach-turning, grotesque, minutely detailed, and way, way over the top.

Four friends, Black, Asian, mixed race, one of them female, band together to avenge the death of a young friend and relative who was killed in a senseless urban hate crime. They know they can’t just go after the racist gang who did this. They’d be caught immediately. But they have an idea. They find similar crimes, sometimes historic lynchings, and trace the perpetrators’ descendants to the present day and then research their behavior. If the racism and hate has persisted down the generations, they go into action. At first, they simply kidnap the target, torture them enough to thoroughly scare them, and then demand that they pay money monthly into a blind fund. They distribute the proceeds to the families of victims. Simple, right?

Of course, things go wrong, and they end up killing someone. And the someone they kill is connected to maybe the worst white supremacist gang in the history of the world. They set off an apocalyptic chain of events that results in a kind of terrifying symphony of mayhem. The book is well written and well crafted. It builds slowly, relentlessly, and pulls the reader along to a kind of big, crazy, operatic climax. The characters are beautifully detailed and indelible. The action gut-wrenching.



As a side note, let me mention that I’m not a big fan of metadata. I don’t like subtitles, prologues, blurbs, intrusive jacket copy, weird chapter names, or any other folderol that distracts from the novel itself. However, the epigraph here is amazingly well-chosen and chillingly memorable: “And they are lucky that what black people are looking for is equality and not revenge,” by author and

filmmaker Kimberly Jones.

Call it revenge porn. Recommended, but not for the faint of heart.

## IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

by Jo Callaghan

Random House, 2023, \$18.00

**Rating: B**

**First line:** He can’t see.

Jo Callaghan’s debut thriller, **IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE** is a terrific read, tense and well-paced, thought-provoking and intelligent. At heart it is a police procedural with two mismatched cops. One of them is a woman. One is an AI. It is a buddy movie for today.

Set in a city in England’s Midlands, it pairs a female homicide detective with a wristband AI device that can project a life-size hologram of a virtual detective who resembles the late—and very handsome—actor, Chadwick Boseman.

Kat Frank is a 40-something single mother, raising a gifted son who is almost out of high school. She is also a detective answering to her former mentor after some months off the force after her husband was killed. A professor from a national institute for AI research has developed an Artificially Intelligent Detecting Entity, or AIDE, that is worn and accessed on the wrist like a watch, and commands fast and comprehensive computing power. Kat is assigned to pilot the program and is given the equipment and a small team of detectives. They are assigned a handful of cold cases to reexamine with the AI’s help. AIDE Lock can be audio-only, but can also present as an unnervingly human hologram.

Kat’s team chooses two cold cases that involve missing young men. Kat

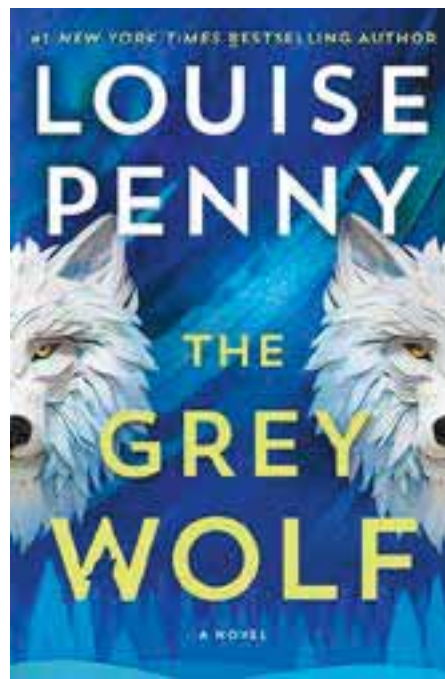
and Lock have a prickly relationship that develops into a more meaningful partnership over the course of the investigation. Lock makes mistakes that result from not considering emotional factors. Kat comes to rely on Lock for saving laborious man-hours with his lightning-fast research and computing power. When the cases show signs of being linked, this ups the ante. When the case also becomes personal, Lock's assistance becomes even more vital.

Well written and fast paced, the book is engaging and a pleasure to read. However, there is one problem: the technology that is presented as being so forward, is actually already here. Minus the gimmick of the hologram, Lock has the computing power of any iPhone or smart watch. Like Siri and Alexa, his capabilities are welcome additions to any investigation. Add in a dash of ChatGPT to advance the dialogue and you have Lock. The hologram projections are a novelty but little more. I did like a scene where Kat is interviewing a grieving mother and Lock projects a life size hologram of her dead son. Kat is furious but the mother's shock quickly turns to gratitude, as she is able to share a last moment with her missing loved one.

Robots have been around since Karel Čapek's play "R.U.R." premiered in 1921, giving us the word, "robot." Some date the concept much earlier to Mary Shelley's 1818 **FRANKENSTEIN** which also featured a scientific creation designed to assist and even out-perform human beings. From the 1987 film "RoboCop" to the latest in the "Terminator" franchise, AI has been assisting in fighting crime in fiction. And in real life. China has deployed robotic spheres, New York has Digidogs, and Knightscope's K5's are already on the job across the country. Whether they look like people or machines or, well, dogs, is the least interesting part of this innovative trend. I would have preferred a plot device that actually advanced the possibilities.

It seems a bit disingenuous to tout Lock as futuristic. He's already here. Just ask Siri.

**THE GREY WOLF**  
By Louise Penny



Minotaur, 2024, \$30.00  
**Rating: A**

**First line:** The phone rang.

**THE GREY WOLF** is the latest in Louise Penny's long series of novels set in a fictitious village of Three Pines near Montreal. It, of course, is wonderful and highly recommended. Followers of the series featuring Armand Gamache, a brilliant and devoted policeman, will gratefully dive right in. If you haven't sampled this series, I suggest starting with the first, **STILL LIFE**, and read them in order, although any of them, including this one, can be read as stand-alones with great pleasure.

In this outing, Gamache refuses to answer his phone, to the consternation of his beloved wife, Reine-Marie. He knows who is calling. The ensuing mystery involves a rare liqueur, a missing monk, a cryptic note and a couple of murders. The consequences have the potential to be disastrous.

The first line is significant. Even the tiniest things can be the seeds of enormous catastrophes.

As I was pondering **THE GREY WOLF**, I wondered, not for the first time, what makes Louise Penny such a terrific writer and why this series has so many ardent fans, myself included.

I have come to the conclusion that it is partly because she spans so many prized sub-genres. Her books are cozies, especially as regards the small circle of close friends who live in Three Pines. Her books are thrillers, since they all begin with a single, often small, event, but eventually turn into high-stakes page-turners sure to please any action fan. They are thought-provoking police procedurals. They are twisty mysteries with plenty of clues, red herrings, and suspense. They are also psychological crime stories where the minds of both perpetrators and detectives are subject to intense scrutiny. And, amazingly, they have a touch of magic realism. Three Pines is not on any map and is found only by those who need to be there.

Louise Penny navigates all these undertakings with intelligence and grace and wit and warmth. Highly, highly recommended!

**BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT**

by Robert Dugoni

Thomas & Mercer, October 2024, \$28.99  
**Rating: C**

**First line:** Erik Wei did not choose the South Lake Union restaurant for its eclectic ambiance, not for the excellent food, nor even for its location—walking distance from work; he chose the restaurant because it was popular, which would ensure a crowd, even on a week-night.

**BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT** is the second in Robert Dugoni's Keera Duggan series that began with **HER DEADLY GAME**. Keera is a lawyer at her father's firm. Her dad, "the Irish Brawler," is semi-retired and under treatment for alcoholism. For various reasons, the firm is struggling financially. Keera is forced to take a case she'd rather pass on. Her childhood frenemy, Jenna Bernstein, had been wildly successful. Jenna is beautiful, charismatic, and the CEO of a biotech firm. Keera's father had defended her five years earlier when she was accused of murdering a whistle-blower at her firm. Now, Keera is asked to defend Jenna again as she is

charged with killing the firm's biggest investor, a billionaire who was also Jenna's lover. But Keera knows that Jenna is a sociopath. When they were children, Jenna tried to murder her!

The investigation into Jenna's past and the firm's present difficulties are interesting. Keera's novel legal strategy satisfies both her lust for justice and her need for revenge.

Like all legal thrillers, this one is talky and nearly action-free. Keera ticks all the boxes—attractive, whip-smart, determined—but she never really comes alive for me. I guess lovers of legal thrillers will want to add this to their collection.

### THE AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO MURDER

by Beatriz Williams, Lauren Willig,  
Karen White

William Morrow, November 2024,  
\$30.00

**Rating: D**

**First line:** Detective Chief Inspector Euan Macintosh had never seen a crime scene like this one before.

You know the saying about too many cooks? Well, it applies here. **THE AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO MURDER** is written by three authors and edited, evidently, by no one at all.

It is apparently the origin story of three authors who meet at a bar at a writer's conference and decide to pretend to be friends in order to get a publisher to underwrite a trip to a writer's retreat. The retreat is in a remote castle in Scotland where they plan to research and write a book. Meta anyone? The three authors are very different from one another: a happily married cozy writer, an angry, aging sex kitten/Goth, and a stern academic writer of historical fiction. They don't much like each other.

Once in Scotland, they bumble around making asses of themselves with the locals and the other residents of the castle. They are in hot pursuit of the famous male novelist who has offered the writing retreat. When he is found dead, scantily clad, poisoned, and stabbed with the antlers from a stag's head, well,

mayhem ensues. When it turns out that each of the Americans had a reason to dislike him, they each become suspects.

The jokes about Americans abroad, the depictions of the disapproving Scots unlucky enough to encounter them, and the determination to write in Scottish dialect (primarily by replacing "no" with "nae") are so grating that I could barely force myself to struggle through this mess. Every modest joke is made and repeated ad nauseum. The authors seem to have made a bet that they could use the word 'plaid' in every other sentence.

I'm sure that after several martinis at the bar at Bouchercon, this book idea sounded hilarious. But when you have to read it, it's not charming. It's just annoying. Avoid at any cost. Just say "nae."



### DEAD MONEY

By Jakob Kerr

Bantam, January 2025, \$30.00

Debut

**Rating: B+**

**First line:** Tony found the body on a Tuesday.

In business parlance, the term "dead money" is usually used to connote money tied up in a stagnant investment. In Jakob Kerr's excellent debut thriller, **DEAD MONEY**, the phrase is used in a

more technical sense, referring to funds tied up in by a clause in a person's will, that can only be released when certain conditions have been met.

San Francisco-based tech billionaire Trevor Canon has been murdered in his well-protected private office. He must have known he was in danger since he had added a new clause to his will, which puts the bulk of his vast fortune on hold until his murderer has been found. The police are stumped. The FBI is just starting to work on the case. Canon's biggest investor, venture capitalist Roger Hammersmith, tasks his employee, Mackenzie Clyde, with finding Canon's killer. His enormous investment that is now "dead."

Mackenzie Clyde is a lawyer on his staff who has specialized in investigations, with stellar results. Now, with more than five billion dollars of her boss's money riding on the outcome, Mackenzie must do the impossible and solve the mystery.

Mackenzie Clyde is a fascinating addition to the rather slim ranks of female thriller protagonists. She is six feet two, for starters. And she's gay. She has interesting secrets. And she has painstakingly worked her way up from near poverty, going to the best schools, taking the right starter jobs, and ending up at Hammersmith Venture. She is assigned to assist the FBI agent in charge of the investigation, Jameson Danner, who dislikes her at sight. She is brainy, brash, driven and wants to succeed at all costs. He is aloof and cool.

There are plenty of suspects including the entire upper management team at Journy, the tech start-up Canon founded. Journy, with its bright green branding is like a mash-up of Uber, FedEx and Citibikes, deploying legions of cars, scooters, bikes and golf carts across the nation and abroad. Naturally, the aim is to have autonomous self-driving cars in the near future. Trevor Canon is Elon Musk with a dash of Steve Jobs and a sprinkling of Travis Kalanick.

The investigation includes Canon's girlfriend and his sister, both of whom work at Journy. Suspects dodge questions, change their stories and lie. Some go missing. Someone dies. Try it.

**FATAL INTRUSION**By Jeffery Deaver and  
Isabella Maldonado

Thomas &amp; Mercer, 2024, \$28.99

**Rating: A-**

**First line:** Walter Kemp was not about to let her escape again.

Jeffery Deaver, one of the great writers of our time, has teamed with former policewoman and writer, Isabella Maldonado, to bring us **FATAL INTRUSION**, an excellent serial killer thriller which flips the script and pairs Carmen Sanchez, a Homeland Security agent with forensics professor Jake Heron to solve a series of brutal murders. The clock is ticking, and Carmen's sister may be the next victim.

Carmen and Jake, prickly due to their history, have reluctantly paired up to pursue a killer who is the most dangerous kind: smart, organized, and ruthless. Carmen is a great cop, intuitive and determined. The victims seem to have been chosen at random, but Jake, enlisted by Carmen because of his oblique approach to forensics, brings to bear the science of intrusion, which tries to pinpoint the factors that have led the perpetrator to his chosen prey.

The coupling of the gunslinger and the psychologist is a refreshing take on the usual mismatched buddy pairings. As their suppressed feelings for each other rekindle, the two focus on the pursuit of the dangerous and relentless criminal.

An excellent and intellectually satisfying entry in the series killer genre. Perhaps not quite as good as Deaver's greatest, but quite a good read, nevertheless.

**THE PUZZLE BOX**

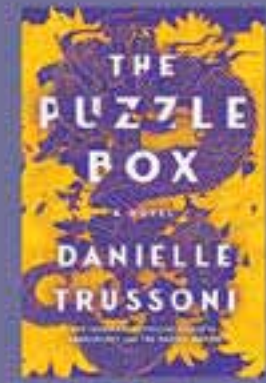
By Danielle Trussoni

Random House, October 2024, \$30.00

**Rating: A**

**First line:** The Shinto priest runs to the temple, lifting the hem of his robes to keep from tripping.

Like many mystery lovers, I love



puzzles. But I was skeptical about a book about them. This book focuses on physical puzzles. Specifically, puzzle boxes. Think Rubik's Cube, but less colorful. So, I was pleasantly surprised by Danielle Trussoni's **THE PUZZLE BOX**, a gem of a book about a man who has an unusual affinity for solving puzzle boxes—intricately manufactured interlocking shapes that must be carefully opened to reveal their secrets.

Mike Brink is a young New Yorker who had been injured in a high school football game. When he recovered, the lingering damage to his brain manifested as a heightened ability to deal with certain complex mental tasks. It left him with an unusual capability for quickly and efficiently solving puzzles. He graduated from MIT. Now he makes a living as a puzzle maker and a championship puzzle solver. (As a crossword amateur, I love that the book namechecks Will Shortz, who edits the daily puzzles for *The New York Times*!)

When a young woman from Japan approaches him with a puzzle box, she gives him a minute to accomplish it. He opens the box in 12 seconds.

The Emperor of Japan has sent her to recruit Mike Brink to come to Japan and open one of Japan's oldest treasures from the Meiji era—the Dragon Puzzle Box, which has been carefully guarded by Shinto priests for centuries and legend has it, it can only be opened during a short window of time at the very end of the Year of the Dragon, every twelve years. Built into the puzzle box are tricks and boobytraps, some of

the deadly. It also reportedly contains a secret meant for the Emperor's eyes only. Something that will change Japan forever. Twelve years previously, an Australian championship puzzle solver was recruited. He evidently boarded a plane to Tokyo and was never seen again.

The young woman, Sakura, has been trained as a warrior and has ties to the Japanese imperial family. She persuades Mike to come to Japan but warns him that not only is the puzzle box the most difficult and dangerous ever conceived, but opening it also has opponents, secret enemies of the imperial family who will try to prevent the opening of the box at any cost. Some of them are also in the royal family's inner circle. Chief among them is Sakura's sister.

Mike Brink's journey to Japan in **THE PUZZLE BOX** is full of danger and surprises. The end is delightfully satisfying. The action is invigorating, and the cerebral gymnastics are, too. The book is a refreshing take on the traditional quest. It harks back to the Crusades, **LORD OF THE RINGS**, and, most interestingly, **THE DA VINCI CODE**.

I loved it.

**WE SOLVE MURDERS**

By Richard Osman

Viking, 2024, \$30.00

**Rating: B+**

**First line:** You must leave as few clues as possible.

From Richard Osman, the author

of the beloved Thursday Murder Club series, comes the first in a new series, **WE SOLVE MURDERS**, about a highly skilled private security guard, Amy Wheeler, who recruits her father-in-law, retired investigator Steve Wheeler, to help her when a job goes wrong.

Both Amy and her client, best-selling author Rosie D'Antonio, barely escape with their lives from a remote island, and Amy doesn't know who she can trust. Amy's boss is mysteriously unavailable. Her colleagues are suspect. Her husband knows nothing about her work. But she has a bond with her father-in-law, and he reluctantly agrees to help. The two of them, and Rosie, the surprisingly game older woman they are protecting, make a charming trio. The dialogue is funny, the plot complex, the action globe-hopping and fun, the relationships believable.

Rosie, the best-selling author—think a crazier J.K. Rowling or a rowdier Louise Penny—is a hoot. She's up for anything if it involves booze, sex and danger.

**WE SOLVE MURDERS** lacks a little of the wit and charm that made The Thursday Murder Club books so lovable. But the new series is promising. Give it a try.

### THE SUMMER GUESTS

By Tess Gerritsen

Thomas & Mercer, March 2025, \$16.99

Rating: A-

**First line:** On the last day of his life, Purity police officer Randy Pelletier ordered a cup of coffee and a blueberry muffin at the Marigold Café.

Tess Gerritsen, author of the beloved Rizzoli and Isles series, has turned to a new and also terrific series called the Martini Club. **THE SPY COAST** was an excellent beginning and now she delivers an exciting second entry: **THE SUMMER GUESTS**.

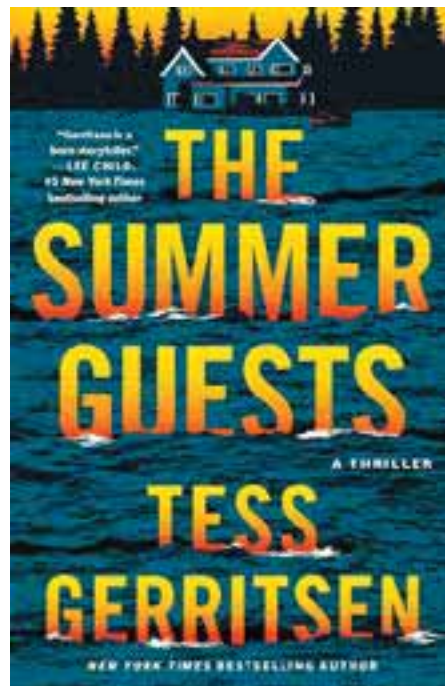
It begins with a shocking, never-solved crime in the quiet town of Purity, Maine fifty years ago, when a local resident suddenly goes crazy kills the town's police chief, Gerritsen takes us to the present when the wealthy Conover

clan comes back, as is their custom, to take up residence in the large lakefront summer home that has been in the family for decades. This visit is different. They are bringing patriarch George's ashes to scatter as per his instructions. And there are newcomers: Susan and her daughter Zoe are recent additions to the tribe since George's son Ethan married Susan and became stepfather to teenage Zoe. Susan can't get used to the wealthy Conovers, particularly the imperious matriarch, Elizabeth, and Ethan's subtly nasty older brother, Colin.

Zoe is fine with it. She can't wait to swim in the clear cold waters of Maiden Pond, right in front of the house. She has been practicing deep free-diving and is excited to explore the territory.

When Zoe goes missing one afternoon, Susan is distraught. The Conovers close ranks, suggesting that she's fine and will come home when she's ready. They make cocktails. Susan knows something is terribly wrong, but no one will listen to her.

Luckily, the town police chief, Joe Thibodeau, takes her seriously and starts a search.



So does the Martini Club. The Martini Club, named for their regular get-togethers are a small group of retired spies who have chosen the peace and quiet of

a small town in New England for their golden years. They are content to have pot-luck dinners with their name-sake drinks, and talk. But when trouble comes their way, they can't help but swing into action.

As a reviewer, I normally dread A-Child-Is-Missing books. How many hysterical mothers and agitated dads can you take? And every author seems to think they have invented parental panic. But Gerritsen manages to focus on the efforts to find Zoe and the town secrets that are revealed along the way.

An excellent outing for The Martini Club. I lift my own glass to them all.

**FIRST LIE WINS**  
By Ashley Elston  
Viking, 2024, \$28.00  
Adult Debut  
Rating: B+

**First line:** It starts with the little things: an extra toothbrush in the glass holder next to the sink, a few articles of clothing in the smallest drawer, phone chargers on both sides of the bed.

This fresh and satisfying book has a clever plot. It starts like any domestic thriller about a young couple with secrets. Then it ups the game. The hot chick, new to the area, who has snagged the attention of the town's golden boy, is actually an undercover operative. Evie, as she is now known, is employed by a shadowy organization that deploys her on various assignments, complete with new credentials, a social media presence, and an unshakable back-story. She was sent by the well-disguised criminal mastermind to get corporate secrets and blackmail material from the hapless mark. Things go wrong. She finds herself falling in love with her target. And he's not as hapless as he seems. Then somebody dies.

Will she stay the course and accomplish her mission? Will her mystery gangster boss kill her if she fails? Does her boyfriend have secrets of his own?

Twisty and well-paced, this fresh take keeps you guessing. Who is one step ahead? Where do allegiances really lie? Who's zooming who?

Highly recommended.

**George's Take:** My wife read and enjoyed this novel when it came out early last year. But I generally wait until the end of the year to see what psychological/domestic suspense novels rise to the top of the Best of the Year lists. This was one of them so I dived in and was rewarded with a fresh, clever and satisfying tale told by the likeable con woman Evie. Talk about unreliable narrator! I thoroughly enjoyed this reading experience.

**Rating:** A

### LISTEN FOR THE LIE

By Amy Tintera

Celadon, March 2024, \$26.99

Adult Debut

**Rating:** A-

**First line:** A podcaster has decided to ruin my life, so I'm buying a chicken.

YA author Amy Tintera brings us an excellent debut thriller, **LISTEN FOR THE LIE**, about a young woman who is accused of killing her best friend but can't remember if she did it.

Usually, the use of amnesia as a plot point is the mark of a must-miss thriller, but every rule seemingly has an exception. **LISTEN FOR THE LIE**, which is also the title of a true crime podcast, is a charming psychological thriller with a nice touch of humor.

Lucy Chase, the first-person narrator, decides to go back to her hometown for the first time in five years. She was never charged with her friend's murder, but she knows the whole town is sure she's guilty. Her parents, her ex-husband, her former friends, everyone except her irreverent, bracingly direct grandmother, seems to be sure she's guilty. The podcaster follows her home. She has a voice in her head advising her to kill. Things look bleak.

But Lucy is determined to identify the killer, even if it's herself. She teams up with the surprisingly cute podcaster who seems to have the same agenda. Guided by the voice of her dead best

friend, Savannah, Lucy revisits the people and places she remembers from that fateful day.

Tintera's style is funny and warm with some interesting twists. Lucy's family, wary since she may be, you know, a murderer, is especially charming.

Very likable. A good read.

**George's Take:** This is the other highly praised psychological suspense novel of the year, besides **FIRST LIE WINS**. It is cleverly plotted, but it offended my sensibilities. No one in the tale seemed to have a moral compass. Everyone in this tale is sleeping around – including the protagonists' mother, father – and grandmother! Not the type of milieu that I care to spend time in. **Rating:** B

### UKULELE OF DEATH

By E.J. Copperman

Seyvern House, 2023, \$34.99

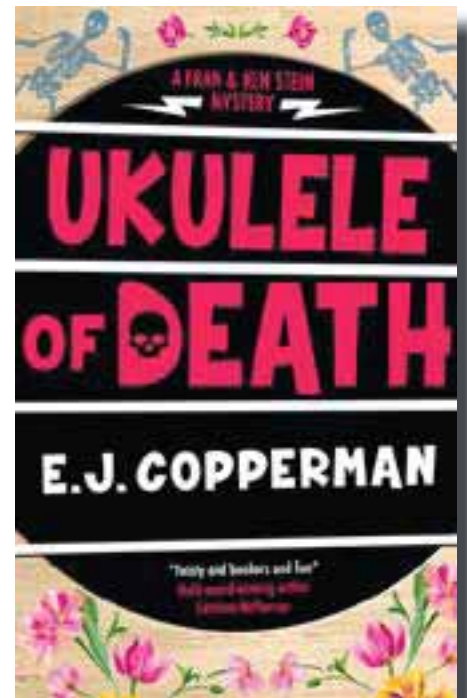
**Rating:** A

**First line:** When Evelyn Bannister first asked me to find her ukulele, I thought she was kidding.

Let me start by saying that E.J. Copperman, along with his sometimes co-author and maybe alter ego, Jeff Cohen, is one (or two) of my all-time favorite authors. Call them cozies. Call them humorous mysteries. But call a cab to take you to the bookstore the minute a new one comes out. They're that good.

The first of the Fran & Ken Stein books (yes, you read that right. Fran Ken Stein), **UKULELE OF DEATH**, finds brother and sister detectives taking a case they have doubts about. Their specialty, due to their own mysterious origins, is helping people find their birth parents. But Evelyn Bannister asks them to help find a small Hawaiian stringed instrument. "I think the uke might be the key to finding my father," she tells them.

They take the case and mayhem ensues. Their client is killed. Fran is kidnapped. Revelations are made.



Fran and Ken Stein are a little different. They are bigger, taller, faster and smarter than their peers. And, of course, they have strange USB ports under their arms and must recharge regularly for peak efficiency. Aside from that, they are flesh and blood and perfectly normal.

Fran and Ken are New Yorkers who live in close proximity to their 'Aunt' Margie who has looked after them since they lost their parents in infancy. Now, it turns out that their parents, both scientists, may actually still be alive. The science that created them is being sought after by governments and billionaires. And the rare ukulele may be the key.

Copperman loves to write about otherness. His Asperger Mystery Series is one of my favorite series. He promotes understanding and appreciation of neurodivergence with such wit and warmth and charm, that you can't help but love him and his detective both.

Now he is writing about a kind of test tube babies that are still only a gleam in some scientist's eye, but are probably coming soon to a pre-school near you. Watch for them. And read this book, in the meantime.

# From The Waterfront

*Ted Hertel*



## DOUBLE BARREL BLUFF

by Lou Berney  
William Morrow, \$18.99,  
November 2024  
Shake Bouchon #3  
**Rating: A**

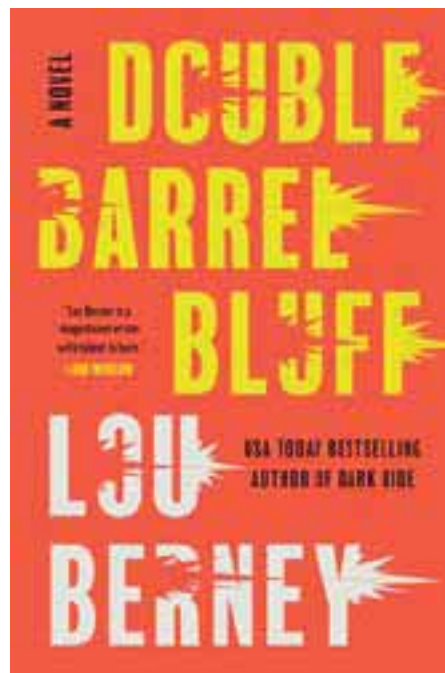
Shake Bouchon, “retired” wheelman for the Armenian mob, has married and settled down in – get this! – Bloomington, Indiana, where *no one* knows his name. Then one day, out the blue, comes Dikran, an enemy from Shake’s past. He is not out to kill Shake but instead to ask him for help finding his missing boss, Lexy. He very reluctantly agrees to help, since Lexy was once Shake’s ex-girlfriend. Shake and Dikran hop on a plane to Siem Reap, Cambodia, Lexy’s last known location. She has been kidnapped by amateurs who believe her to be nothing more than an extremely wealthy woman. Instead, they have no idea that Lexy is actually the *pakhan* of the Armenian mob. Violence ensues on all levels.

This is the third book in the Shake Bouchon series, but there is sufficient explanation here in case you haven’t read the first two (although you really should). In between the first two and this one Lou Berney has written some of the best novels of the last few years: the Macavity-, Barry-, Anthony-, and Edgar-winning **THE LONG AND FAR-AWAY GONE**; the frequently nominated and winning **NOVEMBER ROAD**; and **DARK RIDE**. Each of those three landed on my “Best Of” lists for their respective years (as has this newest one). But fans kept asking for more stories of Shake Bouchon and Berney has obliged with another sparkling and fast-moving novel in this series.

Shake and his wife Gina have moved

to Indiana to get away from stuff like this. So she is less than happy he going to look for his former girlfriend, especially since Dikran is a loose cannon who simply cannot be trusted. In fact “Trust no one” is a common theme here as former enemies become more-or-less friends (at least in the moment) and those thought to be helpful have their own less-than-honorable motives for being involved. But there are characters, even bad ones, who will surprise you. You’ll find yourself rooting for them as Berney makes you care about their fates. He brings Cambodia alive, with its sights, sounds, smells, temples, and people.

