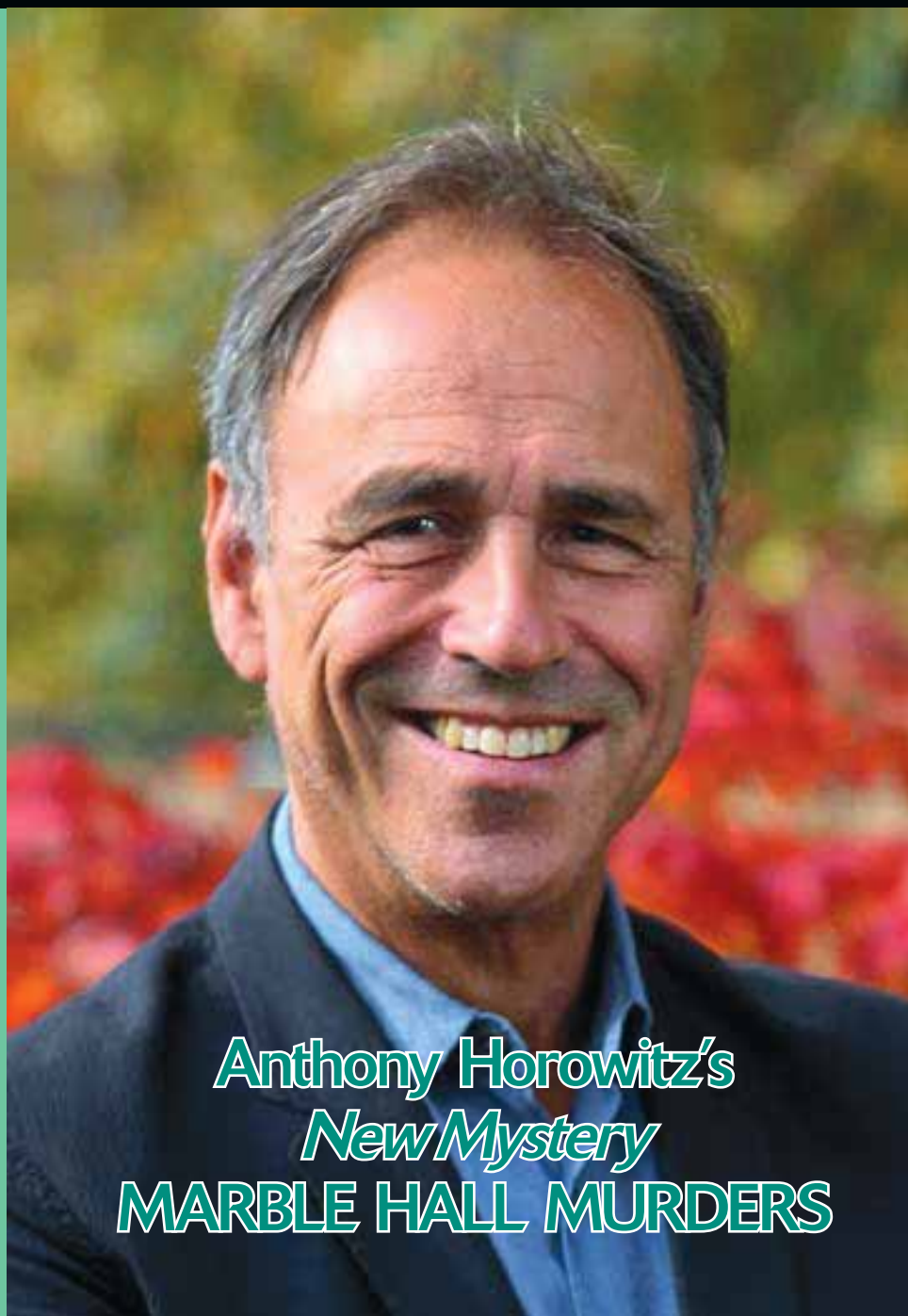


Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



Anthony Horowitz's
New Mystery
MARBLE HALL MURDERS

Anthony Horowitz's

Magpie Murder Series

Traditional Mysteries

Anthony Horowitz
by George Easter

The highly prolific Anthony Horowitz has had a successful career over several platforms – TV, the theater, books for all ages, and of course excellent mystery and crime stories.

I first became acquainted with Anthony's work from viewing the British historical mystery TV series *Foyle's War*, a personal favorite of mine. His script writing is also on display in other British TV programs such as *Midsomer Murders* (first seven episodes), *Poirot*, *Injustice*, *New Blood* and *Collision*.

Makes one wonder where he finds the time to write novels – and boy, has he written terrific novels.

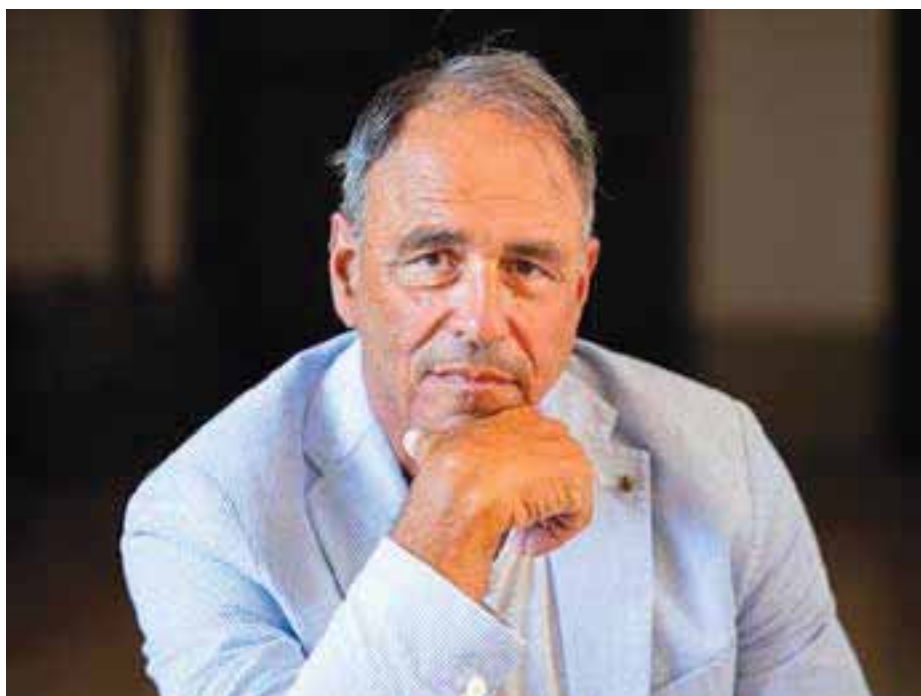
His young adult series featuring teen spy Alex Rider has been an international hit with teenagers (21 million copies worldwide).

But we adults probably know him best for his Sherlock Holmes (*THE HOUSE OF SILK*, *THE THREE MONARCHS* and *MORIARTY*) and James Bond (*TRIGGER MORTIS*, *FOREVER AND A DAY* and *WITH A MIND TO KILL*) pastiches – as well as his two recent, devilishly puzzling mystery series that challenge the minds of fans who

cherish the traditional mystery format. One is the Magpie Murders series (*MAGPIE MURDERS* and *MOONFLOWER MURDERS*), which features the brilliant British editor Susan Ryeland who encounters complex and deadly puzzles to solve. The books have been turned into a hugely successful TV show that can be streamed on Amazon Prime TV.