“Trust no one” – except for Lou Berney, who gives us another dark, suspenseful, and thoroughly entertaining story. You won’t be disappointed.



## BEAUTIFUL UGLY

by Alice Feeney

Flatiron Books, \$28.99/eBook \$14.99,  
January  
**Rating: C**

Author Grady Green has just been told that his new book has made the *New York Times* Bestseller List. But Green’s best day ever turns into his worst nightmare when minutes later his wife Abby disappears without a trace after stopping her car to help a person lying in the road. A year later Green has been unable to write another word. So desperate is he without Abby that his agent arranges for him to spend three months in a cabin on the tiny Scottish island of Amberly. While filled with some odd characters, the island is a lovely and apparently peaceful location . . . but on the day of his arrival he sees a woman who is the spitting image of his wife. Days later, as Grady walks past the only telephone box on the island, its supposedly out-of-order phone rings and he hears Abby’s voice, “Grady, I’m so cold. It’s so dark here. Why won’t you come and find me?” Then the line goes dead.

Alice Feeney is the author of some of the most fascinatingly twisty novels of the past few years: **HIS & HERS**, **ROCK PAPER SCISSORS**, **DAISY DARKER**, and **GOOD BAD GIRL**. However, I was not enthralled by this book. There are no pleasant characters to root for here. Anyone who appears to have pure motives quickly turns out to be strident and unlikeable. There is nothing wrong with disagreeable people in novels but here that leaves no one the reader can truly identify with.

I admit that I was caught up in this plot at the start. I felt Green’s pain at the disappearance of his beloved wife. I was absorbed by the events leading up to the mysterious phone call from the woman Grady believed was Abby. There’s an initially curious subplot about an unpublished novel that draws Green into a desperate act of plagiarism. But all of that interest diminished as the story became more implausible.

There are plenty of twists here, some of which are gasp-worthy, while many others are just preposterous. There is also an incredible misdirection that

many readers will find either too clever or incredibly unfair. For me it was the latter. I like twists as much as most, but in this case there were just too many to be believable. Yes, it's fiction, but fiction should bear some semblance of reality in order to be credible. The island setting, casting its sinister shadow, is one of the book's high points. The setup was intriguing, but in the long run for me the plotting of this novel was a major disappointment.

### AGAINST THE GRAIN

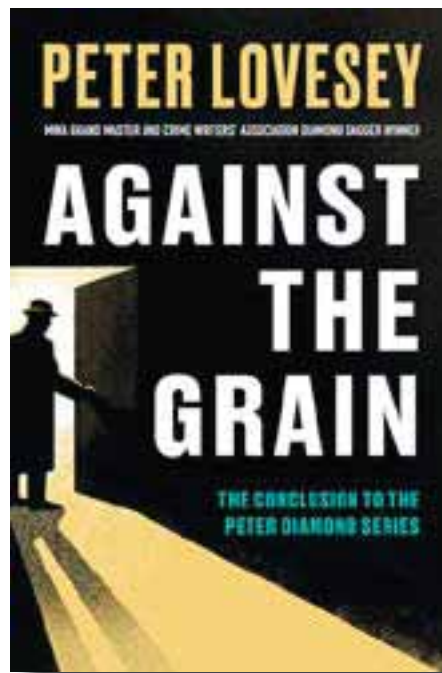
by Peter Lovesey

Soho Crime, \$28.95, December 2024

**Rating: A-**

Bath CID detective Peter Diamond's former colleague Julie Hargreaves has invited him and his significant other Paloma Kean to visit her in the lovely village of Baskerville (no! Not *that* one!). Naturally, there is an ulterior motive for the invitation: as a result of a terrible "accident" in the grain silo, its owner has been convicted of manslaughter. While most people believe the owner is pure evil, Julie thinks there has been a miscarriage of justice and that a killer might still be on the loose. Diamond, of course, cannot resist the challenge and soon comes to believe this was no accident at all. But what secrets might Julie herself be keeping hidden from her old friend? However, as Peter is not there in his official capacity, he must tread carefully, playing the part of a curious visitor as he goes from being a private eye to farm hand to T.V. sleuth.

Here big city detective Diamond must pretty much assume the role of Miss Marple, village snoop, er, sleuth. He can test his skills, along with touches of humor, on a "cozy" mystery without the aid of his regular team. Diamond is fully aware that amateurs do not catch killers, that they only get caught by professionals. (As Ed McBain's Steve Carella once noted, "The last time I had met a private detective who had ever solved a murder was never." **LONG TIME NO SEE**) Diamond soon discovers that the private eye life is nothing like Poirot had made it out to be, which is part of the charm of this 22<sup>nd</sup> – and



sadly – final novel in the series. Why, just "[o]ne carpet stain in *Midsomer Murders* would propel Tom Barnaby to the arrest of a triple killer. Only a TV detective had such luck."

Meanwhile, there are the occasional hints toward Diamond's potential retirement. He reflects on the crises of confidence he's suffered over the years. He begins to realize that his determination to stay on the job has taken a hit. And maybe – just maybe – after twenty-two novels, both he and Peter Lovesey decide to take things a bit easier, sit back, and just enjoy life without having to solve (or, in the author's case, create!) a crime. This is a very fitting end to a long and outstanding career. All the best to both as they go off into their next stages. Both character and his MWA and British CWA Grand Master creator will be missed.

### THE LAST ONE AT THE WEDDING

by Jason Rekulak

Flatiron Books, \$28.99, October 2024

**Rating: C**

Frank Szatowski's estranged daughter Maggie, whom he hasn't spoken with in years, calls him up and invites him to her wedding. She is marrying the extremely wealthy Aiden Gardner, artist and son of a tech billionaire. The wed-

ding, planned as a three-day affair, will take place at the lush home of Aiden's parents. But things immediately seem "off" to Frank. Things like the closet full of hundreds of spiders in the cabin were he and his sister Tammy (his "plus one") will be staying. Things like Aiden being uninterested and evasive. Things like a picture of Aiden with a young woman and a note asking "Where is Dawn Taggart???" Things like someone turning up dead.

Frank is not a likeable protagonist and unfortunately he remains that way all the way to the end of the book. [There's a lot of this in the books reviewed this time around!] This makes it hard to care for what he is suffering through, particularly since he is the first-person narrator. In fact he is written as about as obnoxious and overbearing as any character I've recently read. He even admits that he is a jerk (and he's not the only one who is). But the question here really is: is Frank paranoid or is he actually right in his suspicions? If he is right, who is hiding the truth from him? Daughter Maggie is no gem, either, proving that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. There are also some lengthy sections of the novel where little happens to develop the plot.

In spite of those objections, this is an easy-to-read novel, generally holding the reader's attention all the way through, though with little actual suspense. To get to the end one just has to put up with a jerk of a protagonist, some other unlikeable and clichéd characters, and some unsavory truths that are finally revealed.

### BACKFIRE/NEVER KILL A COP and Other True Crime Stories

by Charles L. Burgess

Stark House, \$19.95, March 2025

**Rating: B**

Charles Burgess had a relatively small fiction output. He died at age 60 having written two novels, one short story, and nearly fifty true crime articles for a variety of magazines between 1945 and his untimely death in 1967. Among the many magazines those true crime articles appeared in were *Complete De-*



*tective Cases, Confidential Detective*, and most frequently by far *Official Detective Stories*, where he was on staff as a “Special Investigator.”

It appears that the novel **BACKFIRE** has never before been published in the U.S., according to Jeff Vorzimmer’s helpful introduction, so it’s great that Stark House has bought it to life in this country. Someone is trying to kill Martin Powers, a nondescript sort of character who appears to have no enemies, is happily (and newly) married, and yet someone cuts his brakes, causing what could have been (but fortunately wasn’t) a fatal accident. Shortly afterwards, someone tries to run him over, but with no success either. The cops are called and they can’t do much to help. So Martin decides to delve into his past to see who might still bear a grudge against him. But could the threat really be much closer to home?

This is a tightly written 100 page novella that moves swiftly from one event to the next as the puzzle is unwound and the suspenseful finish arrives. It’s a shame that author Burgess had such a small output because he really had a grasp on darkness mixed with humanity in his characters. Set in 1959, this reads today as a historical novel, as well. So return with us now to those halcyon days when one could light up smokes in restaurants and no one would say a word about it!

In *I’d Die for You*, Burgess’ only short story, originally published in 1958 in *Manhunt*, two old lovers reunite in order to blackmail the woman’s new husband. Everything goes according to plan . . . just not the old boyfriend’s plan. Only six pages long and the twist can probably be seen coming from early on, but nonetheless this is an enjoyable dive into the minds of evil people.

The final section of the book contains thirteen true crime articles, which often read like the old **Dragnet** radio and TV series, but started being published in 1945, four years before the Jack Webb program began. Those are the facts, m’am, just the facts. Some articles contain excellent advice, like *Never Kill a Cop*. Others had lurid titles to draw in the reader, titles such as *Hell-Raiser*,

*Girl-Hunter and Dazzling Escape Artist* (yes, that’s all one title. Something for everyone apparently!). By the way, Stark House has also published **THE OTHER WOMAN**, Burgess’ only other novel. Those two books comprise the author’s entire output.



### THE CLOSE-UP

by Pip Drysdale

Gallery Books, \$28.99, December 2024

**Rating: B**

Back in the day, wannabe writer Zoe and wannabe actor Zach were lovers, but then Zach ghosted her. Zoe accomplishes her dream by publishing a poorly received thriller about a stalker, while Zach has gone on to become a very famous movie star. Now, three years later, Zoe is suffering from writer’s block, long past the deadline to deliver her second novel in her two-book deal. She’s earning a living working in a flower shop. One day, while making a delivery, she meets up again with Zach and they begin a clandestine affair, one which requires Zoe to sign a non-disclosure agreement. But then she gets the idea to write her second novel about a woman who has an affair with a superstar actor, knowing that even fictionalizing it will result in breaking the NDA. Word of the liaison gets out – and suddenly Zoe has her own stalker who violently

attacks her using the very methods Zoe had set out in her first novel.

The reader can feel Zoe’s desperation, first as she simply cannot conquer her writer’s block and faces having to return the substantial advance she has been paid, then her fear of a lawsuit over the violation of the NDA. When the vicious attacks begin, she becomes even more frantic. Is she paranoid . . . or is someone really after her? If so, who?

While this is a most interesting look at the underbelly of Hollywood, the costs of celebrity and achieving the American Dream, it also contains the so-called “idiot plot.” If just one person had done the sensible thing (here, calling the cops), none of this would have happened. Several characters even said exactly that: “if only I’d called the cops” or “I thought if I told [someone], they’d go to the police but they didn’t.” For me, this dropped the book down a notch. It may not bother anyone else, of course, since we see more and more of this in novels, films, and television.

Hollywood is the serrated edge of dreams nobody wants to talk about. But for some those dreams do come true. Others find that there’s a dark side to everything that sparkles. Occasionally when you see your dreams close up, they look more like nightmares. After all, sometimes success can be the greatest failure of all.

As a side note on **BEAUTIFUL UGLY** and **THE CLOSE-UP**, note their similarities. Purely by coincidence, I read the two books back-to-back. Both have writers who have published a novel, now struggling with writers’ block for so long they face having to return their advances. Both draw inspiration from their present less-than-ideal circumstances. Both characters meet similar fates upon the ultimate reaching of their goal. Yet both stories are completely different, as well. Obviously two authors can take the same basic idea, run with it, and still approach the task from different and equally interesting angles even though they might occasionally intersect.

### A KILLING COLD

by Kate Alice Marshall

Flatiron Books, \$28.99, February 2025

**Rating: B-**

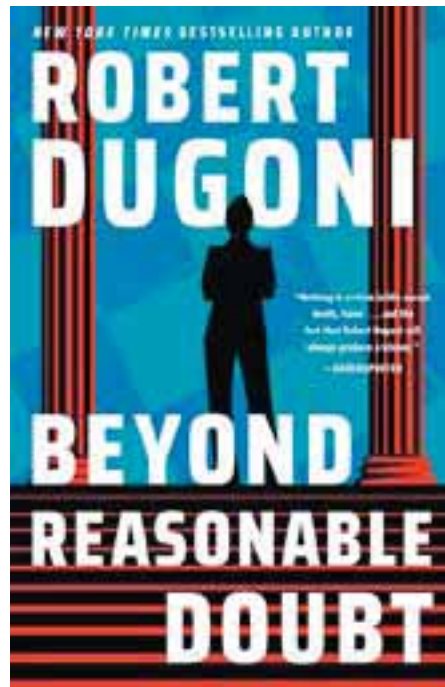
Theodora “Teddy” Scott and her fiancé Connor Dalton arrive at his family’s isolated lodge in the middle of winter. It will be her first introduction to most of the very upright, uptight Dalton gang, a place where secrets – theirs and hers – go to die, in more ways than one. These people don’t so much have mere “baggage” as full-blown “steamer trunks” filled with lies that will be uncovered over the course of Teddy and Connor’s two week visit with the very extended family. Seen by some as gold digger and by others as a nightmare from the past, Teddy must slowly unpeel the tangled web of her own forgotten life before it is too late.

From early on Teddy struggles with repressed memories and anonymous warnings/threats to “stay away from Connor,” notes that she wisely or not ignores. But she eventually begins to think that she may have been at the Dalton lodge when she was very young – and that something so horrible happened that she has mentally buried all these years.

At Teddy herself recognizes, all of this is “too strange, too wild a coincidence.” Unfortunately, I agree with Teddy – it is too wild of a coincidence. And it is not the only one in this story. Those coincidences simply were too strange and in the long (maybe even in the short) run too much to be believed. Further, the book has more twists than a DNA strand. I like a good twist as much as anyone, but this was such a dizzying number that it became hard to follow. Combine this with the fact that everyone has some sort of secret to conceal and the puzzles become even more mystifying.

The book is carefully plotted, well-written with interesting characters. It’s just that the relationships, combined with the gothic elements of family who’ll stop at nothing to keep their past horrors hidden, becomes overwhelming in its complexity. Secrets don’t want to remain secret. They want to burst out. Here an entire dam full of them breaks. It just might be too much.

## THE INNS AND OUTS OF COURT



### BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT

by Robert Dugoni

Thomas &amp; Mercer, \$28.99, October 2024

**Rating: B**

Three years ago Jenna Bernstein was accused of killing her company’s chief medical scientist who had threatened to go public with allegations of corporate fraud. Patsy Duggan successfully defended her. But now Jenna is once again in trouble, accused of murdering her former partner and lover. Patsy’s daughter, Kerra, also an attorney, was her childhood friend, but Keera knows all too well just how much of a manipulative and controlling sociopath Jenna is. Nevertheless there is only circumstantial evidence against Jenna, so she is willing to believe her old friend and take the case. Troubling questions begin to arise, however, leading Keera to think that Jenna just might not be innocent after all.

This is Robert Dugoni’s second Keera Duggan novel. While it doesn’t quite match up to **HER DEADLY GAME**, the earlier legal thriller, it is still an entertaining story. The first two-thirds of the book, the discovery phase, develop very

slowly, but the story hits its stride in the final third with the trial itself. This is the area in which the author’s skill as an attorney shows itself. He knows the law and he gets it right but yet does not beat the reader over the head with it with technical explanations that would only slow the story down even more. For me, the trials have been the best part of both of these novels. There are frequent references to the incidents related in that first novel (without spoilers), but it is not necessary to have read it to understand and enjoy this one.

Family drama is both a high point and a point of slowing the novel down. Those who like character development over plot will probably rate this book a bit higher than I did. But I know I’m generally in the minority, so you can overlook my minor complaints if that’s the case. Either way, overall, this is an enjoyable continuation of this series.

### THE SILENT WATCHER

by Victor Methos

Thomas &amp; Mercer, \$28.99,

December 2024

**Rating: C**

Las Vegas attorney Piper Danes gives up her high-profile job with a prestigious law firm to work as a guardian ad litem in the court system. Her first case in her new position is fifteen-year-old Sophie Grace, the only survivor of an entire family that was murdered. She is appointed by the judge overseeing the family court system to work with police detective Lazarus Holloway. As GAL for Sophie, Danes’s job is to protect the young girl’s interests as the murder case works its way through the court system. However, there was an earlier series of killings to which Sophie’s family’s killings may be connected. Detective Holloway has been haunted by that previous case but has difficulty understanding exactly why Danes has been assigned to partner with him.

Here the alleged killer was caught a bit over halfway into the novel and the final one-third of it consists of a highly technical competency hearing. I was annoyed by some of the legal technicalities, such as this bizarre exchange

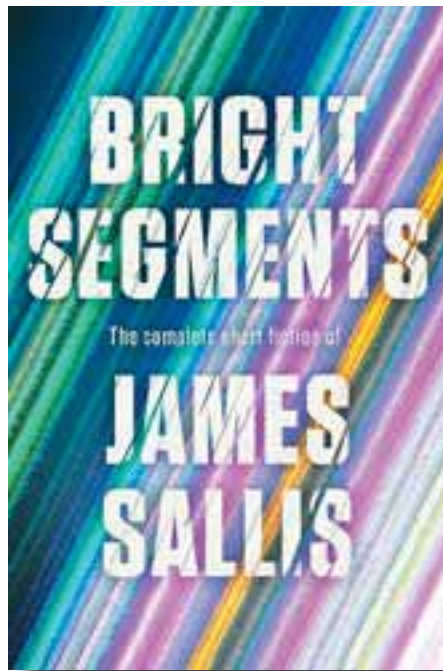
between the parties and the judge: Defense counsel asks, “What caused [the disorder] in this case, if you had to guess?” “Objection, speculation.” “Overruled,” the judge said. What? “If you had to guess” is the very definition of “speculation.” Later, another objectionable question on the medical standard of proof (“certainty” versus “probability”) goes without mention. Okay, none of this would bother anyone except a picky attorney . . . like me. Yes, I’m sure the author, who is an attorney, knows all of this and has his reasons for it, but it still bothered me. It probably won’t bother you. But it took me out of the story anyway.

I also thought that way too much time was spent on this hearing. Defense counsel was overbearing, arrogant, and unlikeable, arguing frequently with and interrupting the judge. I just had to keep shaking my head. And she was far from the only unlikeable character in the book. Further, the story did not feel cohesive to me. There were threads left hanging at the end which I’m sure will be handled in the next book in the series, but I won’t know since I won’t be reading it.

## THE SHORT CIRCUIT

**BRIGHT SEGMENTS: The Complete Short Fiction of James Sallis**  
Soho Crime, \$35.00, November 2024  
Rating: B+

James Sallis is the author of eighteen novels, the recipient of the Hammett Prize for literary excellence in crime fiction, the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière, the Lifetime Achievement Award from Bouchercon, and many other literary recognitions. In addition he has written 154 short stories, all of which appear in this over 800 page volume. Eleven of those stories appear here for the first time. As readers will see as they delve into this massive volume, not only is he a master of noir but also of speculative fiction. Many of these very short tales (you can do the math here) appeared in such well-respected magazines as *EQMM*, *AHMM*, *Asimov’s*, *The*

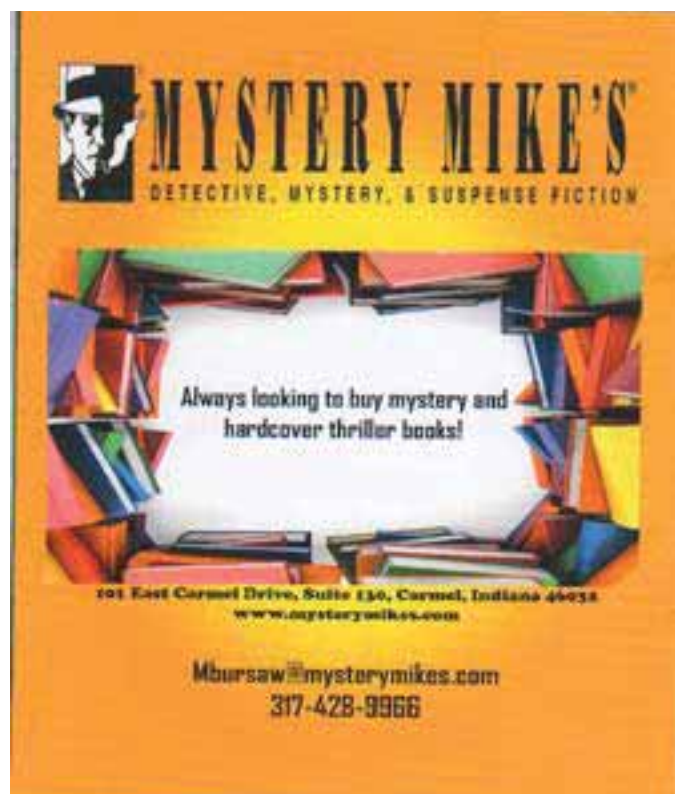


*Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and collections such as the Harlan Ellison edited **AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS** and **NOVA 1** (edited by Harry Harrison). Quite the resume. As Ellison said about Sallis, “he’s right up there, one of the best.”

To give you examples of what you are in for, the bizarre *Kazoo* story opens the volume and includes this great line “He’s

giving me the eye, so I take it and put it in my wallet right next to the finger someone gave me the day before.” *The Leveller* involves a deadly case of road rage. Or there’s *D.C. al Fine* where a depressed man meets a representative of Suicide Control. *I Saw Robert Johnson* . . . voyeur or killer? It turns out that even the dead have rights in *Miranda-Escobedo*, one of my personal favorites. Nothing in life is safe in *Blood Draw* (never before published). Dip in anywhere, like *Ukulele and the World’s Pain*, with its hard hitting opening line: “Sure, I killed the son of a bitch.” And don’t miss going for a *Joyride* with killers in cars. There’s *Dogs in the Nighttime*, which involves the curious incident of shots in the nighttime.

There’s something for everyone here, from crime to science fiction, from noir to comedy. Just about the only things missing are the dates of the original publication of the stories. Another minor quibble is that there appears to be no particular order to the stories. Collecting them by subject matter might have been helpful, though some do not easily fit into any one specific category. Still, there is plenty of good reading here.



# Neither Tarnished Nor Afraid

*Kevin Burton Smith*



Okay, don't pay the ransom—I've escaped.

## DISTRICT #3

by Christopher G. Moore

Heaven Lake Press, \$16.95, November, 2024

Ex-pat Canadian author Moore's last adventure, *Dance Me to the End of Time*, initially billed as the last of the series featuring ex-pat Bangkok private investigator Vinee Calvino, nicked its title from a Leonard Cohen song. He could have copped a line from "The Future," another Cohen song, for *District #3*, because Vinee, like Leonard, has seen the future.

And it's murder.

Set in Thailand a mere dozen years away, Moore takes an unexpected dive into speculative fiction, conjuring a bleak future that is alarmingly familiar, except worse. Far worse. Everything many of us feared has come to pass. Authoritarianism. Climate change. Corruption. Class warfare. Greed. Pandemics. Pollution. Disease. Wildfires. Artificial intelligence. Natural stupidity. The long-promised carnage is here, and it's gone global.

Any compassion or moral compass has been obliterated, stomped to death, or traded in for sleight-of-hand quick fixes. Governments have failed, and all power lies in the hands of the obscenely rich, while what remains of the Bangkok middle class now live uneasily in tightly regulated, fiercely guarded and barricaded semi-autonomous "districts," their fears swapped for the illusion of security and the opiate of reality shows, celebrity influencers, and, well, opiates. Meanwhile, hordes of starving, unhinged and often violent predators,

dubbed the "Crazies," live like refugees in abandoned airports and toxic wastelands, clawing to get in. It's a "city of six million hostages afraid to leave their apartments."

And into this Hell stands Vinee, his aging body physically augmented by the BioR program, still clinging somehow to a jaded moral code and a profession he barely believes in anymore, hired by Malee, a Beyoncé-like reality show superstar/influencer to investigate the troubling death of her husband. Almost against his will, Calvino is soon drawn further into Malee's entourage, reluctantly providing security, trading in his "gumshoes for combat boots."

Malee, meanwhile, despite her seeming omnipotence, is a pawn in a much larger and more disturbing game, a mere tool of the powerful evangelical holy man and television producer who made her a star, and now intends to use her popularity to spread his message. Still, Malee and her fellow contestants wield a little cultural heft of their own, and they plan to use it, in a spectacular, star-studded sea-borne extravaganza (to be streamed, of course) to celebrate "Freedom Day," aboard an oligarch's super-yacht. Unfortunately, as a once-in-a-thousand-years superstorm (the second that year) batters the ship, and betrayals and treachery swamp the decks, the showdown begins to look more like *Lord of the Flies* than *The Voice*. (Fortunately, there's no Reba).

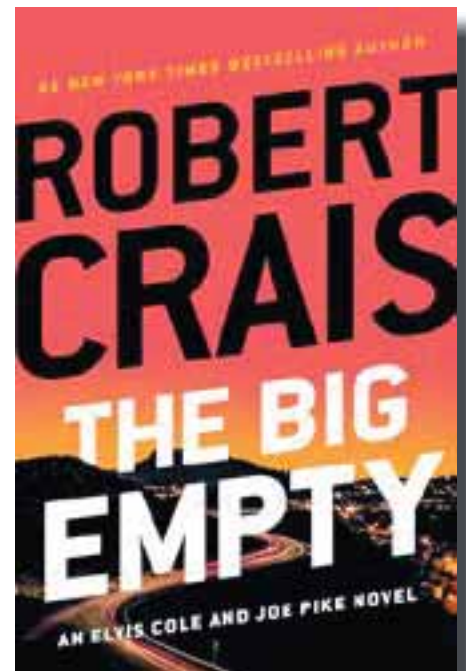
Interspersed with quotes, news items and historical notes both past and future, and myriad musing on a world gone mad, Moore aims high, avoiding cheap shots (although a fleeting reference to January 6, 2021 makes it plain where the author's sympathies lie), inviting readers to draw their own parallels.

Still, the despair and cynicism in this cry from the heart is obvious. As one character cautions Calvino, "There are no heroes. There are only survivors."

## THE BIG EMPTY

by Robert Crais

Putnam, \$30.00, January, 2025  
Elvis Cole #20



Long one of the most reliable players in the Shamus Game, Robert Crais is back, and his latest Elvis Cole novel, **THE BIG EMPTY** (the twentieth in the series), is a prime example why.

Not content with squirting out a book every year like some of his contemporaries, Crais has continued to tinker with the form, taking his time, toying with multiple points of view to ratchet up the tension, easily sliding back and forth from Los Angeles private eye Cole's first person smart-assery to just-the-facts third person, following

Elvis' friend, his relentless ex-Marine comrade-in-arms Joe Pike, and various others.

Sure, Crais knows the tropes and tricks of his trade, and he plays them to maximum effect, but he also knows when to zig, when to zag, and when to yank the rug out from reader's feet... and brother, I was yanked!

It starts out simply enough, almost a goof. Elvis, he of the glib manner and the Hawaiian shirts, is on his Mickey Mouse office phone chatting with long-distance girlfriend Lucy, when another call comes in. He's being summoned by the instantly likable, cute-as-kittens 23-year-old Traci Beller, "The Baker Next Door" (more informally "The Muffin Girl"), a social media sensation with over eight million followers. Her father disappeared without any explanation ten years ago, and she wants the detective to find him (or at least find proof of his death). He is, after all, "The World's Greatest Detective," she reminds him.

"That was a joke I made to a reporter," he cautions her, not convinced the cold case is actually solvable, but Traci is persistent, and she plies him with freshly baked muffins and ten thousand dollars, just to "take a look." He's not a big believer in her muffins, but he believes in her ten thousand dollars. Plus, he can't help but like Traci herself.

And so begins what's already looking like one of my favourite P.I. novels of the year. Everything I love about the genre is here: a smart-ass hero; a complex, emotionally charged plot; characters I can believe (and believe in); rock 'em, sock 'em action, emotional resonance, and — as the case grows increasingly darker and more complex — a major twist that just floored me.

The trail leads Cole in unexpected directions, including a low-rent burger stand where Traci's father was last seen, a frightened young woman who works there but dreams of something better, an ex-con mom with a secret, a gang of goons who thrash Cole within an inch of his life, and to the sort of unexpected moral dilemma that recalls the late Robert B. Parker's Spenser.

There's a certain pattern in detec-

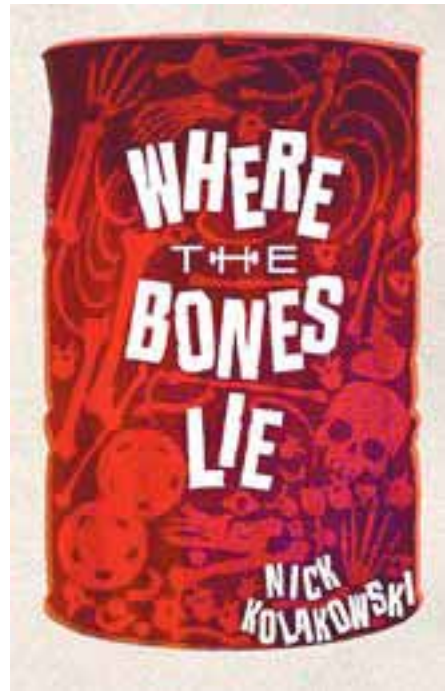
tive fiction, almost a beloved pattern in missing persons cases. The search will be long, and eventually the truth will be outed, and secrets revealed — sometimes a cold bitter truth — but only so cold, so bitter, and it's a line that's never crossed. But Craig drives right past that line, tearing into a heart of darkness I never saw coming.

It's devastating, and the nerve-wracking, violent and emotional showdowns that nail this novel shut make one of the strongest and most moving entries in a series that has never really flagged, and the final lines?

Killer.

Crais is back.

**George's Take:** I couldn't have said it better. **Rating:** A



### WHERE THE BONES LIE

by Nick Kolakowski

Datura Books, \$18.99, March

Philip Marlowe woulda made a great stand-up comic.

I can almost picture the big lug, standing out in the spotlight, neat, clean, shaved and (almost) sober, stalking the stage in some comedy hot spot on the Strip, cracking 'em up with one-liners and snappy, cock-eyed similes...

He had a face like a collapsed lung...

He was a big man... not much wider than a beer truck...

She gave me a smile I could feel in my hip pocket...

So perhaps it was inevitable that eventually someone would take the hint — Nick Kowlski's Dash Fuller is a former Hollywood fixer and bagman trying to make it as a stand-up comic.

Only problem? He's not particularly funny, although as a first person narrator he does have a way with words, like the breeze that "felt hotter than a dog's breath." But hey, almost anything is better, he decides, than working in the tawdry Tinseltown shadows, covering up dirty, sordid secrets — a job that he fears cost him his soul. Or at least his self-respect.

Of course, the Hollywood fixer is a mainstay of the Shamus Game, going back at least to the free-wheeling pulps, with such beloved heroes as W.T. Ballard's Bill Lennox and Robert Leslie Bellem's roscoe-kachowing Dan Turner keeping the star-making machinery running smoothly. They were the good guys, and it was all in good fun. Even laughs.

In reality? Not so much. Real-life fixers like Eddie Mannix and Harry Strickling were as about as funny as cancer; hired thugs burying various scandals and potential career-ending secrets, including unwanted pregnancies, drug addictions, homosexuality, affairs, perversions, abortions, suicides, ODs and everything else, doing whatever it took, up to and including homicide.

Allegedly.

Of course.

Dash (or at least a version of him) first popped up in a 2023 short story, "Back to Hell House," where, fresh off-stage (he bombed), he's approached by his old boss Manny to locate a runaway star. The perpetually sleazy Manny needs "someone not on the payroll" to find a missing actor who's gone off the rails.

Desperate for cash, Dash reluctantly agrees. And promptly heads back onstage to ask the audience for help, offering cash for info.

That beginning is revised and

reprised as the kick-off to *Where the Bones Lie*, but that's just the start. Dash's impromptu plea attracts the attention of the gothy Madeline Ironwood, she of the fiery red hair, combat boots and heavy Navy overcoat, who soon seeks him out. They meet at a taco stand (It's LA. Where else?).

Seems the body of Ken Ironwood was recently discovered in a rusty oil drum in a dried-up lake bed, out near San Douglas in the wine country north of Santa Barbara, a haven for the rich, the powerful and the mind-your-own-damn-business. Apparently dear old Dad famously ran drugs back in the day, but disappeared when Madeline was only two years old.

Now she wants some answers. And maybe some vengeance.

Dash warns her that he's not a licensed investigator, but she doesn't care — she tried a few — they weren't interested. So she just wants "someone who can find things out" and "can keep secrets."

Dash is intrigued, and wouldn't mind doing some actual detective work that doesn't reek. And hey, maybe being a legit P.I. could be a whole new career. Certainly better than going back to work for Manny.

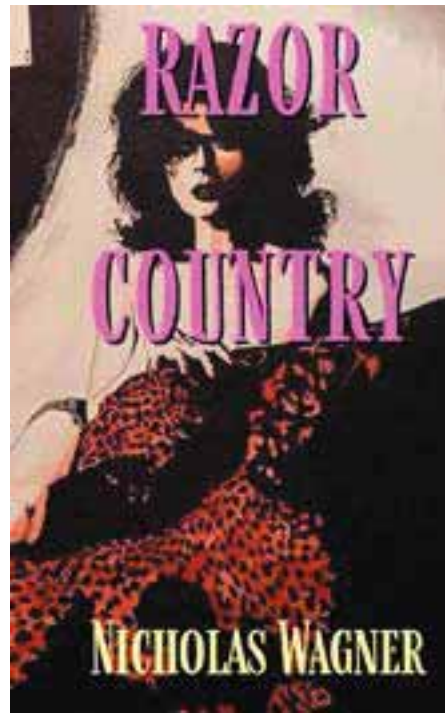
And so we're off. Dash heads off to San Douglas, Madeline insisting on accompanying him, and soon enough they're roaming the countryside, facing off against assorted cops (both ineffectual and/or crooked), assorted miscreants and thugs, a wealthy winery owner and obnoxious documentary filmmakers intent on telling the Ken Ironwood story. Even Manny is hovering on the edges, only a phone call away, intent on drawing Dash back into the fold.

Dash and Maddy make a good, if uneasy, pair — swapping cynicism and sarcasm back and forth, and the banter is sharp (she may actually be funnier than he is), but as the clues build up, so does the nastiness: death threats, explosions, fire, murder and all that good stuff. Enough so that Dash begins to regret selling his gun.

And the ending?

Yikes.

The author is thinking **WHERE THE BONES LIE** may be the start of a



potential series.

Yes, please.

### **RAZOR COUNTRY**

by Nicholas Wagner

Independently Published, \$6.85, April, 2024

A hard-drinking, hard-loving, hard-edged hard man for hire, Colm Steiger works off and on for the London-based Enquiry Service in the years around World War I, going where they send him. Australia, Argentina, Guyana, The Bahamas, South Africa, London, Montreal. Mostly the Commonwealth.

The jobs? Find someone. Stifle a gang war. Hunt down a fugitive. Retrieve stolen goods. Smash a union. Kill someone.

Whatever.

He's an ex-soldier, a vet of the Boer War and later WWI. Tall, wiry, dark hair. Missing a few fingers on his left hand, and a bad leg, courtesy of The War to End All Wars. A tough, cynical SOB, any vestige of a moral code subdued by the cold-edged, cynical

pragmatism that drives him.

There's an edge here that fans of Hammett's Continental Op will instantly recognize, but where there Op is taciturn and terse, Colm can be a surprisingly chatty bastard, prone to a gritted teeth verbosity.

"They send you places. The men... The men upstairs. And they give directives regarding comportment. Regarding alacrity. Ways to effect their designs. And you find yourself maneuvering through a landscape they're not even interested in understanding," he explains to a woman.

And whereas Hammett could set a scene, Wagner's descriptions are curiously sketchy, short of any real local color, be it the Australian outback or downtown Montreal. A brown building. A street. A farmhouse. A road. It's descriptive shorthand.

Still, the action more than fills the gaps. In between jobs, Colm reads and drinks, gambles and consorts with whores. And even at rest he finds trouble. And then he's summoned again.

This is Colm's only book-length appearance and likely the only one, comprised of twenty-one untitled, loosely connected short stories, each finding him on a new adventure, a new locale. They flit by, jagged little tales, sharp and hard and frequently nasty, almost percussive in their violence, but they go down easy. Real easy.

For those who think they're not getting enough grit in their diet, this may be the ticket.

\* \* \* \* \*

Stick a fork in it. I'm done. You can email me at [kvnsmith@thrillingdetective.com](mailto:kvnsmith@thrillingdetective.com), or visit me at [thrillingdetective.com](http://thrillingdetective.com).

Kevin Burton Smith

**The Thrilling Detective Web Site**

Down these mean streets a man must click...

# Novels of Sensation and Other Stuff

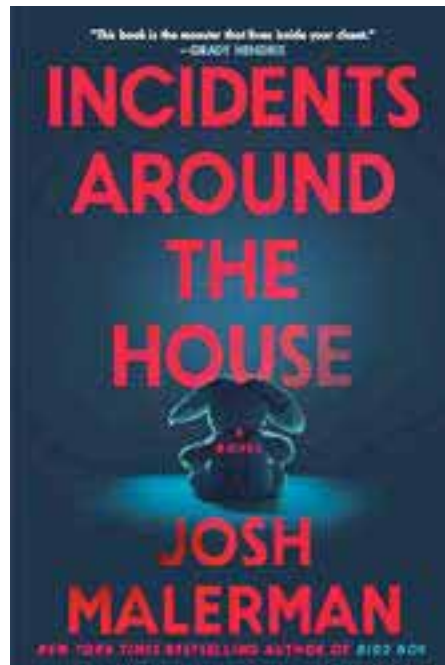
*Hank Wagner*



Max Allan Collins's hitman Quarry...well, returns...in **QUARRY'S RETURN** (Hard Case Crime, November 2024, 224 pages, \$16.99). Set in the present day, it finds the septuagenarian trying to enjoy the fruits of his shady labors, and, more importantly, build a relationship with his long-lost daughter. But it wouldn't be a Quarry novel if the hard-boiled killer sailed quietly off into the sunset of his retirement years. Rather, he's confronted with an unexpected attempt on his life, and the disappearance of his daughter, Susan. Quarry's attempts to make sense of both situations makes for great reading, as per usual.

The book has a lot of depth, working on many levels. First, Collins seems to be using Quarry, who happens to be around the same age, to comment on modern life, parenthood, and aging, in general. In addition, Quarry has published fictionalized accounts of his exploits, which sound suspiciously similar to the novels Collins has been publishing for almost fifty years now. Furthermore, Quarry's daughter Susan is a successful true crime author who has written a popular book about her father's life (without publicly acknowledging that fact, of course). Very meta.  
**Rating: A**

Utterly engaging and uniquely suspenseful, Josh Malerman's **INCIDENTS AROUND THE HOUSE** (Del Rey, June 2024, 376 pages, \$28.00) is a story told from the unique perspective of a young child, Bela, a supernatural thriller that will have you jumping at every unexplained sound that emanates from your home. It's a sort of stream of consciousness experience, which reminded me of Benji Compson's portion of **THE**



**SOUND AND THE FURY.** It really pulls the reader into the narrative, sort of like helplessly watching a car accident unfold in slow motion in before your eyes, as Bela is forced to deal with an otherworldly presence that lives in her bedroom closet. Malerman (author of **BIRD BOX**), really knows what he is doing. The book, filled to the brim with the literary equivalent of jump scares, is hard to put down, and equally hard to forget. Readers are plunged directly into the action on page one, and it only gets more tense from there, as Malerman builds dread while adding nuance to his very flawed, very human cast of characters. **Rating: A+**

The main character of J. T. Ellison's **A VERY BAD THING** (Thomas & Mercer, November 2024, 495 pages, \$28.99) is the wildly successful author Columbia Jones, who to me, seems to be a composite of elements/traits derived from real

life authors Catherine Coulter and Mary Higgins Clark, with a dash of Anne Perry thrown in to spice things up. How compelling a character is Jones? Well, so compelling that she dominates the book, even after meeting an unfortunate end at the opening of the novel; her death triggers a series of events and revelations that makes for compelling reading. Ellison successfully, almost wickedly, updates any number of tropes that you'd find in an Agatha Christie whodunit; the book at times dips into the gothic, with questions of identity, and shady family histories coming to the fore. There's even a dramatic buildup to the reading of a heretofore unpublished Last Will and Testament.  
**Rating: B+**

Ace Atkins adds to his well-deserved reputation as one of the top practitioners of Southern noir with his thirtieth novel, **DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE** (William Morrow, June 2024, 384 pages, \$30.00), a truly harrowing tale that brings to mind the work of authors as diverse as Joe R. Lansdale, Reavis Wortham, S. A. Cosby, Megan Abbott and Michael Connelly (the last three of which all provided glowing blurbs on the book's back dust jacket). The action begins as vaguely discontented suburban housewife Addison McKellar realizes her husband Dean has gone missing; it's not anything he's not done before, but this time out, her mental alarm bells are ringing. Unable to get the police to take her seriously, she seeks help from her father's friend, Memphis PI Porter Hayes. As Hayes starts poking around, he finds that what appeared to be a small, local case has international implications.

This book is sly and subversive, full



of wit, humor, pathos and action. Its characters are vivid and memorable, and the lessons it has to teach invaluable. Porter Hayes, described by some as a black Sherlock Holmes, actually bears more than a passing resemblance to John Shaft (you only need to look at his name again to see what I mean); super cool, he's someone you want in your corner when the chips are down. He's a character for the ages, and I hope there are further adventures to come.

**Rating: A+**

Mindy Meija's sixth novel, **A WORLD OF HURT** (Atlantic Monthly Press, August 2024, 352 pages, \$27.00), tells the story of Kara Johnson and Max Summerlin, an unlikely duo trying to take down a drug trafficking ring. Kara, who literally doesn't feel physical pain, is a criminal adjacent romantic out to avenge the death of her girlfriend; Max is a cop who still believes in the rule of law. Together, they hunt the drug kingpin who ruined Kara's life, as Max fervently strives to uncover the secrets Kara holds.

Readers will enjoy this story, as two seemingly diametrically opposed characters use their individual skills and insights for the greater good, even as an unusual and unexpected friendship blossoms. They'll also enjoy the insights Meija provides into both sides of the law,

delving into the motivations of her characters with equal gusto, whether they be the good, the bad, or the outright ugly.

**Rating: B**

**ALTER EGO**, by Alex Segura (Flatiron Books, December 2024, 336 pages, \$28.99) is a sequel to the author's highly successful 2022 effort, **SECRET IDENTITY**. Whereas much of the action of **SECRET IDENTITY** centered on the creation of the comic book character The Lethal Lynx in the mid-nineteen seventies, **ALTER EGO** picks up in the modern day, with an attempted revival of the legendary character, both in comic book and movie form. The announcement of the revival creates a commotion, as the rights to the character are at best murky. Passions are aroused, passions which may lead to extreme acts.

Like its predecessor, **ALTER EGO** delves deeply into the creative process, and into the very idea of storytelling itself. Also like its predecessor, it alternates between traditional prose sections detailing the trials and travails of its human characters in "real time", and excerpts from the Lynx comic book series, which greatly enhance the overall reading experience. **Rating: B**

In 2025, be on the lookout for **HIDDEN IN SMOKE**, by two-time Edgar



Award nominee Lee Goldberg (Thomas & Mercer, April 2025, 300 pages, \$28.99) and **THE NIGHT BIRDS**, by two-time Bram Stoker Award Winner Christopher Golden (St. Martin's, May 2025, 304 pages, \$29.00).

**HIDDEN IN SMOKE** is the third novel to feature arson investigators Walter Sharpe and Andrew Walker, who this time out find themselves investigating a series of Hollywood apartment fires, and a horrific incident involving a major freeway. While on its face a stand-alone novel, it refers back to events chronicled in the first two novels in the series, and sports appearances from characters from another Goldberg series featuring homicide detectives Eve Ronin and Duncan Pavone. Featuring subplots about wildfires and one man's revenge against the CEO of a pharmaceutical company which gouges needy customers for life saving drugs, the novel feels remarkably current and topical.

Golden's **THE NIGHT BIRDS** is an impactful tale of horror featuring a pair of women fleeing from a coven; the coven has evil designs on an infant the duo has committed to protect at all costs. Desperate, the women seek shelter with a friend who is conducting research on a unique ecosystem that exists within the decks of a grounded freighter off the coast of Galveston, Texas. Unfortunately, the coven follows, pursuing them through a once in a century storm to the ship itself, setting up an unrelenting night of terror and despair.

Golden is firing on all cylinders on this one, tapping into a unique mythology for his villains, and a unique setting for the action sequences, delivering some of the best set pieces of his career. **NIGHT BIRDS** has a wicked urgency about it, as if the author was writing in real time, doing a play by play, rather than a recitation of events. Similar to a couple of his recent books, such as **ROAD OF BONES** (2022), and **ALL HALLOWS** (2023), it has a real "you are there" feel to it. Great work from a seasoned pro.

**Rating: HIDDEN IN SMOKE: B+**

**Rating: THE NIGHT BIRDS: B+**



# The Cozy - Traditional Mystery Cafe'

## Robin Agnew Reviews



### NO COMFORT FOR THE DEAD

By R.P. O'Donnell

Crooked Lane, February, \$29.99

Castlefrefre #1

Rating: A+

Welcome to my first book crush of the new year. It's set in the late 80s, as tiny Castlefrefre in County Cork, Ireland, experiences a shrinkage as jobs and inhabitants flee for bigger towns and more opportunity. Swimming against that tide is central character Emma, the town librarian, who has returned home to live with her dad, Sam, after her dream career in the Garda didn't work out. After one of Sam's frequent nags about moving on, Emma takes off and ends up at the "Big House" in town. There she hears shots, witnesses a man fleeing, and finds the reclusive owner dead and another unknown man injured, then takes off to the town doctor to summon help.

So far, so cozy. But what makes one book sing a little more than another, very similar book? There are many factors, one of them being prose, and O'Donnell writes with a loveliness that's both sturdy and delicate, framing

the story with a huge, destructive storm named Ophelia and weaving sightings of foxes and bats throughout. Foxes can symbolize many things, but one is "wild loveliness" and another is "mischievous," both of which apply here, while bats can be seen as a symbol of change and rebirth. And there is indeed some serious change rumbling toward tiny Castlefrefre, coming like a freight train, and Ophelia and the murder in the Big House are the kick off.

Symbolism is all well and good, but another crucial element that makes a book sing is character, and O'Donnell appears to understand and portray it masterfully. Emma loves her library but regrets not only her change in career, but the absence of her long ago hometown honey, Charley. But when the identity of the other man who was shot is revealed, it brings the very same Charley back to town. We are there with Emma



as she travels back through childhood to young adulthood, revisiting the relationships she's had with her Dad and Charley, as well as the other central characters in the story.

When the injured man's father asks Emma to use the skills she's learned in the Garda to investigate and clear his son, she steps up. She tries to be guided by Sherlock Holmes, but she realizes the details she notices are not as complex as his. What works for her is knowing everyone in town, including the somewhat skeezy police sergeant Noonan and a local lawyer who seems to operate on not quite the right side of the law. But it's not until Emma teams up with the lawyer's secretary, the lonely yet observant and quietly funny Mary, that the investigation really takes off.

There is another pretty heartbreaking death and a dollop of danger for Emma, but she's surrounded by community and loved ones, and that gives her investigation a boost. I never worried that things wouldn't be set to rights – a cozy/traditional element – but the sensitive writing, character detail and lovely setting for this novel make it a complete standout. I read it with a lump in my throat. This is a spectacular debut.

### LOOSE LIPS

By Kemper Donovan

Kensington, \$28, January

Ghostwriter #2

Rating: B+

I really enjoy this quirky new series featuring a nameless ghostwriter as the main character.

In the first book, the writer trailed a Hillary Clinton-esque figure and wound up solving a crime with her. In this follow up, she's now an established professional after publishing an account of her previous adventure and is recruited for a private cruise for wannabe writers. She's the "mystery writer" instructor, along with a poet, a memoirist, and an ultra successful romance writer. We eventually learn her pen name, Belle Curren, which certainly makes things simpler from a logistical point of view.

The cruise has been set up by a

former school friend of Belle's, Payton, who has subsequently gone on to fame and glory. Both women are astonished when the third member of their grad school triumvirate, Flora, shows up, as she's suing Payton for stealing the book concept she claims she's been working on for decades. They soon learn she's only appeared on scene in an effort to make Payton miserable.

Donovan does a nice job setting things up, both in terms of the ship, the writing conference, and the tensions and rivalries between the characters. The cast includes Joan Chen, who wants to be a writer but is serving as the ship's doc (she and Belle meet when Belle has a bout of seasickness early on), Payton's chic wife, Nicole, Payton's bitchy assistant, Jackson, as well as various women attending the conference.

When things go south after a first mysterious death, Belle and Doctor Joan unite as a detective team. As she did in the first instalment, Belle willingly assumes the "Hastings" role and allows Joan to take the lead. As they're at sea with no visible security (everyone signed a waiver before signing up), the amateur detection seems perfectly plausible. This is a classic setting, of course, and the ship provides a "closed circle," that is, someone on board must be the guilty party. As more deaths occur, Joan and Belle are hot on the trail.

Donovan is a witty and sometimes unexpected writer, a sharp observer of human interaction and character, and pretty funny as well, his skills renewing a very traditional mode of storytelling. With the set up he seems to be adopting – like a traditional ghost, "Belle" the ghost writer can go just about anywhere and remain kind of invisible – giving Donovan lots of leeway in terms of her finding more murders to solve. The resolution here is quite ingenious, and as in all the best golden age style mysteries, the clues were right there for the reader to discover. These are fun reads which also make you use your brain.

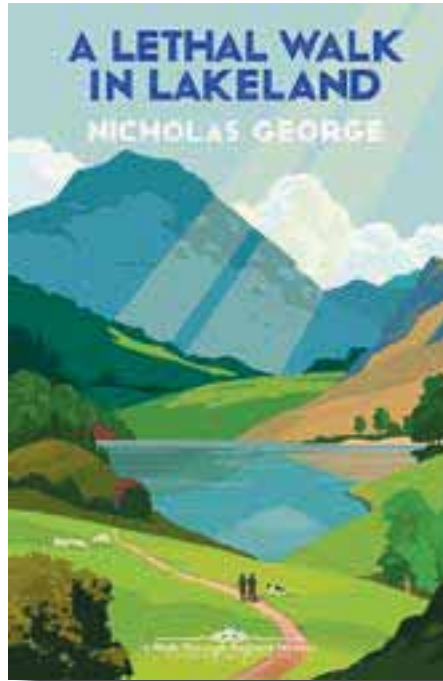
### **A LETHAL WALK IN LAKELAND**

By Nicholas George

Kensington, \$27, January

A Walk Through England #2

**Rating: B+**



This series, one of the sweetest around, centers on Widower Chase, a retired policeman, who, enthralled by the beauty of the British countryside, goes on frequent walking tours. This is the second book in the series and so far every time Chase goes on one of these journeys, someone gets murdered. In the first one, he met a man, Mike, a coroner in the UK (Chase is American) and sparks flew. In this installment they will be reunited, but Chase's walk through Lake Country is the real focus, and the pair don't even get together until nearly the end.

Chase is a truly nice guy, who often goes on walking tours with his friend Billie, an avid knitter and fellow nature lover. This one is disrupted, however, by an obstreperous and loud family of Texans who continually fight with one another, threatening to hijack the trip, despite the tour leader vowing to throw them out without a refund if another punch is thrown.

But the roughhousing continues, and when there is eventually a murder, Chase's puzzle instinct kicks in, and the police on the scene are happy to accept his offer of assistance. When Mike, finished with his own work, comes up to meet up with Chase, he's pressed into

service too, as a fill-in coroner. With the two men so invested, it's inevitable that Chase solves the crime.

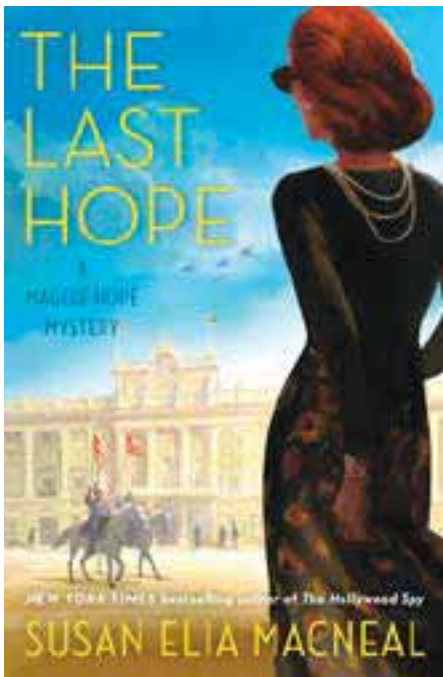
This is an intriguing mix of a professional and an amateur sleuth. As Chase is retired, he's technically an amateur, but still retains his old skill set, and so far local police have gladly accepted his help. The tone is completely on the traditional side of things, with fair clues, a suspect circle, and a crucial scene where the entire cast is brought together by the detective for the big reveal.

The most striking feature in these books is the scenery, as George immerses his readers and characters in the ageless English countryside. Chase, while being a nice, decent guy, also remains an interesting enough person to hang a series on, and as a reader, you're always glad when he turns up to settle things down. His nascent relationship with Mike seems sweet and might provide the kind of yin and yang demonstrated by such partners as Christie's Tommy and Tuppence, Moyes' Henry and Emmy or Maron's Deborah and Dwight. All of these loving couples are the tentpoles of their series, adding heft and depth, and I'm guessing Chase and Mike may well do the same.

The mystery part was also quite clever and Chase's wrap up was excellent. The book held my interest, threw in some surprises, laying out all its clever twists fairly for the reader. All in all George could not have produced a more pleasant reading experience.

## **Maggie Mason Reviews**





**THE LAST HOPE**  
by Susan Elia MacNeal  
Bantam, \$29.00  
Maggie Hope #11  
**Rating: A**

Maggie Hope is being sent to Madrid to determine if the Germans have succeeded in creating an atomic bomb. This would completely alter the outcome of the war, and our planet as we know it. Maggie is to determine if Werner Heisenberg, a physicist has completed the bomb, or perhaps is very close to creating such a destructive weapon. If he is successful, Maggie is to assassinate him and return to London.

Spain is a neutral-ish nation, and there are many different sets of spies and agents. One is Coco Chanel, the famed french designer. Maggie had encountered Chanel in the past and now is faced with her again, though Chanel is very sympathetic to the Germans.

Maggie meets and charms a star matador, and his fame helps give her access to Heisenberg. The setting in Madrid is perfect for a spy novel with various nationalities and real danger. I had my heart in my mouth for much of the book. Maggie is an admirable woman, strong & intelligent. I enjoy

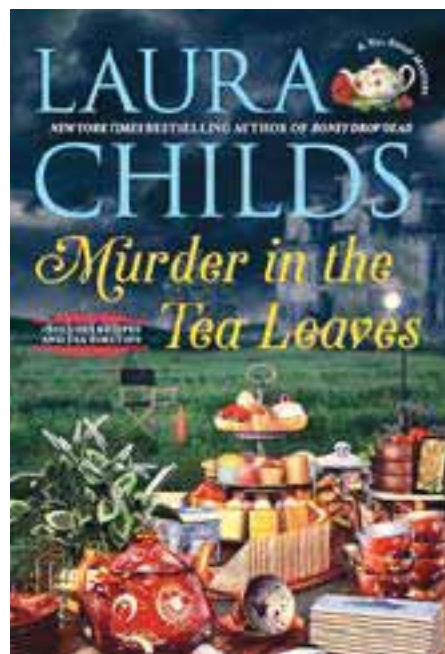
reading about her and this book is no exception.

**MURDER IN THE TEA LEAVES**  
by Laura Childs  
Berkley Prime Crime,  
Tea Shop #27  
**Rating: A**

Tea Shop owner Theodosia Browning (Theo to her friends and fans) is a good example of the warmth of the Southern people. She has a successful tea shop, good friends, a wonderful canine companion, and a nose for mystery. Charleston, South Carolina is also a big part of the series.

This adventure explores the ins and outs of a movie set, Charleston being a perfect setting for a film. Sadly, the director of *Dark Fortunes* is electrocuted, and Theo's friend Delaine is the prime suspect. The death occurred at Brittlebank Mansion, said to be haunted. A member of the Charleston film board is also murdered. But Theo is up to the task of bringing the murderer to justice.

I'm a big fan of this series. It was the inspiration for my trips to Charleston. I learned about a great restaurant, Poogans Porch from the book. My only regret is that the Indigo Tea Shop doesn't exist is real life. Highly recommended.



**Lefty Award  
Nominations  
2025**

Winners will be announced at  
Left Coast Crime Convention  
(March 13-16, 2025)

**Best Mystery Novel**

- HOME FIRES, Claire Booth
- BLESSED WATER,  
Margot Douaihy
- ASSASSINS ANONYMOUS,  
Rob Hart
- MOLTEN DEATH, Leslie Karst
- SERVED COLD, James L'Etoile
- CALIFORNIA BEAR,  
Duane Swierczynski

**Best Debut Mystery**

- BLUE RIDGE, Peter Malone Elliott
- OBEY ALL LAWS, Cindy Goyette
- THE MECHANICS OF MEMORY,  
Audrey Lee
- GHOSTS OF WAIKIKI,  
Jennifer K. Morita
- YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID,  
K. T. Nguyen

**Best Humorous Mystery  
Novel**

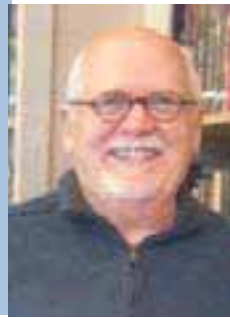
- A VERY WOODSY MURDER,  
Ellen Byron
- ILL-FATED FORTUNE,  
Jennifer J. Chow
- BRONCO BUSTER, A. J. Devlin
- SCOTZILLA, Catriona McPherson
- CIRQUE DU SLAY, Rob Osler
- WE SOLVE MURDERS,  
Richard Osman

**The Bill Gottfried  
Memorial Best  
Historical Mystery**

- HALL OF MIRRORS,  
John Copenhaver
- A KILLING ON THE HILL,  
Robert Dugoni
- AN ART LOVER'S GUIDE TO  
PARIS AND MURDER,  
Dianne Freeman
- THE LANTERN'S DANCE,  
Laurie R. King
- DEATH OF A FLYING NIGHTIN-  
GALE, Laura Jensen Walker

# Deadly Pleasures

## George Easter



### GUIDE ME HOME

by Attica Locke  
Mulholland Books, \$29.00,  
September, 2024  
Darren Mathews #3

**Rating: B+**

Texas Ranger Darren Mathews is anxiously waiting to see if an over-zealous prosecutor is going to seek an indictment against him because of his actions chronicled in the first two books of this trilogy. Darren knows he did the morally right thing, but a prosecutor might think he did something illegal – if he can find proof. Darren’s estranged mother doesn’t help matters when she turns a gun over to the authorities – a gun that may implicate Darren in a crime. As the story progresses, we (as does Darren), learn a lot more about his mother, her hard life and her good heart.