The other recent series is the Hawthorne/Horowitz series (*THE WORD IS MURDER*, *THE SENTENCE IS DEATH*, *A LINE TO KILL*, *THE TWIST OF A KNIFE* and this year's *CLOSE TO DEATH*). Anthony has paired the brusque, temperamental, but brilliant detective (retired) Daniel Hawthorne with the author Anthony Horowitz (yes, the author becomes a character!), who acts as a sort of Dr. Watson and writes novels based on Hawthorne's successful cases. What a brilliant concept to make himself a character in a series and Anthony Horowitz pulls it off with great ingenuity.

Anthony has also been very active in charity work. In 2019 Anthony became a Patron to Home-Start in Suffolk, a small local family support charity working with families across the Suffolk county, as they navigate through challenging circumstances such as mental health issues, bereavement, long term or terminal illness, isolation, domestic abuse, poverty and so much more. The valuable work the organi-





zation does right in the heart of the community – bringing trained volunteers into the lives of families to support them both practically and emotionally, helping them to grow in confidence and empowering them with the skills to raise their children to flourish – is why Anthony chose to support this dedicated and hardworking charity. In Anthony's own words – “For me, charity begins at Home-Start.”

In 2022 Anthony was awarded a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) for his services to literature.

His Most Recent Novel

MARBLE HALL MURDERS

by Anthony Horowitz

Harper, \$31, May

Susan Ryeland #3

Grade: A

Reviewed by Robin Agnew

If traditional, golden age style mystery is your jam, these books are absolute perfection. Though it's a series, and the main character, Susan Ryeland, has her life change drastically between the volumes, you could definitely read each one as a standalone and not be lost. Of course, if you like golden age style traditional mysteries, you're going to read them in the order the author intended regardless, right?

As Anthony Horowitz has proven himself to me to be some kind of genius, I always find that it's a good idea when opening one of his books to just relax and trust that he will reliably serve up a great story. In this instalment former editor Ryeland has returned from her idyll in Crete after abandoning both the hotel business and her boyfriend.

She decides to take on freelance editing work (the reason why it's freelance is explained in the earlier books), and the first assignment that comes her way is the continuation of the Atticus Pund series. Pund, a detective working in the 1950s, was the creation of her former client, the late Alan Conway, who grew to hate his detective and decided to give him a fatal illness. The title of the new book, then, is *Pund's Last Case*.

The author in charge of the re-boot is the spoiled, troubled heir to the fortune of a wildly successful (now dead) children's author. Susan expects him to be trouble, and he certainly is, but despite herself and her reservations about the entire project, she finds herself intrigued by the book itself. As in Horowitz's other works, there's a book within the book. In the first instalment (*Magpie Murders*) the ending was missing as the author died before he could finish, and in this one, Elliot, the new writer, has given her only about a third of the book, but the portion she gets is certainly captivating.

Set in France in 1955, it follows the family of a wealthy woman who dies suddenly, though not completely unexpectedly. She'd reached out to Atticus before she'd left for the South of France, and although he hurries over, he arrives too late. He now feels obligated to investigate, much to the annoyance of the French policeman in charge who

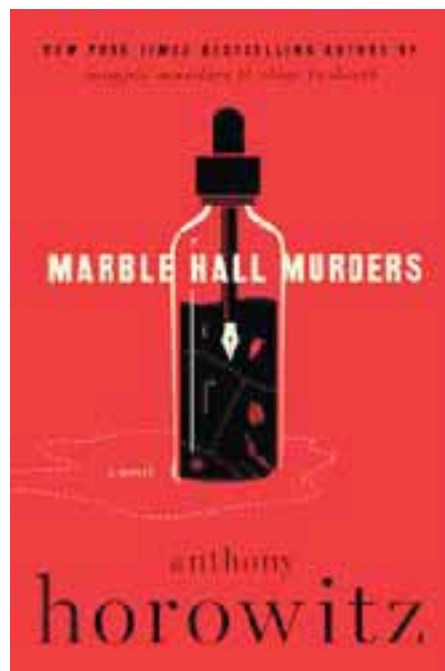
views him as an intrusion. Much like his avatar Hercule Poirot, however, Pund is so brilliant that his insights are eventually not only tolerated but eagerly sought after.

Meanwhile Susan is waiting for the next bit of the novel only to discover that her client is ignoring her advice, drinking, and mistreating his girlfriend. He fires her shortly after a disastrous radio interview she'd advised against, but she still attends the family party she'd previously been invited to. There she discovers that the family in the book and Elliott's actual family are obviously not only connected but nearly mirror images. Susan had spent the time before her dismissal looking into Elliott's past, visiting his family home (now open to the public), and talking to the folks from his past that she is able to track down. When a death occurs and Susan becomes the prime suspect, she must continue to investigate in order to prove her innocence, and she forms a fragile alliance with the detective in charge of the case.

As with every Horowitz novel, the reader is treated to a lovely dance, with plots and characters intertwining, and you can reach the halfway or three quarter point still not feeling completely sure of what may or may not happen next. While the ending was not as tricky as some of his other books, it's still an adroit sleight of hand that is beautifully set up and knocked down. With this strong instalment, Horowitz proves once again that these smart, gorgeously written and compelling books remain some of the very best crime novels being written.

Other Recent Traditional Mysteries

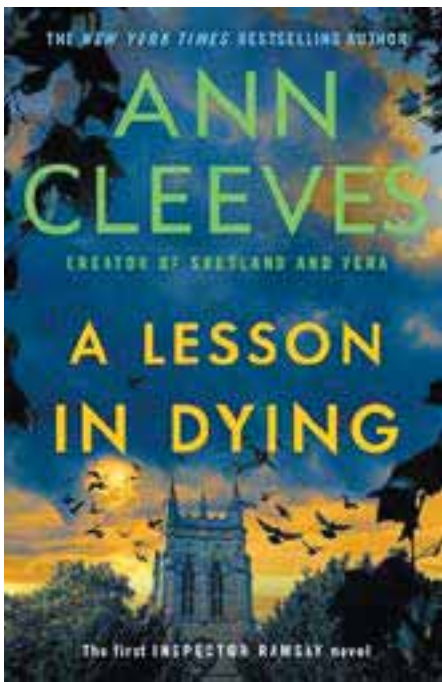
Traditional mysteries (little or no sex, violence or profanity) are enjoying a wave of popularity right now -- due, I suspect, to writers such as Anthony Horowitz, Louise Penny, Richard Osman, Ruth Ware, Ann Cleeves, Benjamin Stevenson and Nita Prose. Another contributing factor is the attraction



of movies and tv programs on the streaming services that are puzzle/traditional mysteries. I also consider almost all historical mysteries to be traditional mysteries and historical mysteries represent a substantial number of titles published in mystery fiction each year. And, of course, cozies are another subset of the umbrella traditional mystery genre.

Just this month in amazon's editors' choice lists for best mysteries, nine out of twenty could be considered "traditional."

There are way too many current titles to treat them in a comprehensive fashion, so here are a smattering of reviews of some of the traditional mystery titles that we have taken note of.



A LESSON IN DYING

By Ann Cleeves

Minotaur, \$18. Re-release. March.

Inspector Ramsay #1

Grade: A

Reviewed by Robin Agnew

This welcome re-release of the first book in Ann Cleeves' Inspector Ramsay series, originally published in 1990, is a pure delight. Our bookstore (open 1992-2018) was lucky enough to have many of these now collectible volumes on our shelves. Before breaking out with her Vera books in 1999 the

hardworking writer produced two now completed series, one centering on bird-watching, and this debut in the Ramsay series, a real, golden age gem.