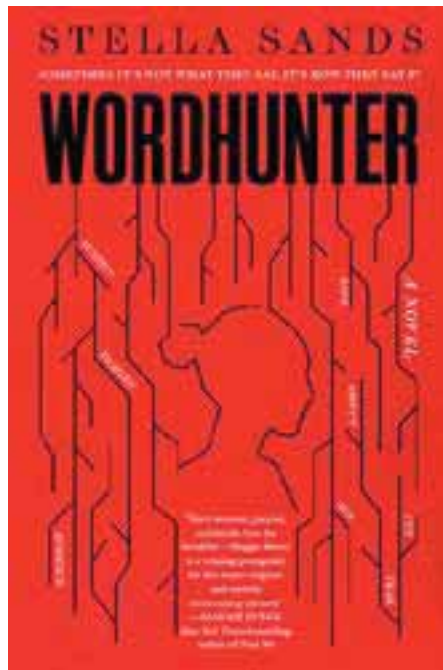
All these matters are peripheral to the central story about Sera, a missing black college student, whose white sorority sisters claim ignorance about her whereabouts. Darren is asked to look into the matter despite his recent resignation from the Texas Rangers. His investigation leads him to Thornhill, a company town which holds its residents in economic servitude – modern-day slavery but with much better living conditions.

I found the first two books in the trilogy, **BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD** and **HEAVEN, MY HOME** to be far superior to this, the third. The backstory of Darren’s mother was the most interesting part of **GUIDE ME HOME**. The central storyline didn’t turn out to be much of a mystery at all and the book seemed too filled with social commentary. Attica Locke is a gifted writer but this isn’t her best effort.

### WORDHUNTER

by Stella Sands  
Harper Paperbacks, \$18.99,  
August, 2024

**Rating: A**



Some might consider Maggie Moore trailer trash. She’s tattooed, pierced and strangely dressed. But Maggie is also a word savant. Her mind is constantly playing sophisticated word games and puzzles. She works as a waitress while going to a local college, where she is the top student in her forensic linguistics class.

The local police hear about her skill set and ask for help to decipher notes left by a stalker-turned rapist. Her analysis leads to capturing the criminal.

Then the daughter of the mayor is kidnapped, which brings back bad memories of what happened to Maggie’s childhood best friend who likewise disappeared – never to be found. For

this reason she is reluctant to help, but the police insist. So Maggie begins to analyze the texts, emails, and verbal tics of various suspects . . . and comes to a disturbing conclusion that will rock this small community.

I can’t remember when I’ve been so drawn into a mystery – right from the first page. Maggie Moore is an utterly fascinating character who is well defined by the talented Stella Sands. The mystery that Maggie is tasked in solving is average but Maggie’s unique methods turn it into something special.

### THE TREASURE HUNTERS CLUB

by Tom Ryan  
Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, October, 2024  
**Rating: B**

In the 1920s five boys discover a pirate’s treasure off the coast of Maple Bay, their idyllic Nova Scotia seaside town. They bury it in a secluded place and agree to meet back in five years when they reach adulthood. When they dig for the treasure, they find that it is gone. But they don’t give up and search for it for the rest of their lives – and their descendants form a Treasure Hunters Club that religiously meets regularly to find the treasure.

At the center of the Club is the aristocratic Mirabel Bellwood Johnson, the scion of the Bellwood family. She has finally located her long-lost grandson and summoned him to Maple Bay to tell him something of great importance. But the grandson, Peter Bellwood Barnett, arrives at the family estate only to find his grandmother lying dead at the foot of an ornately carved staircase.

Seventeen-year-old Dandy Feltzen is isolated and adrift following the death of her beloved grandfather, until his final request and a tantalizing clue sets her on a mission to solve the mystery he spent his entire life chasing.

Cass Jones has given up on her dream of being a successful author when an unexpected opportunity lands in her lap: a housesitting gig in remote Maple Bay, where she stumbles on the perfect subject matter for her breakout book—and the handsome sailor who might be just the person to help her research it.

Peter, Dandy and Cass have never met before, but they're on a collision course with each other to solve the mystery that has defined Maple Bay for the last century.

I found this traditional mystery mildly entertaining for most of the book. But I have to admit that the author came up with a pretty big surprise at the end. Good but not great.

### TO DIE FOR

by David Baldacci

Grand Central, \$30.00, November, 2024

Travis Devine #3

**Rating: B-**

Former Army Ranger and financial analyst Travis Devine is now working for the Office of Special Projects (a sub rosa operation in the Department of Homeland Security). His present task is to look after the well being of orphaned twelve-year-old Betsy Odom, whose uncle, Danny Glass, is under investigation for RICO violations. This seemingly simple job of babysitting soon morphs into something quite difficult. Throughout the story line Devine is trying to keep hidden from a woman (The Girl on the Train) who is determined to kill him. This plot line is a carry over from a previous book in the series.

The meandering story line requires a lot of suspension of disbelief, something I found difficult to provide.

**TO DIE FOR** will appeal to avid David Baldacci fans, but if you're not one of them, I'd skip it.

### PRO BONO

by Thomas Perry

Mysterious Press, \$27.95, January

**Rating: A-**

When Charlie Warren was a teen, his mother Linda was victimized by a con man who stole almost all of her money.

Now Charlie is all grown up and is a successful Los Angeles attorney who specializes in recovering hidden funds, most frequently having something to do with a spouse trying to hide assets during a contentious divorce proceeding.

His current case is a bit different and

involves the attractive widow Vesper Ellis, who has just noticed that someone has been using her dead husband's identity to siphon off money from their investment accounts.

With interesting details, we readers follow Charlie's clever maneuvers to recover Vesper's lost money.

There is also a subplot involving Charlie's attempts to reclaim at least some of his mother's stolen money.

Readers of *DP* know that I'll read anything that Thomas Perry writes. He is a master at creating fascinating characters with interesting skills and professions. These characters jump off the page and the narrative flows so smoothly that reading **PRO BONO** seems effortless to the reader.

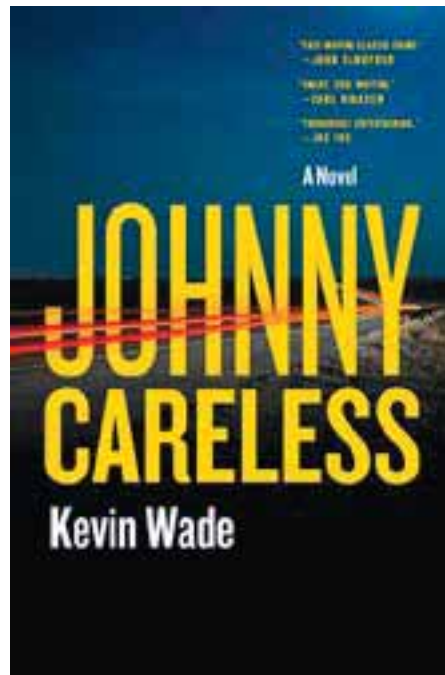
### JOHNNY CARELESS

by Kevin Wade

Celadon Books, \$27.99, January

Debut Mystery

**Rating: A-**



Jeep Mullane grew up on Long Island's North Shore, a blue-collar kid, always a bit of an outsider to his wealthy friends. But one of them, Johnny Chambliss ("Johnny Careless"), a freewheeling child of privilege, takes him under his wing and they become fast friends.

Jeep's dad is a NYPD cop and Jeep follows in his footsteps and becomes an

NYPD detective, only to burn out some years later. So he returns to his home turf and becomes the local Police Chief of Bayville.

Jeep is soon called upon to investigate the suspicious drowning of ...you guessed it...Johnny Careless.

There are a lot of flashbacks to the time when Jeep and Johnny were teenagers that provide a lot of substance to the story.

He is challenged by Johnny's wealthy and secretive family and his beautiful, enigmatic ex-wife as he untangles a knotted mystery fraught with theft, corrupt local moguls, and decades-old secrets, all while grappling with his own deep-seated grief for his lost pal.

The author is a well-known screenwriter and this is his first foray into writing novel-length fiction. It turned out quite well. His sympathetic characters and attention-grabbing plot speak well for the future.

A word about the setting. I grew up on the South Side of Long Island in a blue-collar town and had quite a different life experience than Jeep did. My town did not have any "haves." But I'm always attracted to books set on Long Island – that inevitably bring back pleasant memories.

### KARMA DOLL

by Jonathan Ames

Mulholland Books, \$27.00, January

Happy Doll #3

**Rating: A-**

This book picks up right where the last one, **THE WHEEL OF DOLL**, left off. Private detective Happy Doll is living in hiding near a remote Mexican beach, recovering from wounds suffered at the hands of a murderous Hollywood pimp. The Jalisco Cartel also want him dead, so where does he hide? In Mexico! Typical Doll move.

After witnessing a murder for which he is framed, Doll is forced to sneak across the border back to L.A. to bring the real murderer to justice.

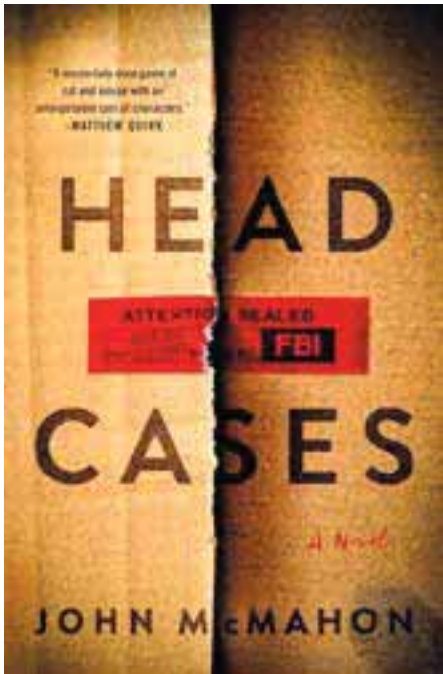
I've read all three of these wild and wacky Happy Doll novels and have enjoyed them all. These short and fast-paced entertainments are as unpredict-

able as they are fun to read. There is a continuing underlying story so the series is best read in order.

### HEAD CASES

by John McMahon  
Minotaur, \$28.00, January  
Gardner Camden #1

**Rating: A-**



The FBI has formed a special investigative unit made up of misfit geniuses and highly skilled investigators known as PAR (Patterns and Recognition). There are four members of the group (soon to be five – if he works out):

Gardner Camden – a savant at puzzle solving

Cassie Pardo – a brilliant mathematician and computer analyst

Frank Roberts – head of the unit – a career FBI agent

Joanne Harris – weapons expert

Richard Neal Brancato – just out of the training – the rookie on probation

The team generally work out of an office delving into cold cases, but for their current case, they are out in the field trying to find out why a serial killer is killing serial killers.

Their ability to detect patterns and solve puzzles way faster than their FBI colleagues puts them in a league of their own. But unfortunately their envious colleagues call them “Head Cases” be-

hind their backs.

This narrative is sprinkled with witty dialogue and unconventional characters that make it a highly entertaining read. My interest was laser focused throughout the book and I look forward to this being a successful series long into the future.

### THE MAILMAN

by Andrew Welsh-Huggins  
Mysterious Press, \$26.95, January  
Mercury Carter #1

**Rating: A-**

Mercury Carter is a former postal inspection agent, now a for-hire delivery man who carries a gun and has all sorts of skills. Despite experiencing some traumatic brain damage, he’s as sharp as a tack and often is thinking two or three moves ahead. Carter is called on to deliver valuable items and charges commensurate fees for his work. He has a perfect record – every delivery he has been hired to make has been successful.

Carter is certainly in the mold of a Jack Reacher, but not as physically imposing. When I think of comparisons I’m inclined to see James Byrne’s Dez Limerick (**THE GATEKEEPER**) as coming pretty close.

The story opens with a home invasion. The invaders are after information from the wife Rachel Stanfield, who is an attorney. She claims that she doesn’t know the answers to their questions. Just as the gang of four is about to resort to torture, the doorbell rings. It’s Mercury Carter with a delivery that Rachel has to sign for. When she can’t come to the door, Carter suspects that something is amiss and takes action to find out what that is.

After the gang escapes with Rachel in tow, Carter is more determined than ever to make his delivery – and to help rescue Rachel before she is killed.

There are a lot of dangerous situations in his pathway, which Carter skillfully maneuvers. He’s not always right in predicting the future actions of the gang, but he’s right enough to prevail in the end.

This is another exciting new thriller series that I’m anxious to follow.

Andrew Welsh-Huggins is a writer who deserves to be better known. I hope that the **THE MAILMAN** will propel him to a wider readership.

### THE QUIET LIBRARIAN

by Allen Eskens  
Mulholland Books, \$29.00, February

**Rating: A-**

Hana Babic is the eponymous “quiet librarian,” who lives the life of a recluse in a small Minnesota town. She has successfully hidden her past life in war-torn Bosnia. Thirty years ago she (real name Nura Divjak) witnessed the cruel murders of her family by Serbian soldiers and vowed revenge. So she joined a band of militia fighters and became a legendary warrior known as Night Mora. Eventually Nura is forced to flee to the United States with a bounty on her head.

Her only contact with the past is her best friend Amina, who has just been found murdered in her nearby home. Has someone finally come to wreak revenge on Hana?

The ever-dependable Allen Eskens, has come up with another thoroughly original, blood-pressure-raising tale of suspense. I’m a big fan of tales of survival and this is an excellent one. Don’t miss it.

### UNTOUCHABLE

by Mike Lawson  
Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, February  
Joe DeMarco #18

**Rating: A-**

The latest thriller by the consistent Mike Lawson involves the murder of billionaire Brandon Cartwright, who was known to rub shoulders with the rich and famous but was otherwise a pretty worthless human being. It is automatically assumed that Cartwright had crossed one of his buddies and had been murdered for his trouble.

But a sharp-eyed archivist who works in the National Archives notices some doodles on the back of a U.N. speech made by POTUS that indicates that the President may have had something to do with Cartwright’s death.

The doodles are as follows:

- \*Cartwright A-hole!!!
- \*Pardon? No F-ing Way
- \*Pay ?? Too Rich \$\$\$
- \*Doyle's Way?? Only Way

The head of the National Archives takes this information to Former Speaker of the House John Mahoney (a known enemy of National Security Advisor Doyle) who tasks his investigator/fixer Joe DeMarco to look into the matter more closely.

DeMarco is no stranger to investigating some of the very worst people Washington D.C. has to offer. In fact, he's made a career of it. But as evidence continues to point towards the President and his National Security Advisor, DeMarco is faced with an impossible situation: bringing someone who is literally "untouchable" to justice.

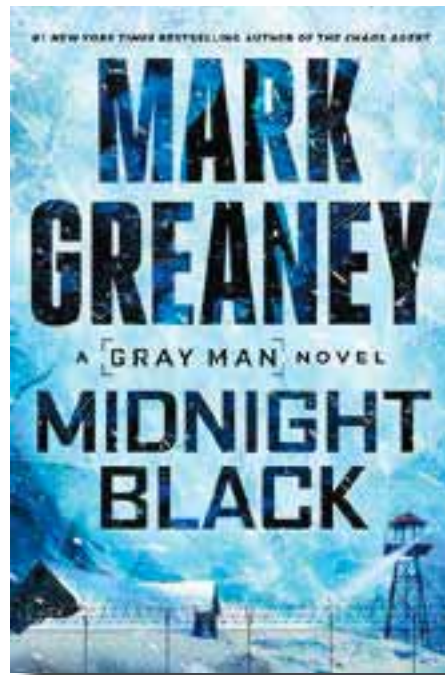
Lawson also touches on DeMarco's upbringing and his relationship to his father who was a hitman for the mob, which elevates the series to a new level.

This is a series that one can dive into anywhere along the line of eighteen books, so if you haven't read any entries in the series, try this one. Mike Lawson is one of the great storytellers of our age.

**MIDNIGHT BLACK**  
by Mark Greaney  
Berkley, \$30.00, February  
Gray Man #14  
**Rating: A**

After a slightly disappointing entry in the series for 2024 (**THE CHAOS AGENT**), the Gray Man, Courtland Gentry, is back with a vengeance.

Gentry's lover Zoya Zakharova is a former Russian intelligence spy who changed teams a few years ago and started working for the West. But the Russians have gotten ahold of her and imprisoned her in Penal Colony IK22, despite rumors spread by Russian sources that she's been executed. Gentry's mantra for the last six months has been "She's not dead." So he is engaged in a plan to enter Russia, which proves as difficult as getting out of Russia. But finally help comes in the form of his former boss Matt Hanley who is able to



marshal CIA assets to help Gentry along the way.

But the CIA has its own agenda and that is the rescue of the most prominent Russian dissident and his wife who are being held in Russian adjacent prison camps, one of which is the same as where Zoya is being held.

Longtime series character Zach Hightower enters the scene to provide much needed backup to the Gray Man.

What starts out as a lone wolf operation quickly morphs into something much larger and something with a much great chance of success.

This is a 2025 title and tops my list so far as the best thriller of the year. It will be hard for anything to top this one in my mind. But we've got a lot of time to read something better.

**IF IT ISN'T ONE THING...**  
by Steven F. Havill  
Severn House, \$29.99, March  
Posadas County #27  
**Rating: C**

Undersheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman is called to the scene of a fatal road accident involving a drunk semi-truck driver and a pickup hauling a horse trailer. The horse, which turns out to be quite valuable, survives but the owner is puzzled. It was supposed to be en route to Colorado for veterinary treatment

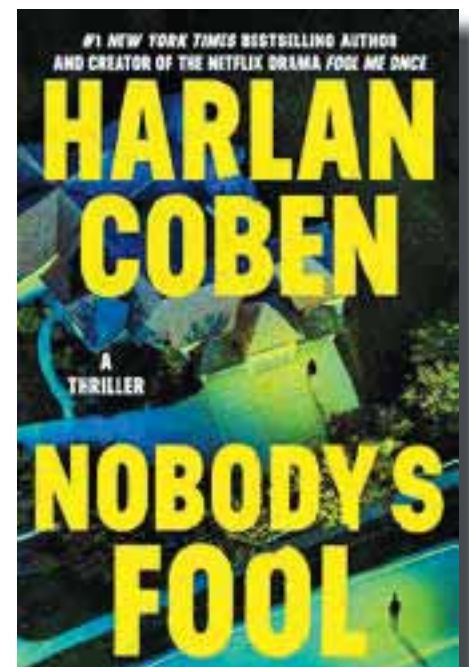
but somehow wound up in New Mexico near the Mexican border. The foreman traveling with the horse is nowhere to be found.

What ensues is pure police procedure, realistically described, but quite boring. I quickly became dismayed and lost interest in the plot – and wouldn't have finished if the book hadn't been so short. Give this one a pass.

**NOBODY'S FOOL**  
by Harlan Coben  
Grand Central, \$30.00, March  
Sami Kierce #2  
**Rating: A-**

Sami Kierce, a young college grad backpacking in Spain with friends, meets Anna and ditches his friends to spend time with her. One morning he wakes up to find Anna's bloody body lying next to him and a bloody knife in his hand. He panics and calls his Dad who emphatically tells him to get himself to the airport and take the first plane to the U.S. Sami is so traumatized by this that he drops his plans to become a doctor and lives a pretty aimless life until he finally gets his life together and joins the NYPD.

Twenty-two years pass and we find Kierce, now a private investigator, in a loving relationship with his wife Molly



and baby son Henry. He's scratching out a living by doing low level surveillance jobs and teaching wannabe sleuths at a night school in New York City. One evening, he recognizes a familiar face at the back of the classroom. Anna. It's unmistakably her, but how can that be? As soon as Kierce makes eye contact with her, she bolts. For Kierce there is no choice. He knows he must follow this woman and find out what happened twenty-two years ago and how he got it so wrong.

In typical Harlan Coben fashion, the simple plot expands into a much larger one, peopled with Sami's idiosyncratic class of wanna-be sleuths, wealthy families, a convicted murderer released from prison, an heiress who disappeared for eleven years and just about the nicest wife that a man could have.

This is the best Harlan Coben novel I've read in the last few years. He is the master of answering that question "How can that be?" with the most ingenious solutions.

### WHITE KING

by Juan Gomez-Jurado

Minotaur, \$28.00, March, 2025

Third in Red Queen (Antonia Scott)

Trilogy

**Rating: A-**

This is the third and final novel in the Red Queen Trilogy. To catch you up, the series features Antonia Scott who has a world-class forensic mind, capable of reconstructing crime scenes and solving puzzling murders. She is part of a top-secret organization known as Red Queen, which has authority to cross European borders. The burly Spanish police detective Jon Gutierrez is her Watson and bodyguard.

As the story begins, Antonia has reluctantly decided to end her husband's life support and is grieving the loss of her beloved spouse. Then suddenly Jon is kidnapped by her nemesis and other Red Queens are under attack.

At the center of this chaos is the mysterious Mr. White, who has been weaving a web around Antonia for a very long time. He is as smart and capable as her, but unlike her, he's a psychotic killer

bent on destroying Antonia and her colleagues.

With Jon's life at stake, Mr. White gives Antonia seemingly innocuous challenges: solve three crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. The only way to keep Jon alive is to play by Mr. White's rules, but what is his end game?

I gave the first two novels in this trilogy "A" ratings. The third, **WHITE KING** was not quite as engaging, but a fitting end to the story arc that stretches over the three novels. I certainly hope that this is not the end of Antonia Scott. She's almost as good and quirky a character as Lisbeth Salander (Stieg Larsson's girl with the dragon tattoo) and her creator is still alive to create more puzzling cases for her to solve. Let's hope.

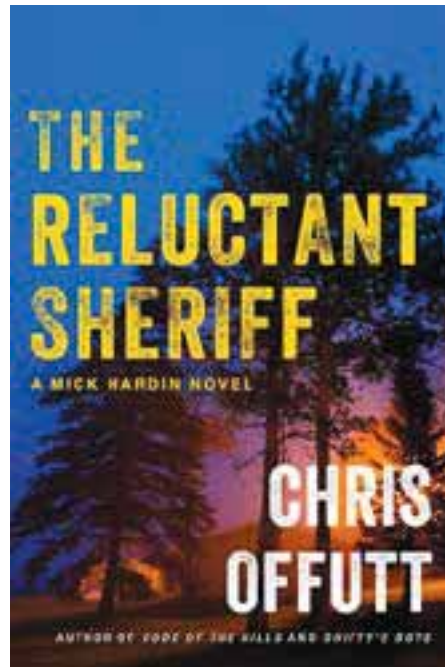
### THE RELUCTANT SHERIFF

by Chris Offutt

Grove Press, \$27.00, March

Mick Hardin #4

**Rating: A-**



Now that Mick Hardin has retired from the Army as a CID officer, all he wants to do is retire to his pied-a-terra in Corsica and live the quiet life he has longed for. But familial loyalty keeps dragging him back to his Kentucky home.

Mick's sister Linda is the sheriff and she is recovering from being shot in the last book of the series, **CODE OF THE HILLS**. She enlists her brother Mick to temporarily take her place as sheriff until she can get back on her feet again. He reluctantly agrees and is hoping for a period of dealing with minor crimes. Nope. Almost at once dead bodies start showing up and Mick finds himself embroiled in difficult investigations.

There are two main reasons to read this series.

1. Chris Offutt writes as beautifully as James Lee Burke. His work is a pleasure to read because he doesn't over-write. His descriptions are succinct and his books short by today's standards. Offutt's lyrical writing doesn't get in the way of the quick pacing of each book.

2. Offutt's characters and plots are of the highest quality and are imbued with the author's love of the region he so eloquently describes.

### BROKEN FIELDS

by Marcie R. Rendon

Soho Crime, \$28.95, March

Cash Blackbear #4

**Rating: B+**

1970s Red River Valley, Minnesota finds Cash Blackbear riding a tractor doing field work for local, wealthy farmer Bud Bogerud. One day she finds Bogerud dead on the kitchen floor of a farmhouse he rents to native field workers. Upstairs Cash finds a little girl, Shawnee, cowering under a bed. She is too terrified to speak, which suggests that she may have been a witness to what happened downstairs. Shawnee's mother and father are nowhere to be found.

Shawnee is placed into the hands of the same unfeeling social worker Cash was left with when her mother abandoned her as a child. Cash doesn't want Shawnee to suffer the same fate that she did in the foster system, so she goes in search of the girl's parents.

It soon becomes clear that Shawnee's father is the prime suspect, but Cash doesn't agree and works to prove his innocence, with the help of her mentor and friend Sheriff Wheeton.



This is the first of the series that I have read and I enjoyed it and will read others. Cash is a bit difficult to warm up to, but I'll give it more time.

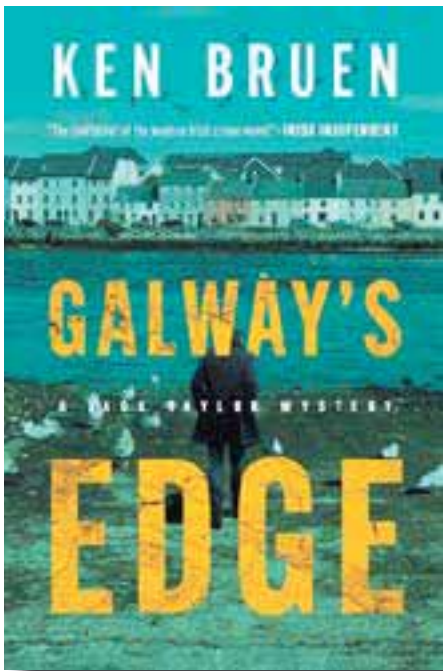
**GALWAY'S EDGE**

by Ken Bruen

Mysterious Press, \$26.95, March

Jack Taylor #18

**Rating: A-**



Even though the Jack Taylor books are relatively short, they are generally jammed packed with story lines. In **GALWAY'S EDGE**, Jack gets a commission from the Vatican, does favors for nuns in a convent, seeks to protect the wife of an abusive Garda and most shocking of all, is paid by a terminal-ly-ill man to kill him on the man's birthday.

The EDGE is a vigilante group created by some powerful and wealthy citizens of Galway as a means to rid the city of some of its less desirable inhabitants. But, of late, it is seen as having gone too far. A representative of the Vatican hires Jack Taylor to convince a local priest to disassociate himself from EDGE. But soon the priest and other influential members of EDGE turn up dead.

When I describe authors' writing styles I avoid the use of the word "unique," except in one case – Ken

Bruen. No one writes like he does. You have to read him to experience what I'm saying. I thought he had lost his way a few books ago, but I found **GALWAY'S EDGE** quite appealing, so I'm back on Ken's bandwagon.

**KILLS WELL WITH OTHERS**

by Deanna Raybourn

Berkley, \$29.00, March

Killers of a Certain Age #2

**Rating: B+**

After successfully surviving the attempts on their lives in the Barry-Award-winning **KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE**, Billie, Helen, Mary Alice and Natalie are back for more in **KILLS WELL WITH OTHERS**. A year has passed and these retired assassins are chafing at the bit for something more exciting than watercolor classes and yoga sessions.

Natalie, the director of the Museum, where they were employed, has called them to find the mole in the organization who is leaking critical information about the Museum's prior activities and the identities of some of its agents.

Together the foursome embark on a wild ride across the globe on the double mission of rooting out the Museum's mole and hunting down the gangster who seems to know their next move before they make it.

I guess I should have concentrated a little bit more than I did – but I often got the four characters confused with each other. A short list of characters with a two sentence description of each and how they are different from one another in the next book would be quite helpful to the reader.

This series is a lot of fun, but don't expect much depth here. I liked the first in the series better than this one, but I still mildly recommend it because of its unusual characters.

**HANG ON ST. CHRISTOPHER**

by Adrian McKinty

Blackstone Publishing, \$28.99, March

Sean Duffy #8

**Rating: A**

When Adrian McKinty achieved

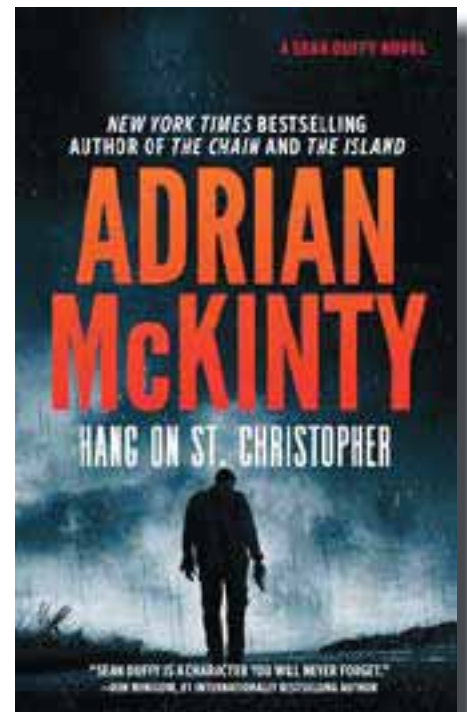
commercial success with **THE CHAIN** in 2019 I was afraid he wouldn't go back to his excellent Sean Duffy series set in Ireland during the Troubles. Happily that didn't happen and we're now up to #8 in the series.

1990s Ireland. Life has slowed down a bit for our intrepid hero. Duffy has moved his family over to Scotland (just a ferry ride away) and comes back one week a month as a part-timer to qualify for his pension.

But he happens to be in station (while the lead detective is on vacation) when a big, fat murder lands on the doorstep. There's no one else around with the detective skills to handle it, so Duffy is bribed with promises of more money and overtime pay to come back to temporary full-time work.

The murder seems to be a carjacking gone wrong and Duffy thinks that it can be quickly resolved. But these are not simple times and, as in the past, simple things have a way of becoming complex when Duffy is involved. The dogged detective needs all of his detection skills to solve this one.

As you can tell, I'm a big fan of this superb series. And you readers must like Adrian McKinty as well. Your votes have resulted in two Barry Awards – for **RAIN DOGS** and **THE CHAIN**.





*Robin Agnew*



### THE CASE OF THE MISSING MAID

By Rob Osler

Kensington, \$27. January.

Harriet Morrow Investigates #1

**Rating: A**

This fun historical mystery from Rob Osler features an unusual heroine: Harriet Morrow, an LGBTQ woman at the turn of the 20th century who has just secured a job as the first female operative at a detective agency in Chicago. In 1898, law enforcement remained somewhat haphazard, so private detectives did lots of investigative work that today would be handled by regular law enforcement. Consequently, when Harriet tells someone she's an investigator, they tend to pay serious attention and respond to her questions.

Something of a trial balloon due to her gender, she's assigned what the agency views as a "no brainer," solving the mystery of the disappearance of the titular missing maid, Agnes, who works for her boss's neighbor. The senior operative in charge informs her that the neighbor, Pearl, is a bit crazy and probably delusional, but the intrepid Harriet pedals off on her bicycle to the neighbor's house regardless. The lady in question is indeed eccentric, mistaking Harriet for a man because of her bowler hat, addressing her as "Harry" as she explains that she certainly could never exist without a maid. Although she herself, thanks to age, never goes to the top floor or the basement, she allows Harriet to look everywhere in the house.

After reaching the maid's top floor room she quickly reaches the conclusion that Agnes has been kidnapped when she finds an open window, an unmade bed, and abandoned belongings. Despite being new to investigating, she

forms a plan and asks for guidance from one of her friendlier fellow operatives, Matthew. He may be friendly, but there are plenty in the agency who aren't, including the secretaries, who resent a woman rising to a station higher than theirs, giving her the cold shoulder when she's relegated to sitting with them rather than having her own office.

Living with her 16-year-old brother, Aubrey, in an apartment they've inherited from their late parents, Harriet is by necessity breadwinner, sister, and parent all in one. While Aubrey, a typical sullen, selfish teenager, is a lot for a 21-year-old to take on, Harriet never feels sorry for herself, choosing to simply push ahead. Even though her first case is a difficult one, she continues to work in the hope that she will indeed be a fully minted operative one day.

Her investigations take her to the Polish part of the city where she meets Agnes's family and discovers the sub-

lime joys of paczkis. She acquires a gun and learns how to shoot it, discovering how to ask questions, or just how to stay in the background and unobtrusively observe when it's needed (something she finds extremely difficult). Through all of it, Harriet also discovers her own identity and how to survive and function as a gay woman. When Pearl gifts her with some of her late husband's clothes, Harriet gratefully accepts (she despises skirts, for one thing) but she isn't sure she will ever have the courage to wear them.

From Pearl to Matthew to Agnes' sister, Barbara, Harriet meets people along the way who challenge the way she sees herself. Author Osler doesn't do things in an obvious way but in a fashion that seems natural and true to the story, which, among other things, is an excellent mystery with a clever and satisfying ending. All of which adds up to this terrific series debut.

### ELEANOR AND THE COLD WAR

By Ellen Yardley

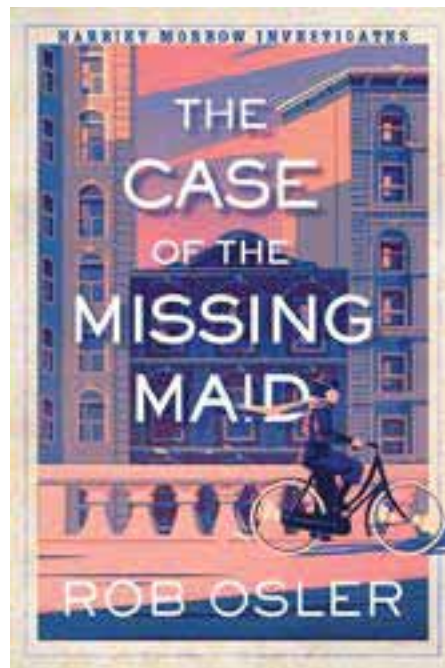
Kensington, January, \$27

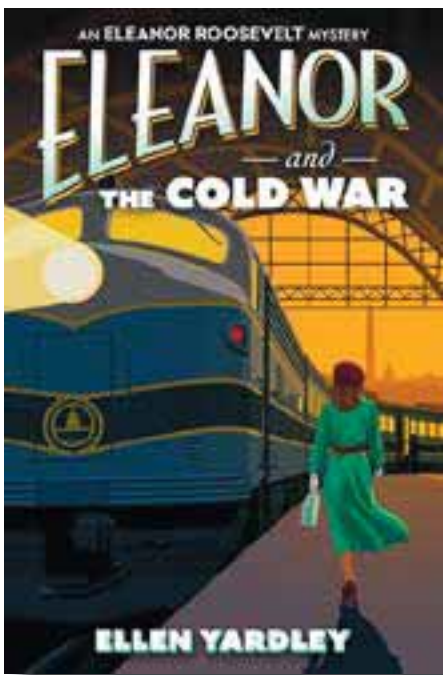
Eleanor Roosevelt #1

**Rating: B**

This is a pleasant read, with the added bonus of having Eleanor Roosevelt, a remarkable human being and perhaps our greatest first lady, as one of its main characters. In this novel, which takes place in 1951, we find her in the middle of the cold war, a widow and a former first lady working for human rights in every possible manner. The action begins when Eleanor and her secretary, Kay Thompson, discover the body of a young woman in the bathroom of a train. The girl proves to be the missing daughter of a friend who had asked Eleanor to look into her disappearance.

Filling in for her aunt "Tommy" (Roosevelt's real long time secretary), Kay is new to the job. Young and beautiful, she's hoping she'll meet a husband while working for the former first lady, but what she doesn't expect, and what makes this novel a journey of identity, is that Mrs. R will profoundly change her perspective on life. Kay and her employer get involved in the investigation





of the girl's death which may involve the Soviets - it's the height of the Cold War and the atmosphere is cloudy with paranoia. When the jurisdiction changes from the local police to the FBI, an organization Eleanor is familiar with, she has a bit more leeway to investigate.

But Kay discovers that what Eleanor is even more familiar with is human nature, and it's her insight into the character of the people involved that allows her to solve the crime. In the midst of all the mystery, the reader is taken on an atmospheric tour of the early 1950s that feels only too authentic. As Kay struggled through some unwanted advances herself - advances she takes for granted though does not enjoy - I remembered my aunt saying she couldn't watch the television show *Mad Men* because the handsy, arrogant, sexist men were all too realistic and took her back to a place she didn't want to be.

Kay has to decide if she wants to be a pampered, confined wife or a free ranging woman like Eleanor who owns her own home (very unusual for the time). Meanwhile, the book introduces other real-life characters like Jack and Bobby Kennedy and Jaqueline Bouvier, all very young and not yet attached to one another. Kat admires Jackie's work as a photographer, and the future First Lady ends up helping her find a vital clue.

Sprinkled throughout - and bolstered by epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter - are Eleanor's practical words of wisdom. Eleanor's spirit infuses the book, though she is in fact technically a secondary character. It's interesting to see the pairing of a confident older woman (Eleanor would have been in her mid 60's at the time) with a young one still figuring out her life. This is a solid read and a decent mystery with a solution that's somewhat unexpected while remaining believable. The heart-break of the dead woman is not slighted and the mechanics of an investigation involving the influence of a beloved former first lady are strong elements here. I liked meeting Kay and enjoyed seeing her begin her journey to full adulthood. This first voyage is a good start to a series following that path.

#### A DEATH IN DIAMONDS

By S.J. Bennett

Crooked Lane, January, \$29.99

Her Majesty the Queen Investigates #4

Rating: A

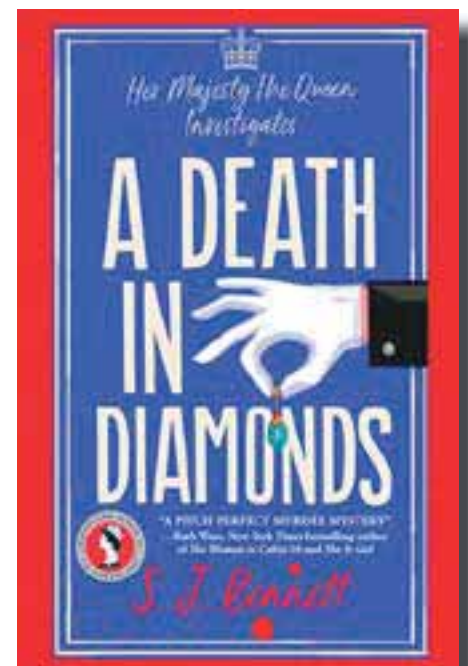
I love this series, and with this title its excellence continues. It was originally published in the UK last year, but thanks to a change of publishers, readers in the US have had to wait until now to get their hands on it. While the central premise of Queen Elizabeth having a private secretary who helps her with undercover investigations may sound a bit silly, Bennett pulls it off thanks to her way with smart plots, great characters and humor. The Queen has access to all kinds of things, of course, but there are also topics that the people around her think a royal should not concern herself with. As portrayed by Bennett, Elizabeth loves solving puzzles, and her private secretary becomes her eyes and ears out in the world.

In the contemporary setting of the series her secretary is a London born Nigerian named Rozie Oshodi. The two women share a kind of mind meld bond, thinking the same way and working well together. This new book is a look back to earlier days, returning to the Queen of 1957, when she was a young married woman in need of a confidant

who is not an old man with a white mustache. She finds an unlikely confrère in Joan McGraw, a secretary at the palace and a former code breaker who worked at Bletchley Park during the war. After receiving an unexpected promotion thanks to the pregnancy of the woman ahead of her, Joan is grudgingly appointed the Queen's Private Secretary despite the reservations of the men in the office.

Bennett, like many other excellent plotters (Allison Montclair and E.J. Copperman spring to mind), is great at setting the hook that pulls the reader through the book. In this one a prostitute is found murdered in the mews house of a high up clergyman (he uses the house for card games), wearing nothing but a tiara, with her - ahem - client found stabbed and strangled to death on the floor next to her. The tiara proves to be a rarity owned by Lord Seymour who had planned to present it to his wife on her 40th birthday. The mystery is how it appeared instead on the head of a dead prostitute.

The tiara was indeed something special - the Queen Mother (to Princess Margaret's annoyance) muses about how she wanted to buy the lovely piece for Margaret but decided not to. The tiara may capture the Queen Mother's interest, but the Queen's mind is fixed



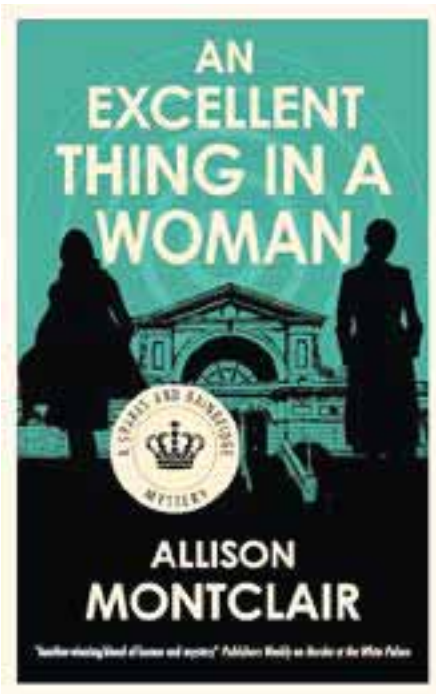
on the location of the murder as well as the oddity of two people being killed without anyone on a densely packed street hearing anything. The Queen has another nagging concern, as Prince Philip had vanished for a time on the same night and in the same general area as the crime.

Among the many reasons I enjoy this series the simplest is probably that I love the Queen and enjoy reading about her. The same is true about stories of any kind about process – from *The West Wing* to many police procedurals. These books provide a fascinating insight into the complex task of running a huge place like Buckingham Palace. (If you are a fan of *The Crown*, as I am, some of the incidents in this book are covered in season 2.) I also like Bennett’s presentation of the woman who dutifully served her country for over 70 years. Appearing out of the limelight, she appears intelligent and slightly humble, keeping her sleuthing machinations in the background and letting the men around her take the credit. I’m sad to say things haven’t changed all that much in the books set decades later, though Rozie is able to operate with a bit more freedom than Joan. A royal treat, these books are simply delicious.

### AN EXCELLENT THING IN A WOMAN

By Allison Montclair  
Severn House, \$29.99, February  
Sparks & Bainbridge #7  
**Rating: A**

This is one of the best series going at the moment, and even though it’s the seventh, this installment retains the freshness and originality of the very first. It follows the adventures of Gwen Bainbridge (a widowed socialite) and Iris Sparks (a former WWII spy), who together run The Right Sort, a marriage bureau in central London. It’s now 1947, and as London recovers from the horrors of war it still finds new things to celebrate, like the dawn of a new technological miracle -- television. Gwen’s beau Sally, a giant sometime playwright, works at the BBC, and is willing to take Gwen, Iris and Gwen’s son and cousin



on a tour of the studio. And thus Montclair inserts the reader and characters into the BBC, the setting for the crime, with a typically deft hand. When a female corpse is discovered during their tour, things become complicated, because the woman, a French dancer at the BBC in the country for a couple of weeks for a broadcast, had previously appeared at the marriage bureau looking for an instant husband.

Another complication appears in the person of Mike, the police detective investigating the case, who also happens to be Iris’s former beau. They have a rough time working together, but when Sally emerges as the main suspect, they all forget their differences and unite. Iris suffers too, as she’s lost Archie (this is not a spoiler as it’s the first sentence of the book) and is drinking far too much. She’s living alone on a narrowboat in the Thames and grieving as she works her way through Archie’s glorious wine stash.

This book has a typical Montclair set up, and the plot is a complex affair of intersecting characters and coincidences, brought to life by a portrayal of the nascent BBC. Their headquarters was the Alexandra Palace – known to all as the “Ally Pally” – where one of my favorite characters spends his days working methodically through buckets

of colored glass shards, reassembling the famously beautiful Palace rose window which was shattered by a wartime bomb. While this book isn’t set during the actual war, there are many reminders, emotional and otherwise, that keep its memory front and center.

While Iris is alone, Gwen has at last established her own household, enjoying her new relationship with Sally and revelling in both her independence from her in-laws and the lunacy court. Over the course of the series, the yin and yang of Iris and Gwen’s friendship has tied things together in a really delightful way.

The *mise en scène* is all I’ve come to hope for in this wonderful series, overflowing with Nazis, the resistance, undercover work, French can-can dancers and puppets. The denouement, orchestrated by Gwen, is bravura as well as emotional, and this series fires on all cylinders to another winning finish line.

**C**ongratulations to Mick Herron for being named the British Crime Writers’ Association Diamond Dagger winner for 2025. This is akin to a Lifetime Achievement Award in the U.S..

Herron is quoted as saying: “I’ve spent the best part of my life—not the majority of it; just the best part—in the crime writers’ community, and to receive this accolade from these friends and colleagues is both a career highlight and a personal joy. I’m touched and thrilled beyond measure, and will try to live up to the honour.”

Thankfully Mick Herron is still relatively young and has many more years to provide us with his Slow Horses series and standalones filled with biting wit and insightful prose. Well deserved.



# Lookin' For A Few Good Books

*Larry Gandle*



## THE OLIGARCH'S DAUGHTER

by Joseph Finder  
Harper, \$30.00, January  
Standalone

**Rating: B**

Paul Brightman has been hiding for years in a small New Hampshire town. He has been found and now must flee into the mountains to evade a certain death. Six years ago he was a successful investor on Wall Street. He met and fell in love with a beautiful woman whose father is a very wealthy Russian living in New York. How did his path take him to this point of running for his life? The answer lies throughout this very long book.

The writing of this book is clunky, at times. The dialogue is stilted. The characters are, overall, caricatures and poorly developed. The plot is beyond silly and reality must be suspended throughout. Yet, as I approached the last third of the book, I could not put it down. The pacing picked up and the pages just flew by. The book is entertaining and perfect for the plane or pool where concentrated reading is not required and the brain could essentially shut down. Recommended.

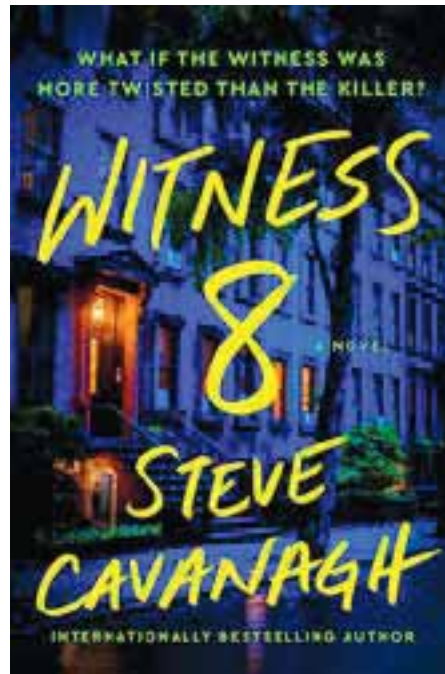
**George's Take:** I agree with Larry's analysis, especially about the book being too long. It would have been better with some good editing. But once I engaged with the characters I was anxious to see how the story turned out. The ending was almost worth wading through 448 pages to get to it. **Rating: B**

## WITNESS 8

by Steve Cavanagh  
Atria, \$29.99, March  
Eddie Flynn #8

**Rating: A**

Ruby has been a domestic helper for multiple families on a street in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Her family was once among the elite but her father's gambling debts put her and her mother in low cost housing in lower Manhattan. She now works for the Jackson family who live on the street. However, as the first line of the book states, "Something is wrong with Ruby Johnson" She witnesses a murder and has a plan in mind to better her situation.



In the meantime, Eddie Flynn must defend a physician who has been accused of murder with the murder weapon found in his closet. The case seems to be open and shut. However, to him something doesn't appear right. To add to his woes, a general contract was put out on Eddie's life. He must try to put an end to it before it is too late.

Steve Cavanaugh brilliantly must juggle multiple plot points throughout

this book. Again, his books are impossible to put down and this one is no exception. So many plot twists just keep coming. Please don't misunderstand me. This book is not great literature but is a helluva lot of fun. Steve continues to keep up the high quality he established in his earlier thrillers. In my opinion he is one of the most entertaining authors writing today.

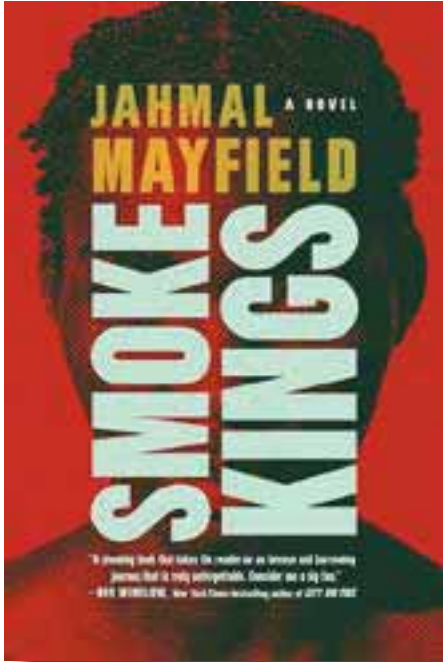
## THE WEALTH OF SHADOWS

by Graham Moore  
Random House, \$30.00, May, 2024  
Standalone  
**Rating: B**

In 1939, Anselm Luxford, working in the financial sector, is asked to come to Washington to join a secret unit that will help defeat the Nazis in Germany. They will do it by isolating them financially. They will freeze bank accounts, form pacts with countries in Latin America preventing manufacturing resources from reaching Germany- shutting down their ability to obtain iron ore used to make weapons, and isolating the country economically. Anselm does this by making deals and working with and against some of the greatest economic minds of the time including John Maynard Keynes of Great Britain. All this while battling spies back home.

This book is a fascinating look at how Germany was defeated not only on the battlefield but economically. It was a new form of warfare and proved quite effective. The story, though interesting is a bit repetitious. Characters are generally not well rounded. The book is based on fact yet there are some inaccuracies as would be acceptable under the fictional heading. An addendum clarifies what is or isn't factual. It is a

solid spy novel and a fascinating look at an historical event that few know about. Recommended.



### SMOKE KINGS

by Jahmal Mayfield

Melville House, \$19.99, February, 2024  
Debut Novel

**Rating: B+**

Nate Evers is a political activist angered over the fact that blacks are still being killed simply for the color of their skin. He explodes with rage when his young cousin, Darius, is senselessly killed. Joined by Darius's brother, Joshua, his girlfriend, Rachel and their friend Isiah, they decide to enact revenge on the injustices done to blacks many years ago by a different generation that has long passed on. Their plan is to scare their victim into thinking they are about to die but letting them live with the promise that they will pay reparations to an unfortunate black family. Everything goes well until they pick the wrong victim and then things get deadly.

The book is unfocused. There are so many characters and subplots that it can be difficult to follow. Eventually the plot becomes one as the book nears completion. At that point, the pacing picks up and the pages fly by. Characters are mostly superficial and some stereotypes.

The book could have used better editing as at least 100 pages could have been trimmed. It is entertaining but I am not sure I would call it one of the best crime fiction books of the year.

### THE DROWNED

by John Banville

Hanover Square, \$28.99, October, 2024  
Strafford & Quirke #4

**Rating: A+**

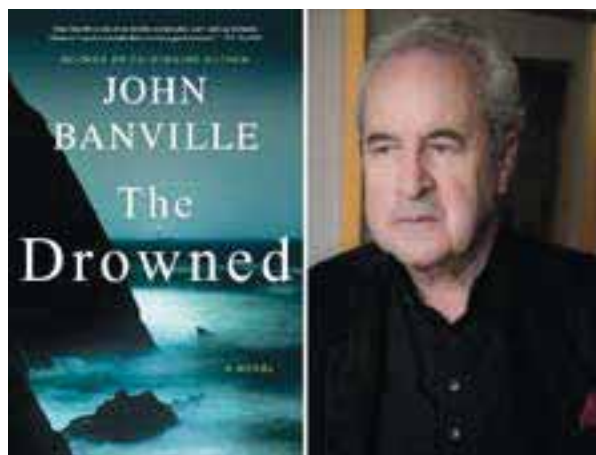
In 1950s Ireland, a local fisherman comes across a luxury car sitting in a field at night with the headlights on and the door open. A man stumbles out of the dark claiming his wife has disappeared. He appears frantic and fears she has thrown herself into the ocean. Detective Inspector Strafford is called in from Dublin to search for answers. As the case appears to get increasingly complicated, he turns to his old colleague, Quirke, a pathologist for his input. Things are not at all what they seem to be.

This is one of the rare books that I have read that when I reached the last page, I was disappointed to leave these characters. There is still so much going on in their lives. John Banville is a master at characterizations and dialogue. This book is so well written, the actual mystery appears to be less compelling than the lives of the characters. Some time ago John Banville, a Booker Prize-winning literary writer decided to write crime fiction. He says, "I'm gentrifying the crime novel. My aim is to turn crime fiction into a literary form." That becomes starkly evident on picking up one of his books. I love what he is doing.

In fact, I would say this book is one of my top five crime fiction books I have ever read. Please read it and see if you agree.

**George Easter's Contrary Opinion:** I read **THE DROWNED** based on Larry's glowing recommendation. If he likes something, I generally do also – but the opposite isn't always true. He occasionally trashes a book that I really like. So I guess turnaround is fair play. I did not like **THE DROWNED** at all and give it a "C" rating. I admit that the author's talent for clever turns of phrasing is elite, but it was surprising to me how dull the story line and the characters were. It wasn't until about page 260 (out of 330 pages) that there was an actual crime to investigate. The only "criminal" brought to justice was a man innocent of the accusations against him. A few of the story lines were left hanging at the end. I've read some of the earlier books about Quirke that the author wrote under the pen name Benjamin Black and thought they were quite good. But Inspector Strafford, the lead character in **THE DROWNED**, has few, if any admirable qualities and I found him decidedly unlikeable. The plot seems to meander with no purpose except to give us windows into the lives of unappealing and uninteresting people.

I wish we had done a Reviewed to Death of this book. It would have been interesting to see the variety of opinions I expect it would have elicited. If any of you are brave enough to read **THE DROWNED** after my comments, please let me know if you agree with Larry or you agree with me.



# Down Under Crime



## Jeff Poppo Reviews

### GUNNAWAH

by Ronni Salt  
Hachette, \$A32.99

**Rating: A-**

The first big Australian debut crime novel of 2025 is Ronni Salt's **GUNNAWAH**.

Set in the Riverina area in 1974, **GUNNAWAH** is an engrossing mixture of crime fiction, historical reflection and coming of age story. Like a lot of good crime fiction, it is set in a period of change, as the local community around Gunnawah awaits the benefits of a proposed irrigation scheme, including those after quick illegal dollars, while across Australia broader social reforms are occurring at a rapid rate.

Into this time of flux comes nineteen-year-old farmgirl Adelaide Hoffman, who applies for a cadetship at the *Gunnawah Gazette*, as the first step in her plan to escape the small town that has not always been good to her. The paper's owner, Valdene Bullark, seeing something of the girl she once was in young Adelaide, puts her straight to work covering the proposed irrigation project. What starts as a routine assignment soon puts Adelaide on the trail of a much bigger story. Water is money in farming communities, and when Adelaide starts asking questions, it's like she's poked a bull ant's nest. Someone will do whatever it takes to stop Adelaide and Val finding out how far the river of corruption and crime runs.

The story starts gradually, but Salt's wry portrayal of the social and political dynamics of the small town keeps the reader very engaged, and there is a good sense of unease. The characters are an interesting collection of the famil-

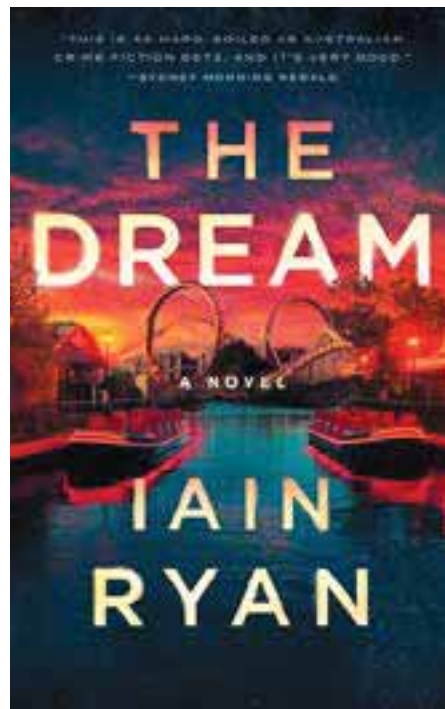
iar and the quirky, and there is a nice smattering of humour as they interact. The mysteries at the core of the book are well conceived, with lots of strands and surprises to them, and it all builds to an exciting and unexpected conclusion.

In all, **GUNNAWAH** is a quirky, but engaging, crime story that provides an accurate insight into the changing nature of Australian society in the 1970s. An outstanding debut.

### THE DREAM

by Iain Ryan  
Ultimo Press, \$A34.99

**Rating: A**



There is a strong James Ellroy feel to the second of Iain Ryan's novels about corruption and murder on the glitzy Gold Coast strip in the 1980s.

As with his 2023 novel **THE STRIP**, **THE DREAM** features a familiar mix

of corrupt cops, sleazy businessmen and outright crooks, all trying to make it rich. **THE DREAM** focuses on three far from perfect characters whose lives become entwined in a web of corruption, greed and possible redemption as the days count down to the 1982 Commonwealth Games.