Of course, the golden age of mystery ended many decades before this series began, but Cleeves follows many of the plotting and set up tropes familiar to any fan of the classics. Set in a small village, the book begins when the much hated school headmaster of the insular community is done away with at a combination Halloween/Guy Fawkes party for the school kids. To the natives, all of whom are more than familiar with each other, Inspector Ramsay seems like an exotic creature who appears from above to swoop in to solve the crime.

There are children underfoot, of course, but they don't really figure into the story, which takes a deep dive into the inner lives of the school's teachers and parents. The dead man's wife is speedily arrested, but Jack Robson, the school custodian and local councilor who has carried a torch for the accused woman since high school, is convinced she's not guilty. He teams up with his friendly and somewhat directionless daughter Patty, to investigate, finding much needed purpose and closeness along the way.

Inspector Ramsay lurks at the edges of the story, as they keep him updated on their discoveries. Patty lurches like a friendly puppy from one home to another, offering comfort where she can, while her father's wheels turn a bit more efficiently, allowing him to be the one who actually cracks the case.

Cleeves' genius is already apparent here. If it's slightly more traditional and less amped up than some of her later works, her characteristic evocative setting and presentation of the characters as complex human beings with flaws and saving graces are all present, as is a plot both obvious and unexpected. And Cleeves, like her golden age forerunners, lays a fair groundwork for her complex solution.

Unlike those golden agers, however, there's quite a bit more fleshing out of her characters and an emphasis on their psychological underpinnings. The tone is darker than an Agatha Christie

book, but not that much darker, really, as Christie was no stranger to the horror show life can become, but Cleeves, as a modern writer, is able to be more frank in her depictions of those horrors.

This is also a propulsively plotted book which, like its classic predecessors, is hard to put down, quite liable to be picked up one evening at sunset and finished....well, perhaps at sunrise next morning. Ann Cleeves is a modern treasure. as rich as any from mystery's golden past.



THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE AND HER JUST OKAY ASSISTANT

by Liza Tully

Berkley, \$30.00, July

Rating: B+

Reviewed by George Easter

Aubrey Merritt is considered by some to be the world's greatest detective, but for most of this mystery it is her newly-hired assistant Olivia Blunt who does most of the leg work. Merritt is cranky, demanding and world-weary. Blunt is young, wide-eyed and obsessed with impressing Merritt with her fledgling detective skills.

Merritt has been hired by the daughter of Victoria Summersworth to look into her mother's death, which the police are treating as a suicide. So

Merritt and Blunt head off to the shore of Vermont's Lake Champlain to look into the matter. The family is wealthy and own a well-known resort.

There are no shortage of suspects: stepchildren, resort workers, an accountant and a recent romantic interest.

As one might expect, Blunt makes some rookie, unforced errors, but in the end does some good work.

It isn't until the denouement (with all suspects present as in an Agatha Christie novel) that Merritt displays her brilliant detective skills.

I was first attracted to the flippant title and thought the book might be entertaining – and it was. But some of the characters were stereotypical and the storyline proceeded in an expected way. No surprises until the end. The characterization was often shallow – especially in the case of Aubrey Merritt. We get no clue as to why she is the way she is. Perhaps we'll find that out in future books.



VERA WONG'S GUIDE TO SNOOPING ON A DEAD MAN

by Jesse Q. Sutanto
Berkley, Hb, \$30; Ppk, \$19; April
Vera Wong #2

Grade: A

Reviewed by Robin Agnew

These books are like comfy, beautiful

pillows for your brain, and, let me tell you, these days that's not a bad thing. Vera, the heroine of the series, is the 60 something widow who, in the first book, finds a dead body in the middle of her formerly obscure tea shop, ultimately finding friends and a purpose in the act of solving a murder. Vera is opinionated, bossy, maternal, and an excellent cook, who, as the book opens, gets a scam phone call which cons her into sharing her social security number and even a photo of her driver's licence.

Realizing she's been had, she loads up some food and heads to the police station to look up her son's cop girlfriend Selena (whom she refers to already as her daughter in law) and ask for help. As the putative future daughter in law helps her out, the food she's brought vanishes while the cops clean up what could have ended up as a very nasty situation.

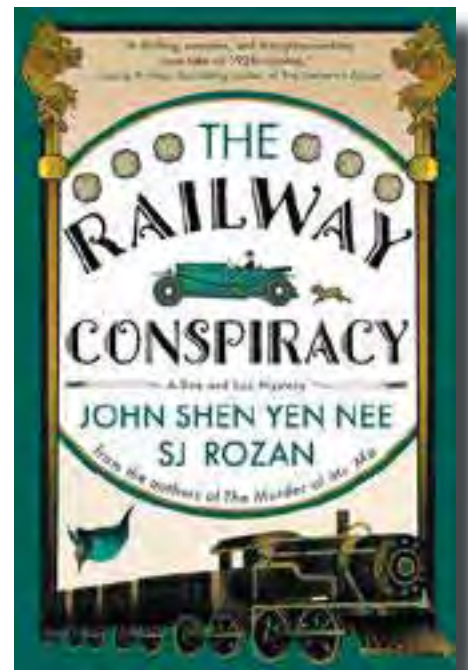
As Vera leaves the police station, she encounters a lost looking young girl, Millie, who she takes back to the tea shop, making her some tea and trying to find out what's bothering her. Millie tells her that her friend Thomas has vanished and she's worried about him, but she flees before Vera can find out more. When the young man is found dead, allegedly a suicide, Vera pursues the case instantly, despite Selena's repeated insistence that she stay out of it.

Ignoring Selena, Vera not only befriends Millie, but also an influencer named Aimes who knew Thomas as Xander, as well as Thomas/Xander's talent manager, TJ. She also discovers that the departed's "grandfather" is a neighboring store owner who met him in his restaurant. As in the first book, Vera draws a disparate, reluctant group of people around her as she snoops, all of them eventually completely won over by her cooking and the power of her (admittedly judgy) form of fierce love. One of the best scenes in the book involves TJ's teenage daughter, Robin, which I won't spoil for you but, believe me, it's an instant classic.

An accidental influencer, Vera shoots cooking and tea making videos, in which she also talks about Xander's death and asks for help, which she gets,

along with a side order of trouble. Her friends, of course, rally around her and they all help provide the ingredients that crack the mystery of Thomas/Xander's death.

I love a book that makes you laugh aloud as you read it, and the passionate and observant Vera is flat out, obliviously funny, probably even more so because she's far from perfect. While this book didn't have the special thrill of discovery that comes with a fantastic first novel and the birth of a great character, it remains a really fun and engaging read. I love Vera and it would be great if she served me a cup of her soothing tea, but I found reading this book every bit as warm and comforting.



THE RAILWAY CONSPIRACY

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

Rating: B+

Reviewed by Ted Hertel

London, 1924. The larger-than-life (some might say "immortal") Judge Dee Ren Jie has returned to London in order to intercept a transaction between a Russian diplomat and a Japanese mercenary. He needs the assistance of his academic friend Lao She in order to stop the sale of an extremely valuable "dragon-taming mace." The grateful owner of the mace throws a lavish dinner in

thanks for its return, only to have one of the attendees, British banking official A. G. Stephen, poisoned. Coincidence? Dee thinks not. Clues link the death to a conspiracy involving the Chinese Eastern Railway. More deaths follow before Dee and Lao She enter the London Necropolis Railway Station to confront the villain hiding in its shadows.

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

Media executive (with credentials at both DC and Marvel Comics) John Shen Yen Nee and prolific novel and short story author S. J. Rozan (the award-winning Lydia Chin and Bill Smith mysteries) have combined to reimagine Judge Dee in 20th-Century London. This is their second collaboration involving Judge Dee, the first being **THE MURDER OF MR. MA**. Along the way the reader is carried back one hundred years, to vivid descriptions of London's nannies, newsboys, buskers, and businessmen, the city's punishing August heat, smoke, motorcar exhaust, the stink of rotting fish mingling with the scent of fresh-baked pastries, cries of peddlers, horns blowing, brakes and tires squealing, bobbies shouting. The cacophony of a bygone age.

The authors bring to life the strife of the political life in China, as it struggles for reform, crossing with historical figures like Zhou En Lai and the sure conviction of other young communists. Bertrand Russell makes an appearance, as well. A. G. Stephen, the murder victim, is also based on the real-life banker, who met his actual fate in a different manner (pneumonia). All of this is cleverly woven together with elements of the conspiracy that will remind the reader of Patricia Highsmith's **STRANGERS ON A TRAIN** on an international scale,

as countries send agents to do the work of other nations' assassinations and disruptions, making it harder to identify and trace the true culprits. Filled with well-described action sequences and colorful characters, this story will keep the reader guessing right to the final underground confrontation.

MURDER TAKES A VACATION

By Laura Lippman

William Morrow, June 2025, \$30.00

Rating: B+

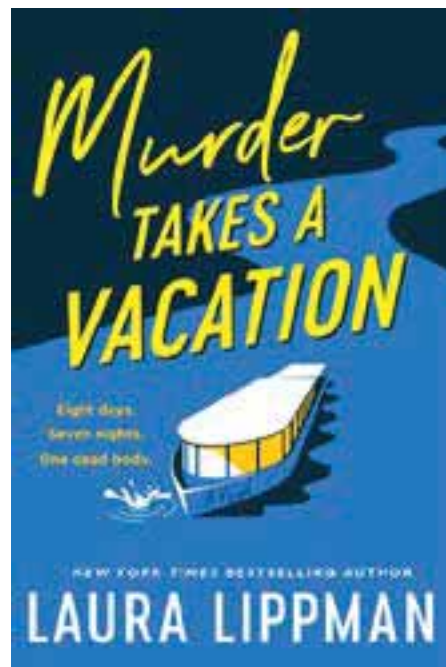
Reviewed by Meredith Anthony

First line: Mrs. Blossom had never been upgraded in her life.

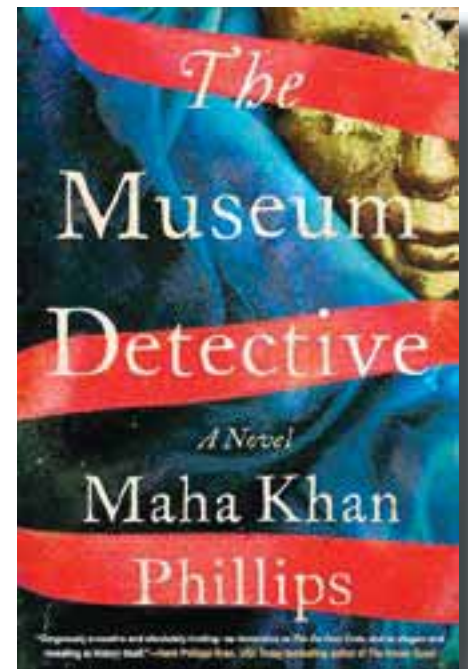
Laura Lippman, one of our best stylists, has given us a new standalone and in it she sets sail for Richard Osman territory. **MURDER TAKES A VACATION** is a charming humorous mystery about a woman of a certain age, Mrs. Blossom, who finds a winning lottery ticket and books a luxury river cruise through France.

She gets more than she bargained for when a handsome man on her flight flirts with her. When her budding love interest is found dead, she also gets to investigate a murder. And along the way, she gets new friends, a new lease on life, and a make-over in Paris!

I loved this romp of a book. I always



loved Lippman's long-running Tess Monaghan series for its strong, relatable female lead, although at times I found Tess could be a little glum. This new book is a refreshing change. Chapeau!



THE MUSEUM DETECTIVE

By Maha Khan Phillips

Soho Press, April 2025, \$27.95

Rating: A

Reviewed by Meredith Anthony

First line: Gul was dreaming of Mahnaz when her phone rang.

I loved this dense, rich, thought-provoking mystery set in present-day Pakistan. Full of local color, **THE MUSEUM DETECTIVE** is a complex and absorbing story of a Pakistani archeologist who is asked to confirm the authenticity of a dramatic relic, found after a shoot-out between drug smugglers and police, in a remote cave in the mountains. What seems to be a well-preserved ancient mummy is brought to her museum headquarters in Karachi.

Everyone wants the mummy. The drug cartel wants to sell it on the black market. Corrupt city officials want to profit by it. Rival archeologists want to study it. Religious fanatics want to rebury it. Dr. Gul Delani, the museum's archeologists, holds off all comers while she tries to identify the artifacts. Even

her family has ideas.

Gul's beloved niece, Mahnaz, disappeared three years previously and when similarities start to surface between the missing young woman and the mummified remains, Gul gets alarmed. With her small team of trusted scientists, Gul must solve the riddle of the mummy and maybe get closer to solving the riddle of her niece's disappearance.

Absolutely engrossing. Highly recommended.

I DIED FOR BEAUTY

by Amanda Flower

Berkley, \$19.00, February

Emily Dickinson #3

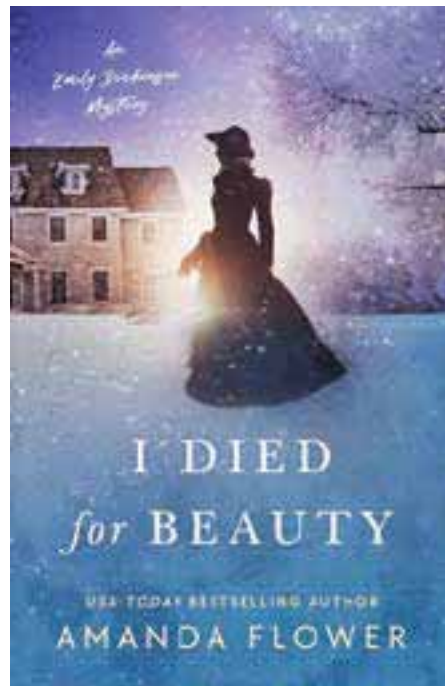
Grade A

Reviewed by Robin Agnes

This may be my favorite in Flower's Emily Dickinson series to date. The perfect blend of setting, character and story really come together in this installment, which takes place during a very cold and snowy winter in 1857 Amherst, Massachusetts. While Amherst is now famous as her birthplace and home, at the time Emily was just an eccentric member of the prominent Dickinson family, with scraps of writing spilling out of her pockets. And, in these novels anyway, a penchant for sleuthing.

While today we find cold and snowy winters unpleasant, back then, without modern technology, the weather could prove much more consequential. Warming fires going all the time meant a greater chance of house conflagrations, while train deliveries (and travel) were impossible, causing food stores to be hoarded. For the poor, the situation was even worse, as their supply of firewood may not have been sufficient to keep them warm for long.

Soon after the Dickinsons are asked to help out a poor family with food and other supplies, they are awakened in the middle of the night by the ringing of bells due to a house fire in the middle of town. Thanks to Carlo, Emily's Newfoundland dog (a real dog who followed Emily all over town), Emily and Willa, her maid, discover a child in the woods whose family has perished in the fire. Emily's sister in law, Susan, takes the



girl in temporarily as they attempt to find relatives for her to live with.