Detective Bruno Karras, haunted by past secrets, receives mysterious photos of a bloodstained house that lead him into a dangerous investigation. Meanwhile Amy Owens, a reluctant investigator entangled with the underworld, does some dirty jobs for the female owner of a string of brothels and finds herself digging into the very dark dealings of a wealthy businessman. While Mike Nichols, a backroom player and ministerial adviser with big dreams, finds himself caught in the crossfire. As the glittering façade of the Gold Coast begins to crumble in the lead up to the Games, Bruno, Amy and Mike uncover a sinister plot that threatens to consume them all.

This is a fast moving and gritty tale. The plot unfolds with clockwork precision, and there are plenty of shocks along the way to the bloody climax. The milieu of early 1980s Queensland is convincingly evoked, especially the flood of corruption and unregulated policing that was overwhelming the state in those years. Ryan steadily evolves and develops his characters, without ever whitewashing them, and the book smoothly moves to a strong conclusion.

Aussie noir does not get much better than this. Highly recommended.

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

by Shankari Chandran  
Ultimo Press, \$A34.99

**Rating: A-**

Acclaimed mainstream literary writer Shankari Chandran makes a strong entry in the thriller genre with her first spy novel, **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**.

The book opens in Sri Lanka in 2009. Decades of civil war and bloodshed are finally being brought to an end in a very bloody fashion. In the capital, Colombo, tenacious journalist Ameena Fernando is murdered, execution-style, on a busy street near her home, with no witnesses. With pressure in America growing to find Ameena's killer, CIA agent Ellie Harper is sent to seek justice for the journalist's death, with strict instructions: find something, but not too much.

Ellie has been on stress leave and non-agency work, since her last mission in Sri Lanka four years ago, which went tragically wrong. She sees the return to the island as providing a chance to put some old ghosts to rest and maybe settle some scores. However, despite the pending peace Sri Lanka is still a very dangerous place full of corruption, secret agendas and bloodshed.

Told across two timelines, **UNFINISHED BUSINESS** is a powerful novel that impresses with its evocative descriptions and well sketched characters. The depiction of the situation in Sri Lanka, in both 2009 and 2005, is tragic and unnerving, and full of insight. The politics of the time are well captured, and the cynicism of the various international players are convincing. Although it pursues some broad themes, **UNFINISHED BUSINESS** is, at its core, a thriller, and Shankari has filled her book with all elements a spy reader would expect: an edgy, unrelenting hero with violent tendencies; plenty of intrigue; death and bloodshed; exotic descriptions; mystery; and an ending that delivers thrills and a final twist.

A powerful spy novel that will stick in your mind.

## Craig Sisterson Reviews

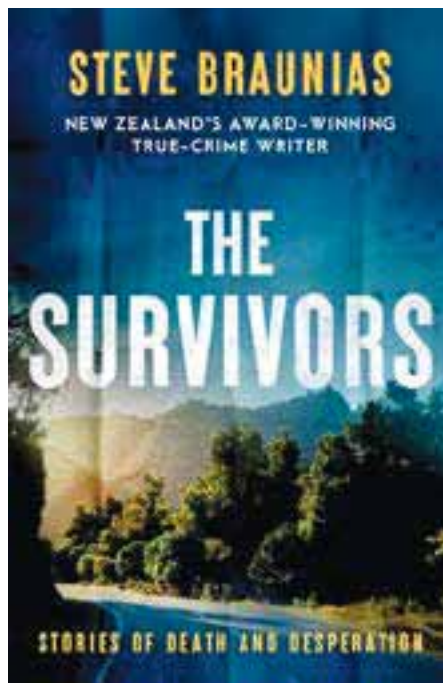
### **THE SURVIVORS**

by Steve Braunias

HarperCollins New Zealand, \$37.99

NZD, July 2024,

**Rating: A**



“For thousands of years, we’ve made up stories about things largely because we haven’t understood them,” says Dr Alex Bartle in the twelfth and final chapter of Steve Braunias’s superb collection of true stories, **THE SURVIVORS**. The Christchurch sleep medicine specialist is talking specifically about the writings and theories of Volker Pilgrim, who feared vampires stealing his sleep, and whose fascinating story bookends **THE SURVIVORS**, with Braunias describing Pilgrim late on as “the governing principle of the entire book, the exemplar of surviving your own life on your own terms”.

But the timeless idea of reaching for stories to explain the unknown, seeking to understand our world and varied lives moving through it, surviving on our own terms or otherwise, applies broadly.

Steve Braunias is a heck of a storyteller, and **THE SURVIVORS** is a fascinating collection that draws us into lives that have attracted Braunias’s curiosity. There’s a troubled French exchange student, unlucky in love, who vanished while going to collect black sands as a souvenir for his mother. Another tale: two hardworking Chinese migrants eking out meagre existences in bleak bedsits, sacrificing to send money home, only for a misunderstanding to lead to

a homicide trial. A would-be arsonist who burned himself alive, having been manipulated by a femme fatale who only faced justice due to a wedding planner turned tenacious detective. A getaway driver for a cop killer.

Summaries don’t do the stories justice; each is soaked in small details, acute observations. Many arise from Braunias’s court reporting, his desire to write about real crimes ‘as a kind of literature’. Chapter 5, ‘Zones of Interest’ is one of the most affecting, as Braunias grapples with his own role as voyeur of horrors inflicted on others, as he reads and takes notes from a 42-volume set of Nuremberg trial transcripts. “The volumes are demonic, a collection of bad spells for extermination.”

While **THE SURVIVORS** digs into some extremely dark areas of humanity, it never reads as too bleak. There are many moments of humanity and light. Braunias confesses he was “among the worst in the business” at traditional court reporting, with its focus on news, total accuracy, and distilling the day’s events. Instead, he was “immediately attracted to the background music of every trial – high comedy, low awfulness, the songs of death”. But now he says he’s putting away his true crime pen.

This will be his final such book. It’s a fitting swansong.

### **LEAVE THE GIRLS BEHIND**

by Jacqueline Bublitz

Emily Bestler Books, \$18.99 USD,

October 2024

**Rating: B+**

Antipodean author Jacqueline Bublitz, who’s split her life between Taranaki in New Zealand and Melbourne in Australia, garnered wide acclaim for her trope-busting debut, **Before You Knew My Name**, a feminist literary thriller that explored the all-too-typical ‘murdered women found in a NYC park’ story we’ve often seen, especially on TV dramas, from a fresh perspective.

That of the victim herself, and the bystander who finds the body.

Critics and reader praise, sales, and



awards flowed, including Fiction Book of the Year at the Australian Book Industry Awards, and double-ups at the crime-loving Davitt Awards in Australia and Ngaio Marsh Awards in New Zealand. Also a shortlisting for the prestigious CWA Gold Dagger for best crime novel in the English language that year; Bublitz was the only female author, and only debut author, to make the shortlist. How do you follow that as a first-time effort?

Well, now Bublitz is back with another fascinating standalone that rakes over some similar ground – true crime obsession and the wider impact of misogynistic murders – while being its own story. In **LEAVE THE GIRLS BEHIND**, New York bartender Ruth-Ann Baker is on high alert after a young girl goes missing from her hometown in Connecticut. Awful memories stir of Ruth-Ann's best friend Beth being abducted and murdered by popular music teacher Ethan Oswald almost twenty years before. Ruth-Ann always felt Oswald had more victims, but Oswald died in prison, so he couldn't have committed this new horror. But still, it stirs Ruth-Ann's past trauma.

She always felt Oswald had many more victims, and perhaps an accomplice. The local police in Connecticut, along with counsellors and her parents, didn't believe her. Especially when she told them she was certain of her beliefs because of Beth's ghost, and the ghosts of other murdered girls who visited Ruth-Ann; looking for help, looking for justice. Could Oswald have had help? Is the current perp somehow linked to what happened many years ago? Or is it just geographic chance, compounded by voices in Ruth-Ann's head?

Bublitz takes readers on an at-times bewildering ride into Ruth-Ann's life, obsessions, and trauma, as well as across the globe as Ruth-Ann decides to take action and follows tenuous leads to New Zealand and Norway, looking for links to Oswald and her ghostly girls. But is our unreliable narrator trying to help a missing girl in the present, ones from

the past, or herself?

Bublitz has conjured another fascinating tale that is likely to stick with readers long after the final page. A story about the messy ripples that are cast by violence, and fear. Ongoing trauma and how that manifests. **Leave the Girls Behind** is not the easiest read, though Bublitz writes well and the text flows smoothly even as the story is murky. Like Australia's famed Vegemite, it may divide readers, while leaving a strong aftertaste either way. An intriguing, impressive sophomore novel.

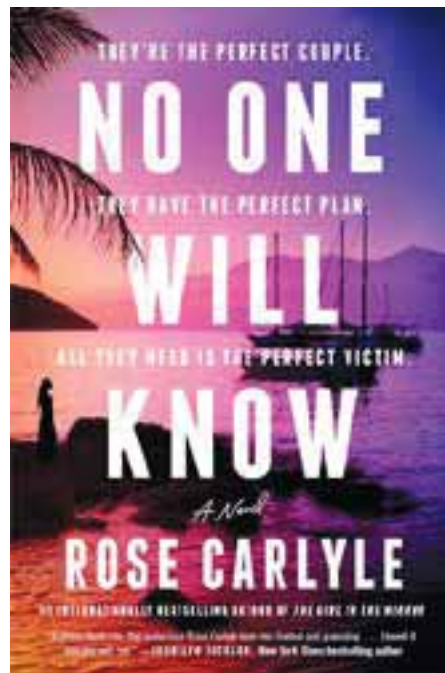
### NO ONE WILL KNOW

by Rose Carlyle

William Morrow, \$30 USD,

October 2024

Rating: B+



Eve Sylvester had wanted to visit Breaksea Lighthouse since she'd first spied it weeks before from the teak deck of the *Torrent* as she sailed towards a mansion and vineyard where an exciting opportunity was promised. A life-changing offer for a young woman with no support.

Eve had fallen in love with lighthouses while crossing the South Pacific with Xander, a casual travel pal who became a lot more during their six months at sea. But now Eve was far from tropical oceans, carrying Xander's baby, and

once gruff, secretive Joseph finished unloading the camp mattress and food crates and left in the dinghy back to the *Torrent*, she'd be all alone. Pregnant, hidden away.

Trapped on a rock surrounded by ferocious seas.

Adventure-loving Auckland lawyer and internationally bestselling novelist Rose Carlyle avoids any 'difficult second novel' wobbles in her cracking new thriller **NO ONE WILL KNOW**.

Fans of Carlyle's smash hit debut **THE GIRL IN THE MIRROR** and new readers alike will find plenty to enjoy in this twisting, propulsive tale centred on Eve Sylvester, a young woman scrambling to survive after her life is upturned by fate and circumstance; along with the nefarious plans of various others who see her as a fitting solution to their own problems. After a car crash rips away the future Eve was hoping for on her return to Sydney, the former foster kid is left broke, desperate, and pregnant.

She has no living relatives, no good friends she can lean on. Achingly aware of the impact of growing up in tough circumstances, Eve can't resist a lucrative offer to nanny for glamorous Julia and Christopher Hygate, a wealthy and charming couple. She will get to live in their mansion estate on a remote Tasmanian island, she'll have a home, and her child will grow up in Paradise Bay rather than what Eve could otherwise offer alone. But has Eve made a Faustian bargain?

Only two novels into her career, Carlyle shows great mastery of pace and narrative drive. She lures readers in quickly to Eve's story, and unleashes a harrowing series of events and perilous challenges. **NO ONE WILL KNOW** hurtles along like an America's Cup hydrofoil, while also engaging emotionally with Eve's story and underlying themes of motherhood and family. It's a sitting or two tale propelled by plenty of suspense and uncertainty, and even for avid 'beach read' or 'airport thriller' readers who may think they can foresee any dangers, Carlyle does a good job throwing in a few curveballs.

**HELL'S BELLS**

by Jill Johnson

Black & White Publishing, \$32.99 AUD,

July 2024

Rating: B+

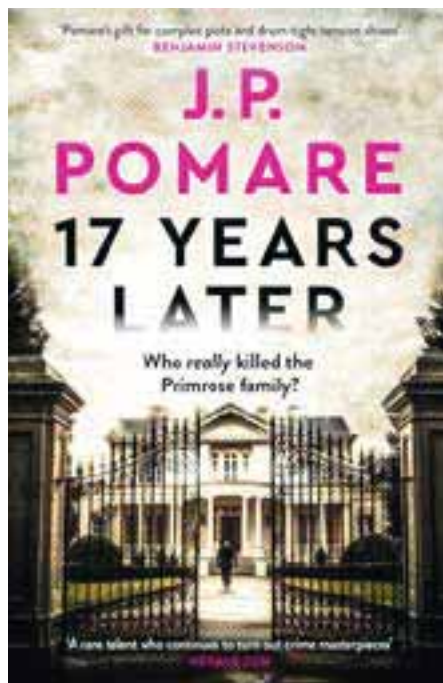
Eustacia Rose is not your typical amateur sleuth. When we first met her in **DEVIL'S BREATH** (published as **THE WOMAN IN THE GARDEN** in the United States), she's prickly, awkward, a disgraced professor of botanical toxicology hiding away from the world while tending a rooftop garden full of poisonous plants and regularly spying on the comings and goings of her attractive neighbour. A gloriously eccentric loner who's as much a mystery herself as the crimes she gets caught up in. While her captivating first outing was a BBC *Between the Covers* pick and dual Ngaio Marsh Awards finalist, it did feel like Eustacia Rose's story deserved to bloom for more than one season.

So it's great to see her back in **HELL'S BELLS**, the second mystery from Brighton UK-based Māori storyteller Jill Johnson. This time Professor Rose has returned to teaching at University College London, only for a sudden death that looks like a possible poisoning and a stalker-ish PhD student with eyes on Eustacia's poisonous plant collection to upturn the life she tries to keep well in order.

When the student also turns up dead, Eustacia feels compelled to investigate.

Johnson, who used to run a leading UK comics store (and later studied for a degree in horticulture), has crafted a wonderfully unusual heroine. Blunt yet unintentionally hilarious at times, fearful yet brave, Eustacia and her relationships with others, often botanically categorised, deliver a fresh feel to the intriguing mystery storylines. A very good read that cements Eustacia Rose as one of the more interesting series characters to appear on the crime and thriller scene in recent times.

This is a growing series (a third, **BELLADONNA**, will be published in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand later in 2025) that will delight classic mystery fans, and those who love quirky, eccentric detectives.



### 17 YEARS LATER

by J.P. Pomare

Hachette Australia, \$32.99 AUD, 1

August 2024

Rating: A

Melbourne-based indigenous storyteller JP Pomare (Ngā Puhī) is one of the most exciting voices to emerge from the 'antipodean noir' crime wave in recent years, crafting a string of intriguing standalone thrillers that combine page-whirring narratives with nuanced characters and the kind of elevated writing you can point to in defence of genre whenever the tired old 'literary fiction vs popular fiction' arguments and misperceptions start rearing their ugly head once more.

In **17 YEARS LATER**, prison psychologist Te Kuru (TK) Phillips once believed that young Māori chef Bill Kareama, convicted of the slaughter of wealthy English immigrants the Primrose family in their stately home outside the small town of Cambridge, New Zealand, had been wrongfully convicted.

Bill was a defendant who'd become a pariah, found guilty of horrendous violence that 'shocked the nation', only for questions to later creep in. Was the prosecution as solid as it seemed? Had the justice system delivered injustice? For years TK was a fierce campaigner

for Bill, noting gaps in the prosecution case and leaps made by the jury in the rush to hold someone responsible for the slaughter of the Primrose family, that he hoped may lead to a successful appeal, or retrial.

Then, TK walked away. Why?

Australian true crime podcaster Sloane Abbott is riding high and hungover after her investigations into domestic violence earned her a major award, upstaging traditional media. When her assistant Tara suggests looking into Bill's case, Sloane is intrigued by the fact Bill has spent 17 years in prison, never acknowledging his guilt, even though he likely would have been paroled by now if he had. She initially declines to look into it, until a grain of truth among her regular dose of online hate makes Sloane realise her career's been built on victims her audience – 'female, white, twenty to fifty' – most identify with. So she decides to swerve into something new: race, class, and a potentially innocent indigenous man. Except Bill, the family's live-in chef, has never talked to any journalists.

Sloane is going to need TK's help.

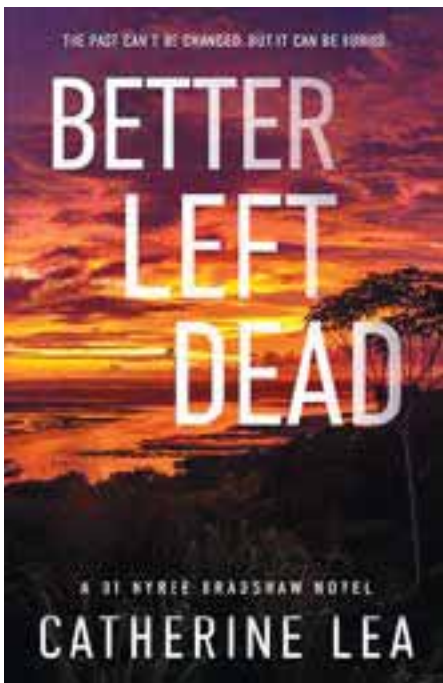
Pomare unfurls his tale through multiple timeframes and tripartite narratives – Sloane, Bill, and TK – luring readers in with many questions and keeping the tension high throughout. Why did TK walk away from the case? Did Bill really do it, or was he railroaded by a biased system? Is Sloane interested in truth and justice, or just a good story to engage her listeners and pump up her profile?

**17 YEARS LATER** is a slick read with plenty of substance, where the truth is slippery; a fast-flowing tale that never feels 'thin'. Pomare, who won a Ngaio Marsh Award for his outstanding debut **CALL ME EVIE**, and has seen later thrillers become #1 Audible bestsellers, shortlisted for awards, and adapted for the screen (Disney+ series **The Clearing**), has a great touch for character and tension. In 2021, Pomare spoke with Māori and Pasifika online magazine *E-Tangata* about crime fiction being a perfect vehicle for social commentary, and **17 YEARS LATER** is further evidence.

It's a page-whirring thriller that goes beyond its central hook of 'did Bill do it' – is he the victim of a miscarriage of justice or a manipulative killer? – to explore societal biases, flaws or blind-spots in our criminal justice system, and the ethics of true crime podcasting. A stay-up-all-night read with plenty to say.

**BETTER LEFT DEAD**

by Catherine Lea  
 Bateman Books, \$36.99 NZD,  
 September 2024  
**Rating: B+**



This second instalment in experienced Kiwi crime and thriller author Catherine Lea's police procedural series starring tough, middle-aged investigator DI Nyree Bradshaw of the Far North CIB shows a storyteller really hitting her stride. After several mystery and thrillers featuring northern hemisphere settings and heroes, including a trilogy starring US socialite-turned-sleuth Elizabeth McClaine, former tech businesswoman Lea 'came home' with DI Bradshaw in **THE WATER'S DEAD**.

This time Bradshaw and her team are faced with the puzzling murder of local hoarder Lizzy Bean, who is brutally garrotted in her own home, that's overflowing with junk of all kinds.

Making for tricky forensics at the scene. A second murder further complicates matters. Does a list of names of former foster kids have anything to do with the killings? Or had some locals who'd had issues with Lizzy Bean and her lifestyle choices play a part? Meanwhile many of the police in the region are instead focused on the missing daughter of a local councillor, and Bradshaw must also deal with the fallout of some life-changing news dropped on her by son Tony, who is in prison for murder.

Lea does a great job soaking readers in the rural and smalltown Northland setting, including the poverty and

problems – drugs, gangs, mental health, greed – lurking beneath the picturesque region's tourist-enticing landscapes. Nyree Bradshaw is an intriguing series star, a little different to the norm even in a sea of police procedurals and small-town noir that's out there.

Overall, **BETTER LEFT DEAD** is a very good, gritty read, where Lea makes readers care about the people in the story – beyond the main characters, too -- as much as finding the killer. Hopefully this is a sign of things to come for a heroine, a wider cast, and a setting that deserves an ongoing series. Time will tell.

**Agatha Award Nominations**



**BEST CONTEMPORARY NOVEL**

- A COLLECTION OF LIES BY CORNIE BEERY
- A MIDNIGHT PUZZLE BY GIGI PANDIAN
- A VERY WOODSY MURDER BY ELLEN BYRON
- FONDUE OR DIE BY KORINA MOSS
- THE DARK WIVES BY ANN CLEEVES

**BEST HISTORICAL NOVEL**

- HALL OF MIRRORS BY JOHN COPENHAVER
- THE LAST HOPE BY SUSAN ELIA MACNEAL
- THE PARIS MISTRESS BY MALLY BECKER
- THE WHARTON PLOT BY MARIAH FREDERICKS
- TO SLIP THE BONDS OF EARTH BY AMANDA FLOWER

**BEST FIRST NOVEL**

- A DEADLY ENDEAVOR BY JENNY ADAMS
- GHOSTS OF WAIKIKI BY JENNIFER K. MORITA
- HOUNDS OF THE HOLLYWOOD BASKERVILLES BY ELIZABETH CROWENS
- THREADS OF DECEPTION BY ELLE JAUFFRET
- YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID BY K.T. NGUYEN

**BEST SHORT STORY**

- "A MATTER OF TRUST" BY BARB GOFFMAN, THREE STRIKES—YOU'RE DEAD
- "EYNISJARA" BY KRISTOPHER ZGORSKI, MYSTERY MOST INTERNATIONAL
- "SATAN'S SPIT" BY GABRIEL VALJAN, TALES OF MUSIC, MURDER AND MATH: BOUCHERCON 2024
- "SINS OF THE FATHER" BY KERRY HAMMOND, MYSTERY MOST INTERNATIONAL
- "THE POSTMAN ALWAYS FURTS TWICE" BY BARB GOFFMAN, AGATHA AND DERRINGER GET COZY

**BEST NON-FICTION**

- ABINGDON'S BOARDINGHOUSE MURDER BY GREG LILLY
- AGATHA CHRISTIE, MARPLE: EXPERT ON WICKEDNESS BY MARK ALDRIDGE
- SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE MURDERERS: CRITIQUING THE COLUMBO KILLERS BY CHRIS CHAN
- THE BOOKSHOP: A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN BOOKSTORE BY EVAN FRISS
- WRITING THE COZY MYSTERY: AUTHORS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR CRAFT EDITED BY PHYLLIS M. BETZ

**BEST CHILDREN'S/YA MYSTERY**

- FIRST WEEK FREE AT THE ROOMY TOILET: A JUNE KNIGHT MYSTERY BY JOSH PACHTER
- SASQUATCH OF HARRIMAN LAKE BY K.B. JACKSON
- SID JOHNSON & THE WELL-INTENDED CONSPIRACY BY FRANCES SCHOONMAKER
- THE BIG GREY MAN OF BEN MACDHUI BY K.B. JACKSON
- THE SHERLOCK SOCIETY BY JAMES PONTI

# Digging Into The Global Crime Spree

*Craig Sisterson*



**K**ia ora and giddy fellow mystery lovers, I hope that you've all enjoyed some joyful moments over the festive season and the beginnings of this new year.

As the calendar switched from 2024 to 2025, I found myself reflecting on lots of bookish highlights from the past year or so – great reads and great events – as well as looking ahead to what may be in store in the year ahead. Lots to look forward to, hopefully.

While I was unable to attend Bouchercon in Nashville last year, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a trio of terrific British crime fiction festivals in the latter part of the 2024: Bute Noir, a wonderfully intimate festival on a Scottish island held in early August; Bloody Scotland, which to my mind may be one of the best literary festivals in the world, held in historic Stirling (think William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, and Rob Roy – the real life versions, not Mel Gibson and Liam Neeson) in mid-September; and Chiltern Kills, a terrific new charitable one-day festival held just outside London in October, with all proceeds going to Centrepoint, a UK charity that provides accommodation and support to homeless young people.

It's the brainchild of British boxer turned lawyer and thriller writer Tony Kent and Northern Irish TV producer and author Paul Waters. Though as the lads said onstage last year, they may

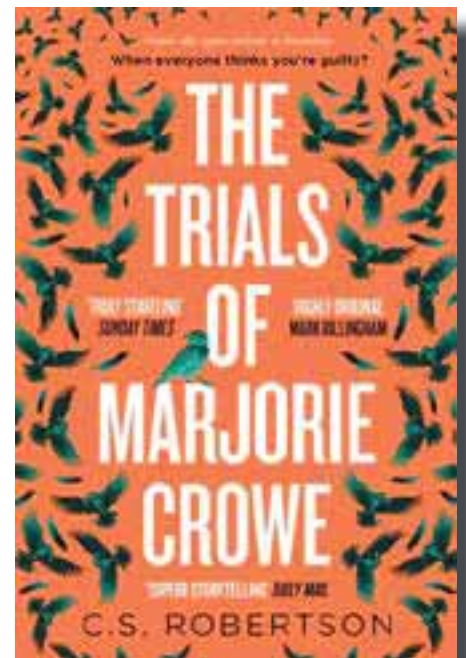
be the frontmen for the festival, but it only happens because of their wives' amazing organisation and work, and dozens of top authors keen to help out the Centrepoint charity.

I chaired several author panels at Bute Noir and Bloody Scotland, including with some fellow antipodeans, terrific authors like Dinuka McKenzie, Michael Bennett, and Vanda Symon (I highly recommend each of their mystery series – check them out), who'd made the long journey over. Personally, while reading and writing are rather solo pursuits in nature, I do love to meet up with other crime readers and authors; there's a collegiality and buzz at such events, and it's great to be around so many creative people. I always come away energised, refreshed, and inspired, to some degree. Even if the festivals can be jam-packed. If you're a keen reader who's never been to a book event or festival, I'd recommend giving it a go.

Who knows, maybe we'll both end up at the same festival one day. If so, feel free to come up and say giddy. For now though, before we dive into some reviews of some good and great books, here's a wee offstage interview I did with Scottish crime writer CS Robertson on the lawn at Chiltern Kills. Along with being a terrific author, Robertson is on the board of Bloody Scotland and a co-founder of Bute Noir.

## THE TRIALS OF MARJORIE CROWE

by C. S. Robertson  
Hodder & Stoughton, \$26.99,  
September 2024  
**Rating: A**



Burn the witch. History doesn't repeat but it often rhymes, as they say, and in Scottish author CS Robertson's terrific standalone thriller the rhyming echoes from the past involve witchcraft, and how women who stand apart from 'normal society' have been persecuted throughout the centuries; sometimes fatally, often by their closest neighbours. Think the Salem Witch Trials, where 200 people were accused of witchcraft on the flimsiest

of evidence, and two dozen executed or died in custody.

In **THE TRIALS OF MARJORIE CROWE**, twice a day the titular character walks the same route through and around the village of Kilgoyne, determinedly keeping on track even when that means walking right through a pub where she can face stares and jeers. She's the village metronome, the 'weird old lady' living on the outskirts that some kids taunt, and others are fascinated by. How old is Marjorie, and is she a retired librarian, a former pharmacist, or a witch? When local teen Charlie McKee is found hanging in the woods, the village begins to turn on Marjorie. Then social media. Burn the witch.

Then another youngster goes missing...

Marjorie can't explain her actions or trust her own recollections. Is she a victim, or a monster?

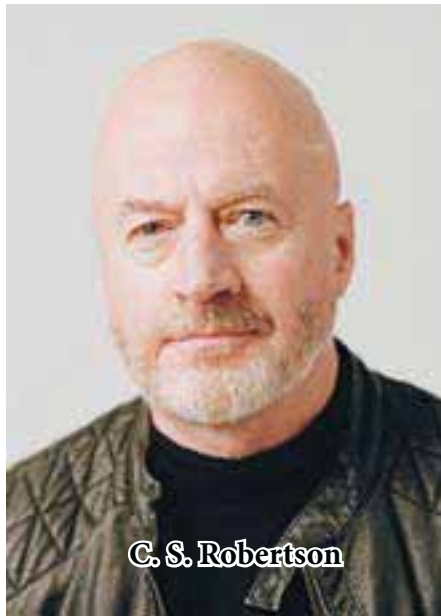
Robertson deftly draws readers into an unsettling, character-centric crime story that dips into the occult while being horrifyingly plausible. Internet pile-ons akin to historic lynch-mobs. Fears of anyone different, or anything that's not easily explained. Interspersed vignettes about real-life Scottish women accused of witchcraft in centuries past, and executed, are a poignant reminder of how easily distrust is stoked into persecution, how those in power may abuse it, and the ubiquitous-ness of misogyny. History doesn't repeat, but rhymes. Burn the witch.

An unusual, terrific crime thriller

## An interview with C. S. Robertson

**What was the inspiration behind THE TRIALS OF MARJORIE CROWE, which is a fascinating small-town mystery threaded with historical themes about witch trials in Scotland?**

CS Robertson: I think this one



C. S. Robertson

started with the character of Marjorie. I wanted to write about an outsider.

I wanted to write about how we treat outsiders as a society, because it's something that we should be getting better at, but we seem to be getting worse at. So I wanted to set Marjorie as a central character, have her be eccentric and misunderstood by the small village that she lives in, and then look at the consequences of her being blamed for something that she may or may not have done, and how the village, and the locals react.