Willa is Emily's Watson, and she's often in an uncomfortable household position as Emily demands she accompany her on her investigations, which means she may not have the chance to get her real work done, drawing the anger of her superior in the kitchen. Emily is blithely unaware of this, thinking Willa's duties are limited to cooking, but of course there's also cleaning, dusting, ironing, laying fires and serving at the table, among many other tasks. This tension in their relationship makes it interesting, as Willa realizes Emily has no idea of her work and, what's more, is oblivious to her social status, which can also make things awkward.

Despite their differences, however, the two women make a good detection team and when it becomes clear that the little girl's parents' death was no accident, the game is afoot. Their activity ramps up as they question various people around town, many of them tied to Amherst College, where the girl's father had worked. The women also pursue another thread of inquiry concerning the girl's mother, a seamstress.

The unpleasant weather is incapable, as snow and cold continue to envelop Amherst, making detection difficult. It also doesn't help that the young

orphan is reluctant to talk to anyone but Willa, who is becoming attached to her. The solution is amazing, perfectly set up by Flower, providing the reader a satisfying aha moment when the pieces fall into place. Flower also never neglects to illuminate the ever present pull of Emily's writing, a vocation that transcends her time, yet remains a fascinating facet of her very human character. The end result is a novel that's pretty close to perfect.

Awards for Traditional Mysteries

There are two awards that shine a light on traditional mysteries and sometimes the subset of cozy mysteries. If you are a fan of this type of crime fiction, you should pay attention to the nominees and winners of these awards.

The grandmother of traditional mystery awards is the Agatha Award sponsored by the Malice Domestic convention.

And the baby of traditional mystery awards is new this year – the CWA Whodunit Dagger (see page 84 herein for this year's long list).



The Barry Award Nominations 2025

The Barry Awards will be presented at this year's Bouchercon in New Orleans during its Opening Ceremonies on Thursday, September 4, 2025. Congratulations to all those nominated.
And thanks to the nominating committee for their expertise.

Voting is now open to subscribers and readers of Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine. Please vote for one title per each category and return your votes to george@deadlypleasures.com.

Deadline for voting is July 31, 2025.

Best Mystery Novel

THE WAITING, Michael Connelly
SPIRIT CROSSING, William Kent Krueger
THE GOD OF THE WOODS, Liz Moore
MIDNIGHT AND BLUE, Ian Rankin
CALIFORNIA BEAR, Duane Swierczynski
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK, Chris Whitaker

Best First Mystery Novel

THE EXPECTANT DETECTIVES, Kat Ailes
PAPER CAGE, Tom Baragwanath
ORDINARY BEAR, C. B. Bernard
IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, Jo Callaghan
FIRST LIE WINS, Ashley Elston
LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera

Best Paperback Original Mystery Novel

DOUBLE BARREL BLUFF, Lou Berney
ALL THE RAGE, Cara Hunter
SMOKE KINGS, Jahmal Mayfield
SOMEONE SAW SOMETHING, Rick Mofina
WORDHUNTER, Stella Sands
SIN CITY, James Swain

Best Action Thriller

ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN, John Brownlow
FIRST STRIKE, Stephen Leather
THE SEVENTH FLOOR, David McCloskey
HUNTED, Abir Mukherjee
HERO, Thomas Perry
THE PRICE YOU PAY, Nick Petrie



Larry Gandle Critiques

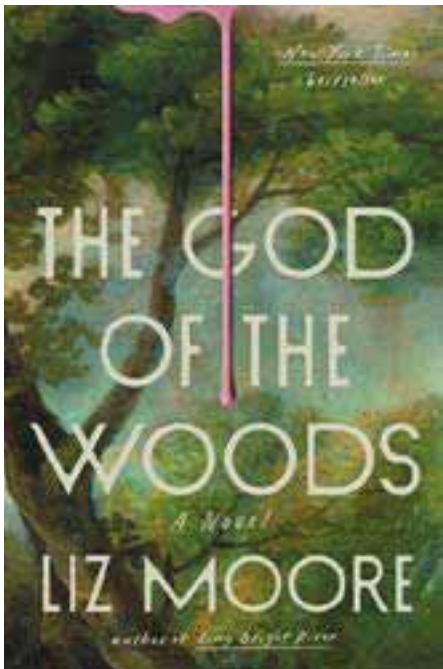
TheEdgars



After having completed my annual reading of the Edgar Awards shortlists for Best Novel and Best First novel by an American Author, I can honestly say that this is another mediocre list. It never ceases to amaze me how insular the judges are in that they rarely select more than one or two books that have been widely praised by the mystery community ie. readers, reviewers. It has been a difficult list of books to get through. Every year I question why I actually do this. I have no answer!

BEST NOVEL

In this category, there appears to be an easy winner as one book has stood out. This rarely is the book that will win.



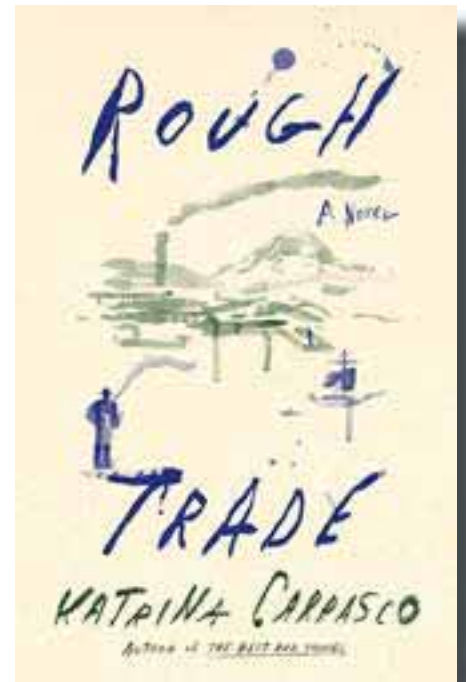
THE GOD OF THE WOODS
by Liz Moore
Riverhead Books, \$30.00
Rating: A

In August, 1975, a thirteen-year-old camper is found missing from her bunk at a summer camp. Her name is Barbara Van Laar and she is the daughter of the camp's owners who live in a large mansion on the property. Fourteen years before her brother also disappeared there. As the search for Barbara unfolds, the reader is brought into the lives of the various family members, as well as, the camp staff. Things just do not seem to be right. The Van Laars are dysfunctional and that appears to affect everyone around them. Nonetheless, what happened to Barbara? The truth will prove surprising.

This is one of those all-encompassing novels that the reader can get lost in. The characters are carefully created and have great depth. The plot is compelling throughout as we meet the various characters. There is something seriously wrong with the Van Laars. Secrets eventually come out leading to the very satisfying and clever conclusion. This is one of the best mystery novels of the year.

ROUGH TRADE
by Katrina Carrasco
MCD, \$28.00
Rating: A-

In Tacoma, Washington Territory, 1888, Alma Rosales, dressed as a man calling herself Jack Camp, runs a crew importing opium into the US Territory. Her and her crew run a successful operation. However, their operation is soon at risk when two men are found dead supposedly of an opium overdose. This draws the law into town and greater scrutiny onto the trade. Complicating her life is a news reporter who goes undercover



to get a story on the opium trade. Alma suspects something about him. Also, an old friend, Bess Spencer, Alma's first love and an ex-Pinkerton agent, arrives in town. Alma will soon discover that Bess is running from the law again bringing unwanted attention to herself and her crew. Things will eventually get violent.