**You intersperse Marjorie's story with wee vignettes about real-life Scottish women who were accused of witchcraft, treated horrendously and often executed in centuries past. While people may be familiar with the Salem Witch Trials from the United States, you've spoken about how witchcraft and witch trials were a huge thing in Scottish history...**

CSR: Yeah, there's a couple, in particular, of mass outbreaks of witch trials in Scotland. There was a mania for it, led by King James VI, who was convinced in his madness that witches were out to bring him down and that they sent storms to try and sink his ship in order to kill him. So it really

came from the very top.

But although there were witch trials across Europe in those centuries, in Scotland, we tried and executed five times as many people per capita as anywhere else in Europe. It was just complete mania, and mainly against women. Their crimes were sometimes for prescribing ailments and trying to make people better with their terrible natural medicines.

But sometimes it was just for gossiping on upsetting men, and the reasons we would think ridiculous, but the outcomes were just brutal and horrendous. And what I wanted to you do in using those vignettes was the old line, if we don't learn from history, then we're doomed to repeat it, and I think that's in many ways what we're still doing.

**Writers often talk about having an insider-outsider perspective, how it can be helpful to have some distance even on things we know well, or places we call home. *The Trials of Marjorie Crowe* is a very Scottish story, but I understand you wrote quite a lot of it while residing on the far side of the world, in Dunedin, New Zealand – although admittedly that may be the most Scottish place outside Scotland. What impact do you think that had?**

CSR: I think it helped. My head was in that space in Scotland, but I was living in Dunedin, and the great thing about that was it gave me the time and space to write in a fantastic setting, and it was a great opportunity to go and do that. But yeah, it did emphasize that outsider aspect of being removed from the place I was writing about. The setting of *The Trials of Marjorie Crowe* is only about fifteen miles from our own home, but I was writing it while being however many thousands of miles away. So it did just deepen that sense of being an outsider, and making me think from that outsider's point of view. It absolutely does help. It was slightly odd being so far away, but

only in a positive sense.

**Can you tell us something about what you're working on next, because you've written crime series and standalones, but I understand the next project is something new?**

CSR: Yeah, something different and more reckless. I'm writing a book with my wife Alexandra Sokoloff, a screenwriter and novelist. We've decided to write a crime series together, set in California, where she's from. I had the concept for the book, and persuaded her that it was a good idea to do this. Sometimes it seems a good idea, sometimes not. But we finished book one and we're halfway through book two, and we're learning how to write together. We're still married, and no one has killed anyone yet. Thought it's come close a couple of times. So far, so good.

## Reviews of Recent Reads

### CLETE

by James Lee Burke

Atlantic, \$27.00, June 2024

**Rating: A**

For decades James Lee Burke has not just been on crime writing's top shelf, he's been the equivalent of a 'locked in the cabinet for special occasions' bottle; among the highest quality you can find. Fortunately we all get to read him, if we wish. Burke, who turned 88 in December, is aging like a fine bourbon, or a Tom Brady or LeBron James, continuing to perform at the highest levels far beyond when most have retired. His Civil War saga **FLAGS ON THE BAYOU** won last year's Edgar Award for Best Novel; Burke is the first American to win 'the Oscar of Crime Writing' thrice.

Now in **CLETE**, he brings us a fresh take on his beloved series starring Dave Robicheaux.

Also last year, the great author SA Cosby, one of a newer generation of writers who could take the baton from James Lee Burke as the crime genre's best, posed a question on social media about the toughest characters in

mystery fiction. Interestingly, many prime contenders were sidekicks, such as Mouse from Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins books or Joe Pike from Robert Crais's Elvis Cole tales.

And of course another character to get plenty of mentions was Clete Purcel himself, the long-time friend and 'podner' of aging Cajun detective Dave Robicheaux. Or as Burke has described him over the years: an 'albino ape' in a porkpie hat, a trickster of folklore, a quasi-psychotic jarhead who came back from Vietnam with a chest full of medals and memories he never shared.

In **CLETE**, Burke takes us inside the viewpoint of this 'archangel in disguise with strings of dirty smoke rising from his wings'. After his car is ransacked by thugs tied to a Mexican cartel, Clete decides to trail the culprits; meanwhile he's hired by mysterious Clara Bow to investigate her slippery ex-husband. Then there's deaths that seem linked to a heavily tattooed man. A hallucinating Clete and Robicheaux hear rumours of a lethal new drug perhaps tied to the thugs who destroyed his car.

**CLETE** is a great read, especially for longtime fans of Burke's work. While it centres 'the sidekick', in the same way that Michael Connelly's book starring Mickey Haller or Renee Ballard can give us a fresh perspective on Harry Bosch – an outside view rather than through the eyes of the longtime hero – Burke's terrific change-up also gives readers a new perspective on Clete and Dave both.

Vivid and violent, **CLETE** skitters along on Burke's masterful prose, soaks us in its Louisiana setting, has more murky layers than a swamp, and gives readers long-time and new a haymaker of a read.

### ECHO

by Tracy Clark

Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, December 2024

**Grade: A-**

Edgar and Anthony Award nominee Tracy Clark returns with a tense third instalment in her acclaimed series starring Detective Harriet 'Harri' Foster that raises questions about the ongoing impact of trauma and loss, and the fine

line between justice and revenge. On a frigid February morning, two college girls discover a near-frozen body of a young man in an empty lot, leading to Harri and her Chicago PD colleagues investigating tragedies present and past at Hardwicke House, the home to Belverton College's exclusive Minotaur Society. Matters quickly become complicated, as the victim is Brice Collier, the scion of billionaire Sebastien Collier, who owns Hardwicke House and is a major benefactor to Belverton College. An absent father, who still wields plenty of power.

What does it mean that Brice's death looks a lot like a student hazing gone wrong, 30 years before?

As she navigates the lies and obfuscations of many involved, Harri must also deal with a shadowy figure who taunts her about how corruption led the way to her former partner's suicide, and seems to want to play a dangerous game that threatens to upturn Harri's work and personal life. And with the police department refusing to further investigate her partner's death, Harri is left frustrated.

Dangerously ready to boil over.

Clark crafts a very good read; a riveting tale that quickly lures you in and then has great narrative drive throughout several twists and turns, as well as plenty of substance. Harri, the only black female detective in a male-dominated police force, is an intriguing series heroine, with plenty to unpack along the way. Talented and determined, with a stubborn streak that could cause issues. Clark doesn't shy away from the impact of police work on Harri and her colleagues as they face dark deeds on a daily basis. The constraints, the policies, the stresses and pressures and power plays that can derail or shackle investigations. There's a growing ensemble feel too, as others in the squad and surrounds have key roles to play, and bring added depth rather than being mere foils for Harri.

Overall, **ECHO** is an excellent read in a strong series that may leave many readers, like me, wanting plenty more of Detective Harriet Foster and her colleagues and friends. Recommended.

**THE WAITING**

by Michael Connelly  
 Little, Brown, \$30.00  
 October 2024,  
**Rating: A-**

Former Hollywood 'Late Show' detective Renee Ballard returns to the fore in **THE WAITING**, Michael Connelly's riveting new novel that sees the now-head of the Open-Unsolved Unit juggling three career-threatening cases. When beach-loving Ballard's personal items (including gun and badge) are stolen when she's surfing one morning, she's compelled to conduct an off-the-books investigation to retrieve them before those in the department that may want an excuse to oust her find out.

This leads Ballard and retired detective Harry Bosch into the sort of harm they couldn't envisage would ever arise from simple car thefts by the beach, but has been simmering barely beneath the surface of modern-day America. Meanwhile, Ballard's volunteer-based cold case unit gets a familial hit on a long-dormant killer, the Pillowcase Rapist, that points to a high-ranking judge, and Harry's daughter Maddie, an LAPD patrol cop, offers to volunteer for Ballard's unit, having uncovered startling new evidence relating to one of LA's most infamous unsolved crimes, the Black Dahlia case.

It's good to be riding with Ballard and Bosch again. While the three cases provide plenty of page-turning intrigue, along the way **THE WAITING** also deepens readers understanding of Ballard; her family history, what drives her, the cracks in her armour. Vintage Connelly, another great read.

**FATAL GAMBIT**

by David Lagercrantz,  
 translated by Ian Giles  
 Knopf, \$30.00, September 2024  
**Rating: B+**

Throughout his career, Swedish journalist and storyteller David Lagercrantz has had a deep interest in – and brilliant touch for – enigmatic,

eccentric characters, both fictional and real-life.

In terms of global readers, he's likely best known for deftly continuing Stieg Larsson's iconic 'Millennium' series starring goth hacker antihero Lisbeth Salander. While some fans found it blasphemous that series would continue beyond what Larsson had written before his death, others embraced the ongoing Salander tales, and even considered that while Larsson created the brilliant characters and their fascinating world, Lagercrantz was arguably the better actual writer.

Before he took on the potentially poisoned chalice of the Millennium series, Lagercrantz had already penned books on persecuted maths genius Alan Turing and mercurial footballer Zlatan Ibrahimović.

Outsiders, eccentrics, oddballs and geniuses. Like Salander.

And like Hans Rekke in Lagercrantz's own new crime series set in Sweden, which began with 2022's **DARK MUSIC**, which introduced a detective duo akin to a modern twist on Holmes and Watson. Hans Rekke is an upper-class Swedish professor, gifted in many ways yet stricken by self-doubt and suicidal tendencies. Michaela Vargas is a young community cop forged in a tough neighbourhood whose parents were political refugees and who may one day have to arrest her own brothers. Thrust together by the troubling murder of an immigrant football referee, to find the killer Vargas and Rekke had to uncover truths many powerful people wanted hidden, and battle themselves as well.

Now, in **FATAL GAMBIT**, the Sherlockian adventures continue as the husband of a supposedly long-dead financier brings tough Vargas a holiday snap he swears shows her still living. Vargas loops in Rekke, but as they investigate Rekke is falling apart again, Vargas is in conflict with her gangster brother, and the unlikely duo uncover a conspiracy involving high-ranking Swedish officials, international bankers, and organised crime in eastern Europe.

Then there's an old enemy from Rekke's past, re-emerging.

Lagercrantz masterfully weaves all the threads together in a terrific tale that gives a few nods here and there to his love of Conan Doyle, while being a modern crime thriller that builds to a thrilling finale. Two books in, it's already a very good series. More please.

**GUIDE ME HOME**

by Attica Locke  
 Mulholland Books, \$29.00,  
 September 2024  
**Rating: A**

For me, as a lifelong mystery reader and now book awards judge in several countries, Texas-born Attica Locke's superb 2017 crime novel **BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD**, the first in her series starring black Texas Ranger Darren Mathews, may be one of the best crime novels of the past decade, with its rich storytelling, great touch for character and place, and incisive observations about many issues including dangerous rhetoric emboldening a white supremacist underbelly clinging on in America.

Five years after its excellent sequel, **HEAVEN MY HOME**, we now have a fitting finale to Locke's outstanding 'Highway 59' trilogy. With the legal consequences of past choices still hanging over him like a sword of Damocles, a bourbon-soaked Mathews hands in his badge. Then his mother, Bell Callis, who despite her long absence from Darren's life has managed to play a key role in his many troubles, reappears. Apparently sober, this time, and wanting Darren's help to find out happened to Sera Fuller, a black college girl who seems to have gone missing from an otherwise all-white sorority where Darren's mother now works as a cleaner. Except everyone says she's not missing.

Disillusioned by how law and justice are being twisted in Trump's America, Mathews reluctantly agrees, only to uncover a snake's den of deceit, and discover far more about his own family history.

# DP Calendar



March 13-16, 2025  
**Left Coast Crime**  
Denver, Colorado

Guests of Honor: Sara Paretzky, Mauel Ramos, John Copenhaver  
Website: <https://leftcoastcrime.org/2025/>



June 13-14, 2025  
**Capital Crime**  
London, England  
Details to Follow

Website: <https://www.capitalcrime.org/>



September 12-14, 2025  
**Bloody Scotland**  
Stirling, Scotland

Guests of Honor: TBA  
Website: [bloodyscotland.com](http://bloodyscotland.com)



April 25-27, 2025  
**Malice Domestic 37**  
Bethesda, Maryland

Guests of Honor: Marcia Talley, Donna Andrews, Gigi Pandian, Lucy Worsley  
Website: [www.malicedomestic.net/](http://www.malicedomestic.net/)



June 17-21, 2025  
**ThrillerFest XX**  
New York City, NY

Guests of Honor: Janet Evanovich, John Grisham, James Patterson, Oyinkan Braithwaite, Jennifer Hillier  
Website: [thrillerfest.com](http://thrillerfest.com)



October 21-25, 2026  
**Cross-Border Crimes**  
**Bouchercon**  
Calgary, Canada

May 15-18, 2025  
**CrimeFest**  
Bristol, UK

Guests of Honor: TBA  
Website: [crimefest.com](http://crimefest.com)



BOUCHERCON NEW ORLEANS 2025

SEPTEMBER 3 - 7, 2025

NEW ORLEANS MARRIOTT

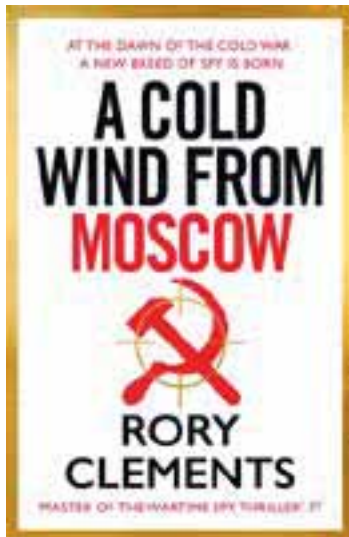
# BLOOD ON THE BAYOU

Case Closed



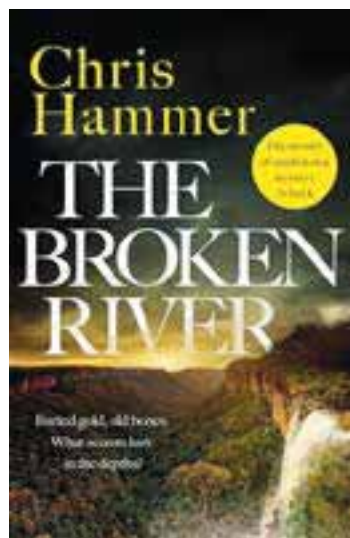
[www.bouchercon2025.com](http://www.bouchercon2025.com)

# What's New In the U.K.

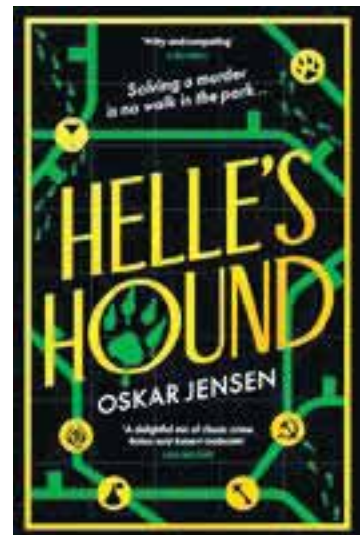


**A COLD WIND FROM MOSCOW**, Rory Clements (Zaffre, £16.99, January). Winter, 1947. Britain's secret services have been penetrated. The country is more vulnerable than ever - and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin knows it. He decides it is time to send his master of 'Special Tasks' to create extra chaos. But Stalin has a more important motive than mere disruption. He has a man on the inside who must be protected at all costs - a communist super-spy who has the secrets of the atomic bomb at his fingertips. Freya Bentall, a senior MI5 officer, no longer knows who to trust and is left with one option: to bring in an outsider whose loyalty is beyond question - Cambridge professor Tom Wilde. His task: to find the traitor in MI5. Bentall has three main suspects and Wilde must get close to them all. That means delving deep into the criminal underworld, attaching himself to the cultural elite of the arts and finding a way into the extreme reaches of British politics.

**THE BROKEN RIVER**, Chris Hammer (Wildfire, £20.00, January). A body has been discovered on the riverbanks of The Valley, a remote community in the hills of New South Wales. The gold mine at the heart of The Valley was once the lifeblood of this region, but it has been flooded for decades. Over the years, many have tried and failed to bring it back to life. Now, most believe the mine is barren. The victim is Wolfgang Burnside, deputy mayor - a champion of change or local schemer, depending on who you ask. He had been working on plans to take the Valley off-grid with hydro-power using the lake surrounding the abandoned mine. Until he was poisoned, his body dumped in the river for all to see. Detectives Nell Buchanan and Ivan Lucic are dispatched to investigate. The warning is clear - there are secrets lurking in the depths of this Valley, secrets worth more than their weight in gold. What price will this town have to pay to ensure that they never see the light of day?



**HELLE'S HOUND**, Oskar Jensen



(Viper, £16.99, January). Dame Charlotte Lazerton -- eminent art historian and mentor of Danish academic Torben Helle -- is dead. And to make things worse, she was found partially eaten by her Irish wolfhound, Mortimer. While the police believe that she died of natural causes, Torben becomes convinced that Charlotte was murdered, although as usual no one pays any attention to him. That is, until he gains the confidence of a policeman who has watched too many Nordic Noir television shows and is ready to listen to any Scandinavian in a fetching woolly jumper.



**THE DAUGHTER**, T. M. Logan (£16.99, March). Lauren can't wait to see her daughter again, to pick her up from university at the end of her first term. But when she arrives at her hall and knocks on the door to her room, a

stranger opens it. At first, Lauren thinks she must have the wrong room, or the wrong floor. Maybe even the wrong building. But she soon realizes the truth: Evie's not there. She hasn't been there for weeks. *So where is she?*

**OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES**, Clare Mackintosh (Shere, £16.99, February). The Hill is the kind of place everyone wants to live: luxurious, exclusive and safe. But now someone is breaking and entering these Cheshire homes one by one, and DS Leo Brady suspects the burglar is looking for something, or someone, in particular. Over the border in Wales, DC Ffion Morgan recovers the body of an estate agent from the lake. There's no love lost between Ffion and estate agents, but who hated this one enough to want her dead - and why? As their cases collide, Ffion and Leo discover people will pay a high price to keep their secrets behind closed doors .



**BLACK TAG**, Simon Mayo (Bantam Press, £16.99, January). Your house is on fire. What do you save? You have seconds to decide. If everything is about to burn, what do you rescue first?

When the West End Gallery in London's fashionable Coal Drops Yard is set alight, the fire service must use the list of paintings lodged with it -- a grab list -- to snatch the key pieces of art from the flames. But something has been altered. It's the wrong list. Then the ashes reveal another tragedy: an unidentified

dead body. Someone who shouldn't have been in the gallery. Crusading journalist Fanie Madden wants to know who it is and why they were there. Soon it becomes apparent that the ashes are hiding much more than they should be -- and that this is much more than a casual act of arson.



**MURDER FOR BUSY PEOPLE**, Tony Parson (Century, £20.00, January). Emma Moon is out.

She's served 16 years for a notorious armed robbery that left two men dead -- and enriched many more. But Emma Moon never talked. She kept the code. She never revealed who was with her on the day of the robbery. She never told who killed those two men. And now she is free -- and everything has gone. Her family. Her share of the money. And her faithless husband. So Emma Moon is in a hurry. Because it is payback time. And after all those years inside, she has friends who will do anything for her. As the bodies of the innocent and the guilty pile up, only one detective stands between a career criminal and her quest for revenge. The same man who, as a fresh-faced policeman, arrested her all those years ago. Max Wolfe is back.

**THE HIDDEN HAND**, Stella Rimington (Bloomsbury, £20.00, January). **The Student:** Li Min, a Chinese student, is forced by her government to transfer from Harvard to Oxford University, where she is recruited to an elite Chinese study centre based out of St Felix's



College.

**The Scapegoat:** Meanwhile, the centre's newly recruited head stumbles on its more sinister purpose: recruiting Chinese and sympathetic British students to steal high-value research and intellectual property. Unsure who at the university he can trust, he turns to CIA agent Manon Tyler for help.

**THE LAST TRUTHS WE TOLD**, Holly Watt (Raven Books, £16.99, January). Twenty years ago, nine university friends made a series of predictions about what would happen to each of them after college. Now they've all gathered together for the weekend. Not for a reunion but for a reveal. Some of them have gone on to staggering success, others to more mundane lives. And one of them is missing. Before her death Lily seemed agitated. Even scared. In the weeks before her death, she called Maggie, wanting to talk but then refusing to say what was frightening her. Now Maggie is beginning to realise that not everyone at the house this weekend is who they appeared to be. And those who are lying are prepared to do anything to stop the truth coming out.



U.K.

## Reviews



## Ali Karim Review

LEO

by Deon Meyer

Hodder & Stoughton, £22.00, October  
(in U.S., February 2025)

Benny Griessel #8

Rating: A

It has been a little while since we've been riding shotgun with Detective Benny Griessel in South Africa but the wait is finally over with the release of this explosive and violent thriller.

While preparing for his upcoming wedding, Griessel, with partner Vince Cupido, get involved investigating the death of a female student cyclist on a desolate mountain pass, as well as the death of the principal suspect Basie Small found dead with all the trappings of a professional assassination. Their superiors seem keen to dismiss Basie Small's murder as a robbery gone tragically wrong. What Basie Small was 'doing' may lead Benny and Vince into dangerous intrigue and a conspiracy of sorts that lies at the heart of the country – or does it?

Deon Meyer, an expert in narrative gear shifts, turns the investigation into a caper / heist thriller with a deadly political dimension in the new South Africa.

Written in a terse journalistic style, Meyer's novel delves into the corruption inherent in political governance linking ex-military operators to a series of heists that may [or may not] be linked to Basie Small's mysterious sister Emelia – and his past life in the State Security Apparatus, with the equally enigmatic Tau Berger.

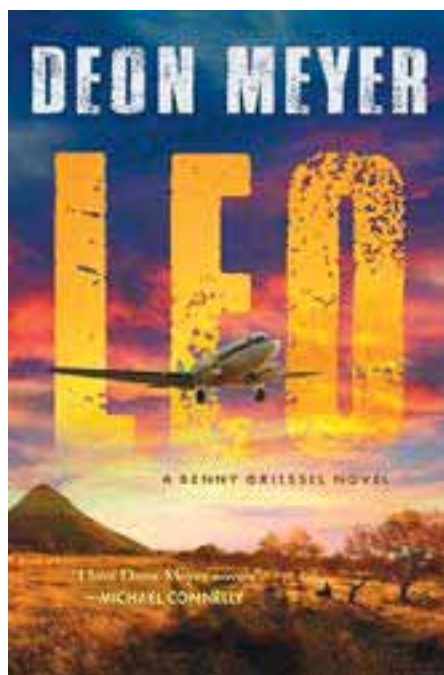
Christina Jaeger and her team of professional criminals who appeared in Trackers has returned from Italy and

is planning a sequence of multimillion dollar heists – the problem is that they are not the only group eyeing the prize – or are they?

With blistering set pieces, a keen eye for dialogue – Meyer weaves a dramatic and powerful narrative with a vivid [and colourfully 'alien'] backdrop that is literary escapism at its absolute zenith.

To miss the return of our South African detectives would be a crime.

Highly recommended.



**George's Take:** This is at the top of my early list of the Best of 2025. Crime fiction doesn't get any better than *LEO* by Deon Meyer. Over the course of eight novels, it has been interesting to see the arc of Benny Griessel's professional life go in a downward slide (due to external factors such as a corrupt police hierarchy), as his personal life arc is ascending, culminating in the last

chapter of *LEO*. Rating: A+

## Jeff Pople Reviews

ONE DARK NIGHT

by Hannah Richell

Simon &amp; Schuster, £16.99.

Rating: B+

I thought that Hannah Richell's *THE SEARCH PARTY* was a solid read, but that the crime elements were overwhelmed by the ongoing family drama and details about the various friendships.

In her new book, *ONE DARK NIGHT*, the murder investigation is given greater emphasis, and the plot is more tightly constructed. The story revolves around the discovery of a girl's body at the bottom of an old stone folly in the supposedly haunted bushland bordering a small Somerset town. The girl is from a posh local school, and it quickly becomes apparent that the death is linked to an illegal student party that occurred nearby on Halloween. Was the girl the victim of a party prank gone wrong, or does her death represent something more sinister and ritualistic?

One of the lead detectives, Ben Chase, knows the area well and when his daughter becomes caught up in the investigation, he finds his judgement questioned and the threat to his family growing.

*ONE DARK NIGHT* is a good police detective novel. Hannah nicely balances the family aspects of the book with the pressures of the investigation, and the book moves smoothly through several twists and some good red herrings. I thought that I had it worked out very early in the piece, but I was wrong footed by a clever bit of misdirection by Hannah and was surprised by the outcome.

The characters are well developed and interesting, especially the students, and Hannah has assembled a strong cast. In all, a really enjoyable crime novel with some good twists.

DEAD MAN'S SHOES

by Marion Todd

Canelo, £9.99

Detective Clare Mackay #9

**Rating: B+**

Marion Todd has established herself as a leading member of the Tartan Noir brigade with her novels about Scottish police detective DI Clare Mackay.

Based in Dundee, Clare is a caring and effective policewoman with just the right amount of grit and determination. In her latest book, **DEAD MAN'S SHOES**, Clare finds herself on the trail of a possible serial killer, and up against a leading local crime figure.

A young man is found dead near a nightclub. He has marks on his neck, the signature of the Choker, a killer who has been targeting gay men across the country. The victim, however, has links to notorious criminals in the area and Clare begins to suspect that the killing may not be as simple as it first appears. When more men, including ones linked to the victim, are attacked and left injured it seems like it is only a matter of time before someone else is killed.

**Dead Man's Shoes** is a moderately paced and well-grounded slice of Scottish crime, that excels in its fine, credible characterisations and Marion's ability to engage and entertain the reader. There are some good twists to the tale and, as with the previous books, the forensic detail is interesting and believable. The teamwork needed in policing is well captured, and a good sense of urgency is generated at key points. At one stage Marion relies too heavily on the old trope of delays in DNA testing to sustain the mystery, but overall this is a very good police tale to while away the time.

### **SMOKE AND EMBERS**

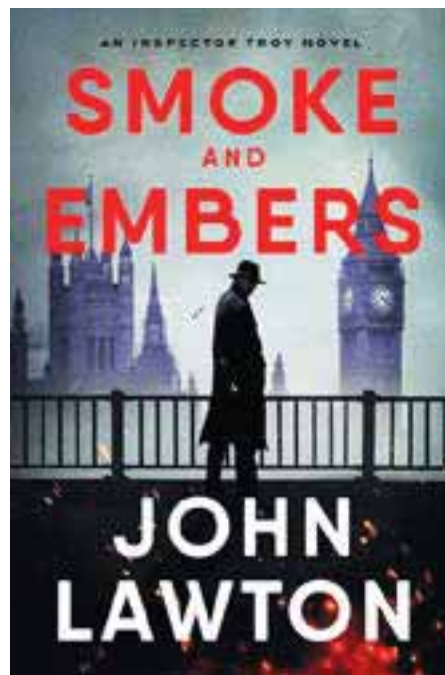
by John Lawton

Atlantic Books, £16.99, May

Inspector Troy #9

**Rating: A-**

Packaged as the ninth book in John Lawton's excellent series about Frederick Troy of Scotland Yard's Murder Squad, **SMOKE AND EMBERS** devotes very little time to its titular hero, but instead focuses on a series of characters



caught up in the turmoil at the end of World War II.

In typical Lawton disregard for the progress of the series through the years, **SMOKE AND EMBERS** is set initially back in 1950, well before the occurrences of the most recent Troy novel, **FRIENDS AND TRAITORS**. The book finds Lawton returning to the years following the end of World War II in Britain and opens with a seemingly inconsequential murder. However, things become more complicated when Chief Inspector Troy learns that his sergeant has been conducting an affair with the known mistress of an infamous London racketeer, Otto Ohnherz. Troy is immediately intrigued by the mysterious origins of Ohnherz's second-in-command, Jay Fabian, who is a major contributor to all three British political parties and claims to have survived the concentration camps. Yet there is no proof supporting Fabian's claims, and the Intelligence agencies suspect that he is a Russian spy.

It is a good opening, but the book quickly moves onto other concerns and focuses on characters other than Troy. The impact of the War in Europe and Britain is a central concern, and the scenes set during the tail end of the Second World War are very well done and interesting. The depiction of the

Final Solution and the flood of refugees at the end of the war is powerful and the book certainly contains a high level of emotional impact. Minor characters from the Troy and Joe Holderness (Wilderness) series float through the book and add interest for regular readers of the novels.

It would be wrong to ruin the many surprises in the novel with a detailed plot description, other than to say that Troy is not a major player in the story, which is basically an intriguing tale about duplicity and reinvention in the aftermath of World War II and the horror of Hitler's Final Solution.

The pacing throughout the book is leisurely, but never boring, as Lawton smoothly adds on layers of intrigue and deception, and fleshes out an interesting collection of characters. With a twisting plotline, crackling dialogue, convincing historical detail and characteristic humor, **SMOKE AND EMBERS** is a masterful addition to Lawton's impressive canon of books. It also has a fascinating Afterword that expounds on the book's themes and adds some more details. A must read for fans of the series, as well as aficionados of spy fiction and good writing.