This is a surprisingly clever historical novel. The author succeeds in bringing this unusual setting to life. Characters are well done and mostly realistic creations. I do place a premium on unique and original stories and this one will not disappoint. This did not appear to be a novel I would enjoy – a so-called queer novel. Yet the compelling plot and engaging characters totally won me over. Highly recommended.

MY FAVORITE SCAR
by Nicolas Ferraro
Soho, \$27.95

Rating: B+

In Argentina, Amber is a fifteen-year-old who never knew her mother and her father, Victor, is a rough criminal who often needs her assistance in patching him up after each violent episode and often having to obtain new IDs for them. When Victor and his best friend are ambushed with his friend losing his life. Victor and Amber set off on a ride to find and kill the man who ambushed him. All he knows is the killer had a snake tattoo on his arm. Will they survive this hunt?

MY FAVORITE SCAR is a translated work that is a dark Argentinian neo-noir novel. It is beautifully translated by Mallory Craig-Kuhn. The writing tends more to the literary spectrum of novels. Characters are well fleshed out. The plot rattles along and the story rarely drags. Violence is a mainstay throughout. This is a solid pick for the Edgars and I am pleased to see the committee went with an international selection. Highly recommended.

LISTEN FOR THE LIE

by Amy Tintera
Celadon Books, \$26.99

Rating: B

Many people in a small Texas town believe Lucy murdered her best friend Savvy and got away with it. Lucy claims to have had amnesia and remembers nothing of the night. She agrees to come back for her Grandmother's birthday party only at her Grandmother's request. Also in town is Ben, creator of a podcast that examines unsolved crimes. He has been previously successful in discovering the truth in another case and feels he can solve this one as well. Lucy is really going to have a rough time returning home. Did she do it? Who knows.

This book is entertaining but endless. It is, overall, a silly book but managed to keep my interest throughout. The writing is not very good as we encounter multiple 'eyebrow raises' faces 'twisted in rage' even an 'eyeroll'. Characters are nothing special with multiple stock creations. The interspersing of the podcast

script throughout the book is a clever way of crystalizing the plot. In the audio version it is especially well done and sounds like an actual podcast. In the end, the story simply went on too long. The way the amnesia was handled felt forced and contrived. Not a memorable book at all. A disappointing pick by the Edgar Committee.

**THE IN CROWD**

by Charlotte Vassell
Doubleday, \$28.00

Rating: B-

In London, Detective Inspector Caius Beauchamp along with his associates, Matt Cheung and Amy Noakes must solve several murders. A body is found in the Thames which has to do with a social scandal involving a long-ago crime. Another body is found in a theatre in which Caius is attending which was linked to the disappearance of a fourteen-year-old girl many years ago from a boarding school. The three of them must run around the privileged part of London to get the answers.

I found this to be a very ordinary dull dreary British police procedural that I would generally avoid. There is nothing truly special about it. Characters are well sketched and the depiction of the locale is well done. The plot, itself, moves along at a lethargic pace and the

length is probably about 120 pages too long. Out of all the books submitted to the Edgar Committee, the inclusion of this book on the shortlist is a puzzle. I would avoid.

**THINGS DON'T BREAK
ON THEIR OWN**

by Sarah Easter Collins
Crown, \$28.00

Rating: B-

Twenty-five years ago, Willa went off to school. Her thirteen year old sister Laika, was to follow but never arrived. She disappeared without a trace. Suspects were brought in but there was never strong enough evidence to make a charge stick. Willa remains haunted by this loss with mixtures of grief and guilt, she finds it difficult to move along in life. Then, invited to a dinner party by her old girlfriend everything changes.

The plot of this incredibly overlong and overwritten book meanders endlessly. So many insignificant characters are introduced in a never-ending cavalcade. Alternate points of view chapters keep things interesting but every subplot literally seems to take forever to resolve. The plot is totally implausible and the reader will have to suspend reality throughout. This is a book that the reader might find interesting when on a plane or at the beach. However, once finished they might find the whole reading experience to be unsatisfactory such as I did. The book is nothing unique and is not unlike so many other domestic suspense novels. Personally, I feel this is a terrible inclusion on the Edgar shortlist. It does not meet the standards of a Best Novel.

THE TAINTED CUP

by Robert Jackson Bennett
Del Ray, \$28.99

Rating: DNF

In a city called Daretana, a high imperial officer is found dead in a huge mansion. Dinios Kol, assistant to Ana Dolabra, a brilliant detective, examines the scene. Din on examining the body is shocked to see that death was caused by plants growing out of his body ripping

it apart overnight. Ana, an eccentric detective often wears a blindfold for some reason. On discussion with her and the lab reports, it seems spores were the explanation for the highly unusual murder. Ana soon shows Din why she is considered the most brilliant detective in the empire -- just very odd.

I read about a third of this very long book. It took me awhile to realize it is a fantasy novel as there is no city named Daratana or an empire. The means of death also made no sense. I quickly lost interest and moved on from this book. I just wonder what the Edgar committee was thinking. The crime is totally outlandish and though some might find something unique about the story, the eccentric brilliant detective and the bumbling assistant has been done before multiple times. This is another awful selection by the Edgar Committee.

My pick: GOD OF THE WOODS by Liz Moore. This would seem to be a no brainer. However, given the committee's overall questionable selections, I would not be surprised if another book was selected.

BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR

In looking back at previous years, this is one of the worst shortlists I have ever read. To me, it is astounding how bad these books are with one exception.

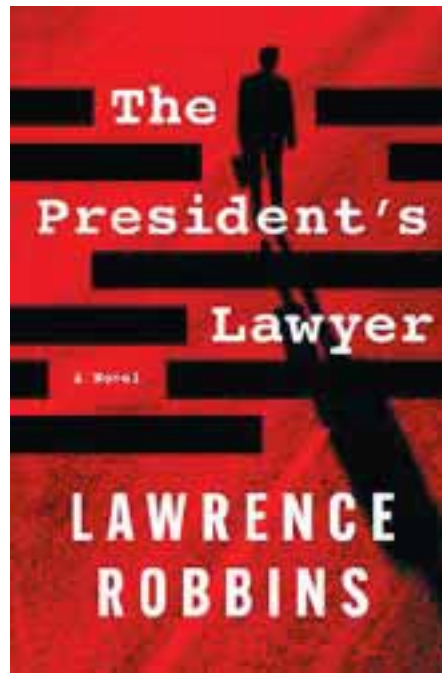
THE PRESIDENT'S LAWYER

by Lawrence Robbins

Atria, \$28.99

Rating: A

Rob Jacobson, a trial lawyer, is asked by his best friend to defend him in a murder trial. His best friend, John "Jack" Carter, happens to be the former President of the United States and is accused of murdering his mistress, Amanda Harper. Rob knows Amanda



well in that she worked with him in the White House Council's office. Rob is hesitant to take the case, but, Jack insists that it could only be him. The result is a truly riveting legal thriller that is impossible to put down. The ending is a complete surprise.

One of my favorite type of books are legal thrillers with a great trial at the heart of them. The trial in this book is among the best I have read in quite some time. There are plenty of twists and turns that make putting the book down as near impossible. Characters are, overall, original and quite complex. The author is a former trial lawyer and his experience is found on every page. This book is a superb first novel and is one of the best Edgar shortlisted book on any of the lists. Sadly, the author passed away in November, 2024.

COLD TO THE TOUCH

by Kerri Hakoda

Crooked Lane Books, \$29.99

Rating: B-

Anchorage homicide detective DeHavilland Beans must solve several murders which appear to be related. They are all baristas working in the

area and all appear to be killed the same way. Who is this serial killer and how will Beans solve the killer's identity?

This is another ordinary regional police procedural. For a debut effort it is okay. I will admit the discovery of the killer is unrealistically too coincidental. It is actually downright idiotic. Of course, the killer, once caught, babbles on and on revealing all. When I finally closed the book, I could not escape the feeling that I just wasted a number of hours. Another mediocre pick of the Edgar Committee. Avoid.

TWICE THE TROUBLE

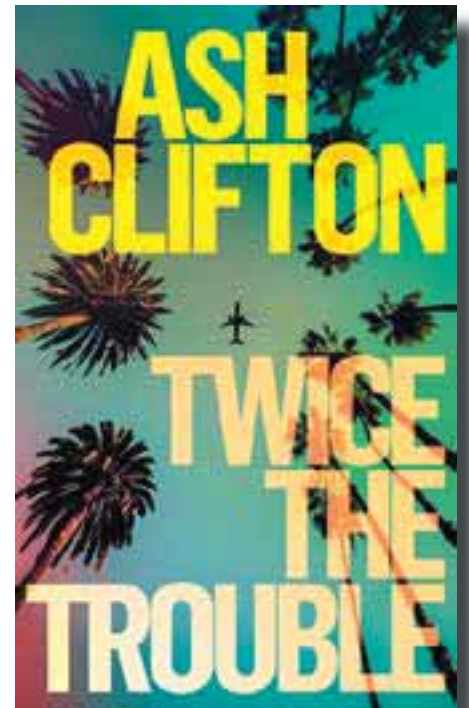
by Ash Clifton

Crooked Lane, \$30.00

Rating: C

Nolan Twice is a former college football player who has turned PI. He is hired to locate a missing local businessman who has apparently absconded with a lot of money from the company he works for. Of course, the search will place Nolan into mortal danger. No surprise here.

First of all, I do not like PI novels. Second, this one is incredibly over-written. Such minutiae fills every page.



Nolan having to ask someone a simple question takes up a full chapter with so much unnecessary detail that the progression of the story gets stalled. Characters are stereotypes and the pacing is lethargic due to the overly detailed writing. This 300-page book appears endless. This book is an excellent example of why I really do not like PI novels. It is another awful selection of the Edgar Committee.

George's Contrary Opinion: I quite liked this novel, but then again, I like P.I. novels. It's not as bad as Larry paints it to be. Just sayin'.

A JEWEL IN THE CROWN

by David Lewis
Kensington, \$27.00

Rating: C

In 1940 London, Germany is about to invade England. Winston Churchill is concerned about the safety of the crown jewels and the possibility that they will fall into the hands of the Nazis. He enlists two people to convey the jewels to a submarine in total secrecy and have them transported to Canada and safety. They are Caitrin Colline, a policewoman and Hector Neville-Percy, a member of the noble class. His fear is that if the crown jewels fall into the hands of the enemy, it will completely demoralize Great Britain and the people will capitulate to Germany. The two of them cannot trust anyone as there are many members of the underground network known as The Bridge who sympathize with Nazi Germany. Caitrin and Hector must portray a married couple as they move the jewels through the British countryside. Of course, they experience betrayal and get themselves into major trouble with the entire country at stake.

I found the premise of the novel -- that the loss of the crown jewels will extinguish the will of the British people- to be totally preposterous. Given that fact, it is hard to take this book seriously. Instead it devolves into a silly

mess with stock characters and a plot that seems to be increasingly unrealistic. Of course, there is the stereotypic scene of the villains holding the heroes captive while explaining all. I really cannot imagine Winston Churchill getting remotely involved in such a ridiculous mission. I would avoid.

THE MECHANICS OF MEMORY

by Audrey Lee
CamCat Books, \$28.99

Rating: DNF

Hope Nakano has lost her memory of the past year. She decides to seek treatment at the Copeland Stark Institute which specialized in memory loss. Yet the people at the institute seem to have their own secrets. She was dating a man named Luke at the time she lost her memory. Luke is a scientist at the memory institute. There are some nefarious happening there as Hope attempts to bring back the last year.

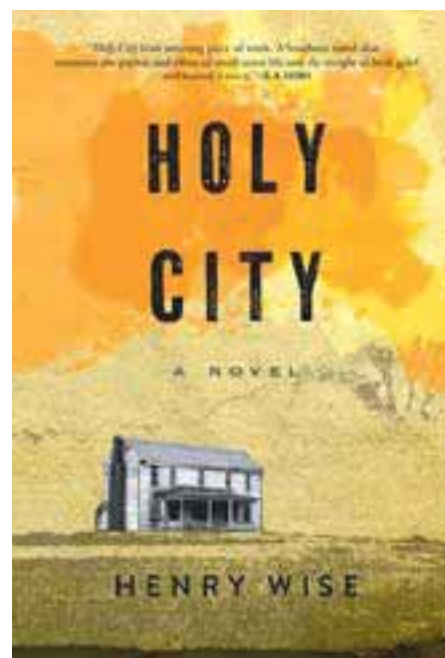
This book is a debut effort at almost 493 pages! I found the book interminable and had great difficulty following the plot after reading 175 pages. I tried but the book is truly awful, IMHO. It is dull with multiple superficial characters. It desperately needed some editing to the tune of almost half the book. Reviews tell me the plot will veer towards sci-fi which also turned me off. It is inexplicably nominated for an Edgar Award for best first mystery novel. Is it actually a mystery? In my opinion this book is a total miss. My advice -- avoid!

HOLY CITY

by Henry Wise
Atlantic Monthly, \$28.00

Rating: B

Will Seems has returned from Richmond to his Childhood home in rural Virginia. He decides to become a sheriff's deputy. Unfortunately, he soon becomes involved in the investigation into the death of an old friend, Tom Janders, a Black friend



who helped him in the past. Unfortunately, the sheriff has placed the blame on someone who is most certainly innocent. Will must work with a Black PI from Richmond named Bennico Watts. Their investigation puts them at odds with each other. Will wants to clear the name of the man wrongly imprisoned and solve the murder of his friend.

The writing in this debut novel is truly quite exceptional. The depiction of the locale brings this desolate rural community to life. His characters have great depth and none of them are true stereotypes. Their dialogue is extremely well written and appears quite accurate to the locale. The actual plot is quite pedestrian and is certainly not the true focus of the book. It is the characters and their interactions with each other. As such it is a mild recommendation.

My pick: THE PRESIDENT'S LAWYER by Lawrence Robbins. There is no other book close to it.