### **YOU ALL DIE TONIGHT**

by Simon Kernick

Headline, £20.00

**Rating: B+**

Simon Kernick is one of those authors who never fails to entertain. You always know what you are going to get with a Kernick novel: fast frenetic action, twists, bloodshed and plenty of surprises, and that is certainly the case with his latest book, **YOU ALL DIE TONIGHT**.

The book centres on an interesting premise. Seven people wake up drugged in a remote British mansion. None of them have any idea where they are or who brought them there. All of them recognise each other though, as they are all connected to a horrific massacre four years earlier. As they try to escape, a disembodied voice echoes through the house, advising that they have all been poisoned and have less than 12 hours

to live. There is an antidote on hand, but only if someone admits to being the killer. As the killer advises: "If you're innocent, you need to find out who committed this crime. If you're guilty, your only chance of a quick death is to unburden yourself."

This is a wild ride of a story. From the opening pages you are quickly caught up in the plot as it ricochets between the present and the police investigation four years ago. The two main central narrators: a police officer and an employee of one of the original victims, both have secrets to hide, and Kernick skilfully uses the two of them to foreshadow events and to create tense cliff hanger endings for each chapter.

The book flies along at a brisk pace, and it is very easy to become caught up in the action and the mystery. Sure, it is very contrived, but this does not stop it from being a gripping read that you will easily fly through in a couple of days. A very compulsive thriller ideal for holiday reading.

### **BEAUTIFUL UGLY**

by Alice Feeney

Pan Macmillan, £16.99 (In U.S., Flatiron, \$28.99)

**Rating: B**

Alice Feeney's latest psychological thriller, **BEAUTIFUL UGLY**, has an intriguing opening premise.

Struggling, self-absorbed author Grady Green is on the phone to his wife as she drives to their relatively isolated home. While on the phone to him, she sees a woman lying by the side of the road, and gets out to help her. Then nothing. Grady finds her car abandoned by the side of a cliff and no sign of her. A year later and Grady is still tortured by what happened to her. He can't sleep. Can't write and is quickly losing all his assets. His agent suggests that he goes and lives for three months in the remote writing cabin of a much-loved and deceased author on a small Scottish island to get his writing mojo back. In desperation he agrees, but then his problems really start when he thinks he sees a woman that looks just like his dead wife.

This a very atmospheric, slow burn

thriller that relies heavily on the author's reputation for surprising twists to draw the reader in. The story unfolds smoothly, with Grady's increasingly hazy narration alternating with another point of view in the past, and the descriptions of the island adding colour and interest. Not a lot happens in the first half, but gradually the tension mounts as Grady's small island retreat becomes creepier and creepier. The final reveal is largely unexpected, and the book's final sentence is chilling.

I think that fans of messaged orientated, psychological suspense thrillers will like this one, but for me it was just a bit too slow and none of the characters were appealing enough to engage me.

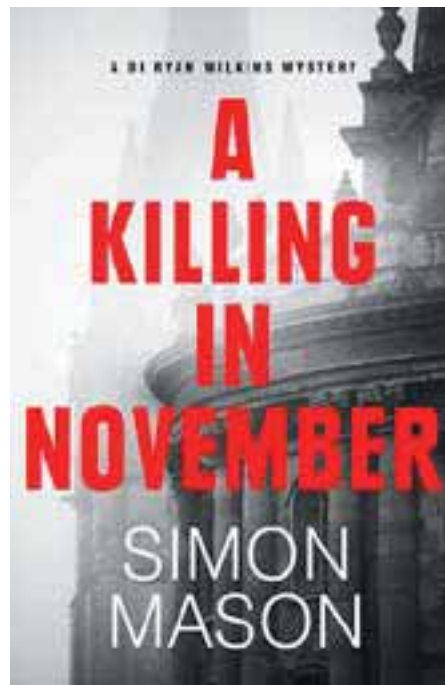
### **Meredith Anthony Review**

#### **A KILLING IN NOVEMBER**

By Simon Mason

Riverrun, 2022, \$15.97 (debut)

**Rating: A**



**First line:** Everyone said the security at Barnabas was a joke.

Who doesn't love a good procedural? Yes, some mystery lovers favor amateur sleuths with their quirks and stumbles and lucky breaks, but nothing

really beats a good police procedural with odd-couple cop buddies and their hunches, interrogations and banter. And if you love procedurals, you probably have a special place in your heart for the British versions.

I adore British procedurals and **A KILLING IN NOVEMBER** is one of the best! I'm late catching up with Brit YA author Simon Mason in his adult debut, **A KILLING IN NOVEMBER**. It's brilliant. And the pairing of Detective Inspector Raymond Wilkins and Detective Inspector Ryan Wilkins both of the Oxford constabulary (they have zero in common other than surnames), is sheer genius!

Newcomer to the DI rank, Ryan is accidentally called to a crime scene at Barnabas College, Oxford. Ryan is rough, white, hails from a trailer park, and looks like a swaggering young lout. DI Ray Wilkins is Black, affluent and well-spoken, himself a graduate of Oxford.

I can't remember being so charmed by an odd couple pairing, or each of them separately, for that matter. Both D.I. R. Wilkins are a handful.

A young woman is found dead within the hallowed precincts of one of Oxford's most venerated colleges on a night when the Provost of the college was wining and dining a potential donor from the Middle East. The ensuing mayhem is delicious. The Sheikh flees for his life and is mooned by a quartet of protesters. D.I. Ryan Wilkins ends up calling the Provost of Barnabas College a pervert. A serving girl calls the Sheikh a defiler. Other complications involve a priceless Koran, a missing school photograph, the complicated route from the kitchen in the Buttery to the suite where the dinner was being served, and the American visiting fellow from Harvard who faints at the slightest provocation.

The themes are wide-ranging, from local prejudice to global racial and religious hate. The clues are there to be unraveled. The end is satisfying. But the real appeal is in the main characters. Their backgrounds. Their loved ones. Their uneasy relationship. Their different approaches to police work. Blows a breath of new life into a beloved old

genre.

Highly recommended.

**George's Take:** I wholeheartedly agree. I have reviewed all of Simon Mason's adult crime novels in DP (including three in this issue – see below). I consider him in the top tier of British crime fiction writing. Even though the books are not published in the U.S. it is fairly easy to get a hold of them at Blackwells or amazon.com.

## George Easter Reviews

### THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

by Neil Lancaster  
HQ, \$18.99, 2024  
DS Max Craigie #5  
**Rating: A-**

Six years ago Beata Dabrowski, a Polish sex worker, disappeared. After a cursory police investigation, she was forgotten.

Now in present day, the incarcerated Davie Hardie, a member of an infamous crime family, is negotiating with the police to be moved to a more salubrious prison and to receive a firm parole date. The information he is willing to give is location of Beata's body and the name of the big-wig responsible for her death.

Hardie accompanies the police to a remote Scottish loch and identifies where the body was sunk in the loch. The body is recovered but then there is attempted escape by Hardie and his henchman. It all goes terribly awry and DS Max Craigie and his team are brought in to clean up the mess and follow up on the information gleaned from Hardie.

I'm a big fan of British police detective novels and this one (and the series) is highly recommended. I especially liked the banter that occurs between Craigie and his colleagues – DI Ross Fraser, DC Janie Calder and ex-MI5 tech consultant Barney. Lots of humor to lighten the darkness of the case they are involved in. The author is ex-police and writes with great veracity.

Published in the U.K. but available on amazon.com in the U.S.

### THE BOOKSELLER

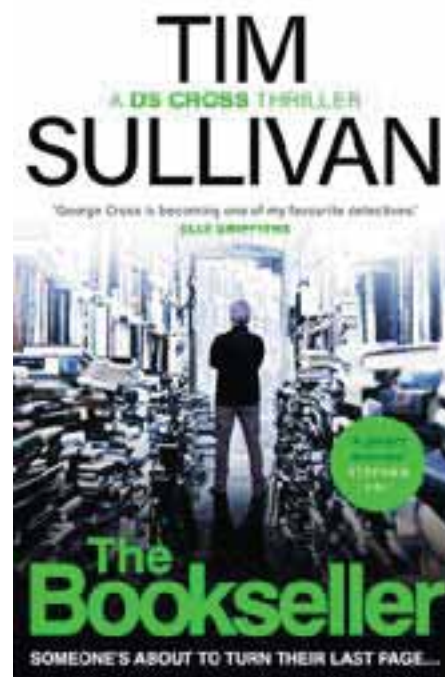
by Tim Sullivan  
Head of Zeus, \$28.99, April  
DS Cross #7  
**Rating: B+**

DS George Cross is on the autism spectrum which makes it difficult for him to relate to people, with a few exceptions. One exception is his beloved father Raymond who is in the hospital being treated for cancer. This disrupts Cross' life to the extent that he is considering retiring from the police to care for his father. Another person he has allowed inside his shell is his partner DS Josie Ottey, who has just been promoted, which Cross finds disturbing because it involves change – something he is adverse to.

Squire's Rare Books in Bristol is owned by 90-year-old Torquil Squire, but run by his son Ed, with assistants Sam and Persephone (Percy). One night Torquil returns to the bookshop from a trip to London to find his son dead on the floor.

Cross and Josie are called to investigate. What follows is a deep dive into the world of rare book selling (not as peaceful as it may seem) and the personal lives of all possible suspects.

The plotting is very good, but it is the cast of continuing characters, especially



Cross, that elevates this series. I think that fans of The Thursday Murder Club books would also like this series, even though there are obvious differences.

Published in the U.K. but available on amazon.com in the U.S.

### And now three by Simon Mason



### MISSING PERSON: ALICE

by Simon Mason  
riverrun, \$17.99, February  
Finder Mysteries #1  
**Rating: A**

July 2015, Sevenoaks. 12-year-old schoolgirl Alice Johnson went missing while doing her paper round, her bag found discarded on the pavement. At 08.00, she was spotted standing in heavy rain at the side of the busy by-pass. At 11.00, she was seen talking to the driver of a black car in Tonbridge. After that, nothing. Alice was never found.

Nine years later the body of another schoolgirl, Joleen Price, is pulled from a nearby lake and a local man named Vince Burns detained. Convinced that Burns is guilty in both cases, SIO Dave Armstrong calls in the Finder to investigate the earlier disappearance.

Interviewing those who thought they knew her, the Finder gradually reveals a hidden Alice, a girl of surprising contradictions. Seeking answers from her divorced parents - an over-protective mother, a negligent father - the Finder is forced to consider violently opposing narratives. Was the timid 12-year-old a victim of the predator Burns, as he himself hints? Or was she carrying out a plan of her own?

### THE CASE OF THE LONELY

**ACCOUNTANT**

by Simon Mason  
riverrun, \$17.99, March  
Finder Mysteries #2  
**Rating: A**

Bournemouth 2008, the height of the financial crash. Don Bayliss, a timid and well-mannered accountant, vanishes after leaving his office before a scheduled meeting. His wife is both perplexed and distraught. His clothes are found discarded at the mouth of Poole Harbour.

After seven years of searching with no firm leads, the investigation is closed, and Don is presumed dead.

Until, sorting through his possessions, his wife finds a garish business card of one Dwight Fricker and decides it must be of some importance. Now more than eight years after his disappearance Dorset Police call in the Finder and the cold case is reopened.

The Finder begins with the last sightings of Don on the day he went missing, hearing how he seemed in a hurry, somewhat distracted? He unearths a string of overlooked clues that lead him to face the unlikely friendships that Don had made, the somewhat overbearing nature of Mrs Bayliss, the secrets that haunted him in his home life and the mistakes that led to him being investigated at work.

**A VOICE IN THE NIGHT**

by Simon Mason  
Quercus, \$20.00, January  
DI Wilkins #4  
**Rating: A**

It seems like in every book of this series DI Ryan Wilkins and DI Ray Wilkins have to prove themselves to a new boss, in this case high-flyer DCS Rebecca Wainwright. One early morning Wainwright is reading over notes left by her predecessor. On DI Ryan Wilkins she reads: "Trailer Park boy. Mother of his infant son deceased. OD. Sees things. Do not, repeat not, give him responsibility." On his partner DI Ray Wilkins she reads: "Posh boy. Lucky cop. Thinks



too highly of himself. More experience needed at the wet end." That pretty much sums up the mismatched team of Wilkins and Wilkins, which Wainwright now regards as a problem to be fixed or discarded.

They are sent to investigate the death of an elderly man found in wet pajamas on the lawn of a local hotel. He turns out to be Joe Emmett, an expert on ancient languages, who was often called upon to authenticate valuable ancient documents and expose those that are fakes. Emmett's death is suspicious, but trying to figure out what really happened turns into a real puzzler.

On the personal side, Ryan's sister Jade, who cares for Ryan's delightful son (Ryan Jr.) is threatened by some toughs. While working at the local Co-op, Jade reports Michael McNulty (one of the infamous McNulty brothers) for shoplifting. Subsequently Jade is pressured to withdraw the accusation – or harm will come to her young daughter and Ryan Jr.

There is also the delightful tension between the Wilkins and a rivalry for the approval of their boss with another detective who seems to have a much easier investigation to pursue.

From start to finish this book was an absolute delight to read – as were the other three in the series. **A VOICE IN THE NIGHT** is available in the U.S. at amazon.com for a bargain price of \$20.00.

**Craig Sisterson Reviews****THE CRACKED MIRROR**

by Chris Brookmyre  
Abacus, \$24.99 USD, July 2024  
**Rating: A+**

Miss Marple meets Michael Connelly could be an easy tagline for award-winning Scottish author Chris Brookmyre's superb new novel, but that distillation severely underplays all that is going on in **THE CRACKED MIRROR**, a truly mind-bending mystery.

Yes, Penny Coyne is a tweed-wearing, elderly librarian in a sleepy Scottish village who has helped the local constabulary solve many murders (or done so despite their bumbling). And yes, Johnny Hawke is a hard-bitten LAPD homicide detective with a maverick streak who's willing to bend the rules to find the truth and catch the bad guys. More interested in justice than procedures and rules.

At the start, as Brookmyre flicks readers between unfolding mysteries in Scotland and Los Angeles, it almost seems like **THE CRACKED MIRROR** is two books that have been misprinted into one. A cocktail of sub-genres, individually tasty yet unusually mixed. Then Penny and Johnny's worlds begin to mesh, as she answers a mysterious wedding invitation at a Scottish manor, and Johnny trails a person of interest to the very same venue. Coincidence, or something bigger at play?

As the oddball pairing are thrust together, **THE CRACKED MIRROR** becomes a helter-skelter thrill ride that will have readers furrowing their brow and whirring through the pages.

Are the echoes among some tragic suicides coincidence or something worse? Why are Penny's local police targeting Johnny, a fellow cop even if one from across the pond? As the stakes are



raised and the action intensifies, Brookmyre rides the absurdity curve to something wonderfully creative and masterfully told. **THE CRACKED MIRROR** is a crime tale with storytelling at its heart – the trail Penny and Johnny follow snakes through screenwriting, book publishing, and video games – and with plenty of heart among the hurly burly and high stakes. Some wonderful easter eggs for genre fans, too.

Overall, **THE CRACKED MIRROR** is a terrific tale that's unlike anything else you'll probably read this year.

### THE SPY

by Ajay Chowdhury

Vintage Publishing, £9.99 GBP,  
January 2025

Rating: A-

I've been an unabashed fan of tech founder and CEO turned crime writer Ajay Chowdhury's moreish mystery series starring disgraced Kolkata detective Kamil Rahman since the first outing, *The Waiter* (2021), which as an unpublished novel won the Bloody Scotland-Harvill Secker Prize for new voices. In that first book, Kamil was eking out a new life as a waiter at Tandoori Knights, a friend's Indian restaurant in London's Brick Lane, before murder intervened, and he was arm-twisted into undertaking an unofficial investigation alongside Anjoli, his new boss's precocious daughter.

Frankly, my only trouble with Chowdhury's books is that, in among the dark deeds leavened with plenty of humour and heart, every time I read one I get so hungry, due to the food references!

As the more-ish series has grown, Kamil has returned to official policing with London's famed Met Police. Although he perhaps got more respect even as berated waiter in Tandoori Knights. In *The Spy* he's recruited by MI5 to try to infiltrate a dangerous terrorist cell. Playing the role of a disenchanted copper, exiled back to the Indian restaurant. Meanwhile some things haven't changed, including Kamil's complicated, stuttering, friends or maybe more relationship Anjoli, who once again gets drawn into amateur

sleuthing as she starts to investigate the kidnapping of a teenage boy.

As Kamil's discoveries lead abroad, into the brutality and suffering of the long-running Kashmir conflict, he and Anjoli both face grave danger. Stakes are high, personally and politically.

Once again, Chowdhury deftly crafts an engrossing, highly readable tale that delves into some of the darkest issues facing society, while providing plenty of light through the humour and heart of the characters, and some of the events. It's a tricky balance, but Chowdhury deftly pulls it off, delivering another cracking tale in what's become a really wonderful series, and a great addition to the genre.

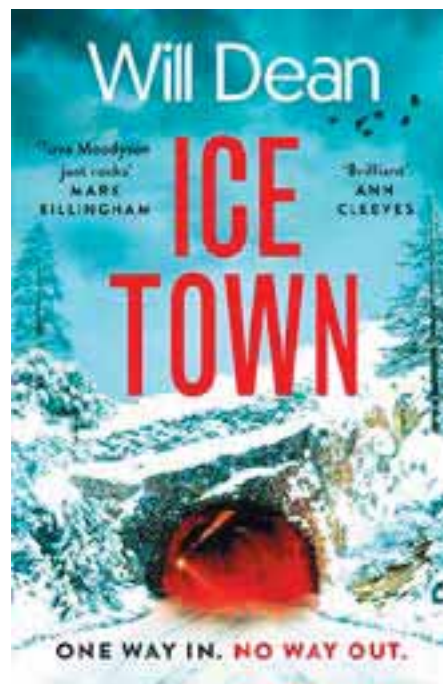
**THE SPY** is delicious crime and thriller fiction, on all fronts.

### ICE TOWN

by Will Dean

Hodder & Stoughton, \$28.99 USD,  
February 2025

Rating: A-



Known as 'the forest author' due to ditching a city career to emigrate from the UK to live with his family in a log cabin deep in a swampy Swedish forest, among the moose and wild boar, Will Dean has been entertaining readers for several years now with some terrific standalone thrillers (e.g. **THE LAST**

**THING YOU BURN**) alongside his very engaging mystery series starring deaf reporter Tuva Moodyson, a city slicker working for a small newspaper in Gavrik.

An isolated town full of quirky characters, surrounded by an ominous, dense spruce forest.

Wheels are very much in motion for **DARK PINES**, Dean's first Tuva tale, being adapted for the screen, with deaf actress Rose Ayling-Ellis set to star as the relentless reporter uncovering secrets and solving crimes. But before then we can all enjoy **ICE TOWN**, a sixth instalment that takes Tuva out of her usual haunts, a page-whirring 'Scandi Noir' blended with 'locked town' mystery, if you will.

In **ICE TOWN**, Tuva is drawn to Esseberg, a mountain village cut off each night when its access tunnel is closed, after an alert goes out that a deaf teenager goes missing. Tuva understands how dangerous being lost in the wilds could be for someone who can't hear searchers calling for them.

Then more people vanish. A body is found. Is the deaf teen a victim or a killer?

Dean has always had a good touch for character and place, alongside page-turning plotlines, and that's on show here once more. Esseberg may be even creepier than Gavrik. Certainly chillier. Dean draws us into Tuva's predicament, as she's faced with new townsfolk and new police who don't have history with her. The shutting off of the access road at night increases the claustrophobia, and makes *Ice Town* something of a 'locked town' mystery. Dean delivers a fabulous, highly engaging mystery that is as chilling as its hypothermia-inducing climate. Well worth your time whether you've read the prior Tuva books or not; it's likely to cajole new readers to go back to the beginning.

### HUNTED

by Abir Mukherjee

Mulholland, \$30 USD, May 2024

Rating: A

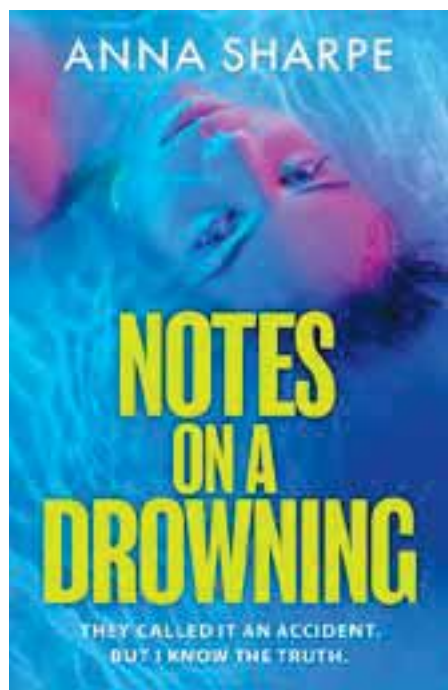
After racking up awards and acclaim for his excellent Wyndham and Ban-

nerjee historical mystery series set in British Raj-era India, Scottish Bengali author Abir Mukherjee successfully swerves into a new sub-genre with **HUNTED**, a fast-paced contemporary thriller that focuses on ordinary people caught up in extraordinary, terrifying circumstances and a clock ticking down to disaster.

In this case, a terrorism plot.

Days before a pivotal US Presidential election, a bombing in Los Angeles kills dozens of people. An organisation called the Sons of Caliphate claims responsibility, and demands prisoner releases or there'll be more violence. In London, Muslim refugee Sajid Khan is accosted by armed police and subject to an 'ends justify the means' interrogation as he learns his teenage daughter Aliyah has links to the suicide bomber. Then a woman called Carrie turns up at his door, saying Aliyah is with her son Greg, a US military veteran, and she thinks she knows where they are. Can they find, or save, their kids? Meanwhile, non-white federal agent Shreya Mistry is also hunting the two fugitives.

But is everything as clear-cut as it seems?



While Mukherjee treads the 'massive terrorism threat on US soil' road that several other thriller writers have over the years, he brings a welcome fresh

perspective in **HUNTED**, a tale that's further elevated by his layered structuring and storytelling. A gripping read that delves into the people behind the politics; a thriller master class dosed with a few surprises.

#### NOTES ON A DROWNING

by Anna Sharpe

Orion Publishing, £18.99 GBP,

January 2025

**Rating: A+**

Readers looking for a superb thriller that offers characters that'll make you care and a propulsive narrative threaded with some very disturbing real-life issues should rush to read **NOTES ON A DROWNING**, the first contemporary tale from British lawyer and author Anna Sharpe, who's previously written several excellent historical crime and Gothic novels as Anna Mazzola.

In **NOTES ON A DROWNING**, 'Sharpe' masterfully draws us into a twisting, sordid tale of legal intrigue, power and corruption. Already starting to fray due to workplace and personal pressures, determined lawyer Alex is roped into more pro bono work – the bane of her boss's life, who is trying to keep the firm afloat and needs fee-paying clients. It seems a simple if frustrating request from a pal: could Anna act for the family at an inquest into the drowning in London's famed Thames River of Natalia, a teenage immigrant from Moldova. A tragic accident fuelled by partying, alcohol and drugs, say the police and others. But resolution isn't so simple for Natalia's family, and soon enough the facts and official story don't add up for Alex, either. Or is she just projecting the trauma and suspicions raised by her own younger sister's disappearance in Japan, many years ago? A mystery still unsolved.

Past and present collide when Kat, an ambitious special advisor to the British Home Secretary who is trying to forget her own history, becomes involved after stumbling across documents with troubling information that contradicts what she's been told. But can Alex and Kat trust each other, let alone dig into the truth behind Natalia's drowning,

when many powerful people want the case closed.

While 'Anna Sharpe' may be a new name to crime readers, the author has already proven herself a strong storyteller with several terrific historical and Gothic tales, and **NOTES ON A DROWNING** may take her to an even higher level. It's an excellent modern-day thriller powered by taut storytelling, several fascinating characters, lots of intrigue, fears, and tough issues. A cracking, if disturbing, tale.

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## Interview with Anna Sharpe

by Craig Sisterson

Anna Sharpe is the pen name of London lawyer and author of historic thrillers Anna Mazzola. Anna's debut **THE UNSEEING** won an Edgar Award, her bestselling third novel **THE CLOCKWORK GIRL** was shortlisted for two CWA Daggers and nominated for the Dublin Literary Award, and her fourth **THE HOUSE OF WHISPERS** won a Fingerprint Award for Best Historical Crime. Ahead of the publication of her first contemporary thriller, **NOTES ON A DROWNING**, Anna spoke with *Craig Sisterson*.

**After writing several historic and Gothic thrillers to great acclaim, including winning an Edgar Award, what inspired you to now write a contemporary legal/political thriller under a pen name?**

I love historical, but I wanted to try writing something different. It's wise, I think, for writers to have a few irons in the fire, as you never know what's going to take off, and what isn't, and the market grows ever more difficult. I wanted to write a modern thriller about political corruption and foreign influence, with female protagonists. The idea came to me at the time that we were realising quite how much Russia was spending on trying to covertly influence foreign governments, and also when rumours

(disputed) were circulating that Jeffrey Epstein had been using sex tapes to blackmail influential people. I thought: what would happen if a criminal organisation tried to infiltrate and influence the British government? How would they play out?

**Legendary crime writers like Val McDermid, Dennis Lehane, and Ian Rankin have discussed how crime writing can be a window into society, delving into important real-life issues alongside entertainment. You deal with some potent issues in NOTES ON A DROWNING, including human trafficking - - how do you balance page-turning thrills with explorations of such matters?**

Yes, I absolutely agree with that. I think crime and thrillers are a great vehicle for exploring topics that are impacting society. You show the impact through your characters and the story, which is often far more powerful than statistics or reports. You can smuggle in some political stuff while also entertaining the reader with the thrills and the twists. But not too much. I had to excise several paragraphs about legal aid funding (or lack thereof) and the state of the criminal justice system, as people are not picking up thrillers because they want to be lectured. They want to be swept up in the story.

**As a writer, how do you separate yourself from the dark things you write about, or take care of yourself while immersing yourself in such issues for months or years of research and writing?**

To be honest, the things I write about are far less distressing than the cases I come across in my work as a solicitor for a women's justice charity, so they perhaps don't impact me in the way they might others. Also, when I write, I'm in control of what happens to my characters, whereas real life is far messier. That's why people read crime fiction, but it's also why we write it: we get to explore terrifying things but within a safe setting. I also laugh a lot - with friends and family and colleagues - which is an important counterbalance to the dark



Anna Sharpe

materials I read and write about in my professional life.

**What were some of your favourite books and authors when you were growing up, and how do you think they've influenced your own writing?**

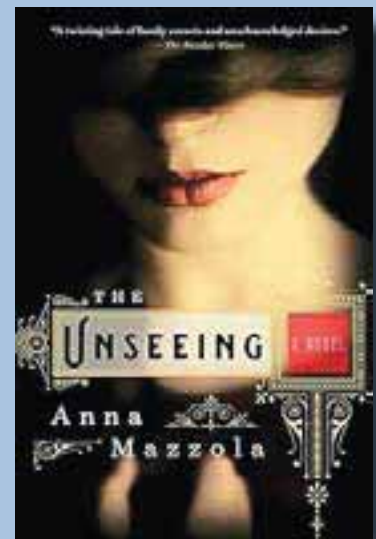
The first books to make me understand the magic of reading were CS Lewis' Narnia series. My sister's middle name is Lucy because I was so obsessed with **THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE**. The first books to make me fall in love with mysteries were, amusingly, pony books, notably **RIDERS AT BLACK PONY INN** by Christine Pullein-Thompson. I then went through all the Nancy Drew books and, when those ran out, The Hardy Boys. I was hooked on mystery and have been ever since. As a teenager, I moved on to Stephen King and am still reading him today. He's probably the writer who has taught me the most: about story, about character, about what books can do and why people read them.

**You've taught creative writing at The Novelry and The Arvon Foundation: what advice would you give aspiring authors trying to 'break in'?**

Firstly, write something that truly fascinates you, because you will be with your first book for years, and it may not come to anything, because during your first novel you're learning to write.

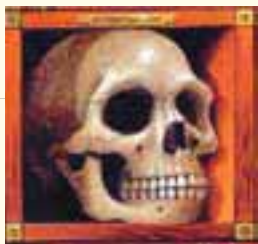
(Well, we're always learning to write). Secondly, read recently published novels as well as classics, and think which books and which writers you want to emulate. When you've found the book that most closely resembles what you want to achieve, read it again and take it apart and work out why it works. What from it can you use when writing your own novel? What can it teach you? Courses and workshops can be great, particularly for motivation and meeting fellow writers, but I think I've learnt most by reading and re-reading other writers.

Anna Sharpe won an Edgar Award for Best Paperback Original in 2018 for **THE UNSEEING**, which she wrote under her real name Anna Mazzola. **THE UNSEEING** is set in London in 1837 and is the story of Sarah Gale, a seamstress and mother, sentenced to hang for her role in the murder of Hannah Brown on the eve of her wedding. After Sarah petitions for mercy, Edmund Fleetwood is appointed to investigate and consider whether justice has been done. Idealistic, but struggling with his own demons, Edmund is determined to seek out the truth. Yet Sarah refuses to help him, neither lying nor adding anything to the evidence gathered in court.



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