The Edgar Award Winners 2025

Best Novel

THE IN CROWD, Charlotte Vassell – Winner

THE TAINTED CUP, Robert Jackson Bennett

ROUGH TRADE, Katrina Carrasco

THINGS DON'T BREAK ON THEIR OWN, Sarah Easter Collins

MY FAVORITE SCAR, Nicolás Ferraro

THE GOD OF THE WOODS, Liz Moore

LISTEN FOR THE LIE, Amy Tintera

Best First Novel An American Author

HOLY CITY, Henry Wise – Winner

TWICE THE TROUBLE, Ash Clifton

COLD TO THE TOUCH, Kerri Hakoda

THE MECHANICS OF MEMORY, Audrey Lee

A JEWEL IN THE CROWN, David Lewis

THE PRESIDENT'S LAWYER, Lawrence Robbins

Best Paperback Original

THE PARIS WIDOW, Kimberly Belle – Winner

THE VACANCY IN ROOM 10, Seraphina Nova Glass

SHELL GAMES, Bonnie Kistler

A FORGOTTEN KILL, Isabella Maldonado

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN, Alexis Stefanovich-Thomson



The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award

THE MYSTERY WRITER, Sulari Gentill – Winner

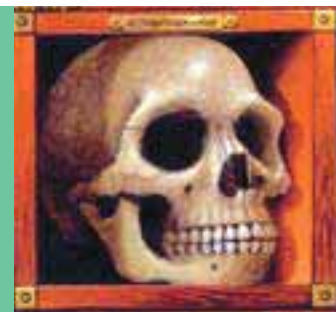
The G.P. Putnam's Sons Sue Grafton Memorial Award

THE COMFORT OF GHOSTS, Jacqueline Winspear – Winner

The Lilian Jackson Braun Memorial Award

THE MURDERS IN GREAT DIDDLE, Katrina Bivald – Winner

Deadly Pleasures Best of 2025



Titles listed garnered starred reviews in one or more of the four library journals (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal*), an Amazon Editors' Choice, and/or a glowing review in *Deadly Pleasures* as indicated. Many of the books listed herein will be found on year-end Best of 2025 lists and some will be nominated for our Barry Awards. All sub-genre's of the mystery/crime fiction and thriller world are represented.

Best Mystery/Crime Novels

****THE IMPOSSIBLE THING**, Belinda Bauer (Atlantic Monthly, \$27.00, April). 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.

PW, DP & AZ

****SAINT OF THE NARROWS STREET**, William Boyle (Soho Crime, \$28.95, February). Gravesend, Brooklyn, 1986: Risa Franzone lives in a ground-floor apartment on Saint of the Narrows Street with her bad-seed husband,

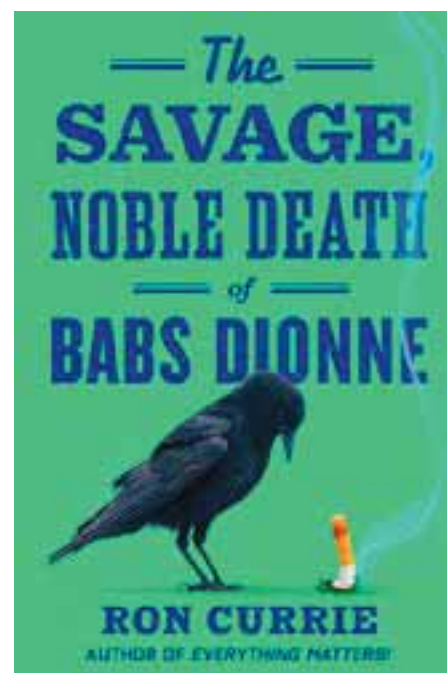
Saverio, and their eight-month-old baby, Fabrizio. On the night Risa's younger sister, Giulia, moves in to recover from a bad breakup, a fateful accident occurs: Risa, boiled over with anger and fear, strikes a drunk, erratic Sav with a cast-iron pan, killing him on the spot. The sisters are left with 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**

****WITNESS 8**, Steve Cavanagh (Atria, \$29.99, March). Something is wrong with Ruby Johnson. 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. Flynn and his unconventional team will need to use every trick they know to keep an innocent man from being locked up. But to save his client's life, Eddie must first protect his own, as the scariest organized criminals in the city are out for his head. **PW, AZ & DP**

****THE BIG EMPTY**, Robert Crais (Putnam, \$30.00, January). 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, BL & DP**

****THE SAVAGE, NOBLE DEATH OF BABS DIONNE**, Ron Currie (Putnam, \$29.00, March). Babs Dionne, proud Franco-American, doting grandmother, and vicious crime matriarch, rules her small town of Waterville, Maine, with an iron fist. She controls the flow of drugs into Little Canada



with the help of her loyal lieutenants, girlfriends since they were teenagers, and her eldest daughter, Lori, a Marine vet struggling with addiction. When a drug kingpin discovers that his numbers are down in the upper northeast, he sends a malevolent force, known only as The Man, to investigate. At the same time, Babs's youngest daughter, Sis, has gone missing, which doesn't seem at all like a coincidence. In twenty-four hours, Sis will be found dead, and the whole town will seek shelter from Babs's wrath. **Kirkus, PW, AZ, DP & LJ**

****THE DEATH OF US**, Abigail Dean (Viking, \$27.00, April). Together, Edward and Isabel move to London. They are young and in love, occupied by friends, work and fun. But late on a spring evening when they are thirty years old, their home is invaded by a serial killer. In the wake of this violation, each tries to come to terms with a night that changed everything -- and their marriage begins to crumble.

Twenty-five years later, their tormentor is caught, and Edward and Isabel reunite for his sentencing. Isabel has waited years for the man who nearly ended her life to be brought to justice. Edward has tried to think about anything else. As they prepare to deliver impact statements in the public eye, it is time to revisit their love story. Will they finally be able to confront the secrets, longings and lies that tore them apart? **Kirkus, AZ & PW**

****THE QUIET LIBRARIAN**, Allen Eskens (Mulholland, \$29.00, February). 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, AZ & DP**

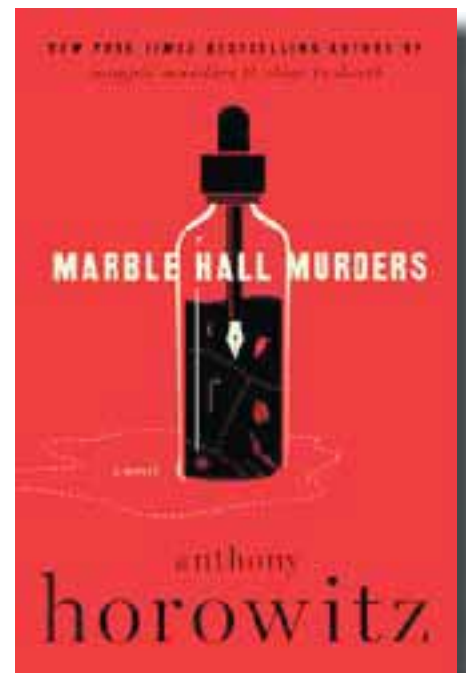
****SALT WATER**, Katy Hays (Ballantine, \$30.00, March). In 1992, Sarah Lingate is found dead below the cliffs of Capri, leaving behind her three-year-old daughter, Helen. Despite suspicions that the old-money Lingates are involved, Sarah's death is ruled an accident. And every year, the family returns to prove it's true. But on the thirtieth anniversary of Sarah's death, the Lingates arrive at the villa to find a surprise waiting for them—the necklace Sarah was wearing the night she died.

Haunted by the specter of that night, the legendary Lingate family unity is pushed to a breaking point, and Helen seizes the opportunity. Enlisting the help of Lorna Moreno, a family assistant, the two plot their escape from Helen's paranoid, insular family. But when Lorna disappears and the investigation into Sarah's death is reopened, Helen has to confront the fact that everyone who was on Capri thirty years ago remains a suspect—her controlling father, Richard; her rarely lucid aunt, Naomi; her distant uncle, Marcus; and their circle of friends, visitors, and staff. Even Lorna, her closest ally, may not be who she seems. **BL, PW & AZ**

****MARBLE HALL MURDERS**, Anthony Horowitz (Harper, \$31.00, May). Editor Susan Ryeland has left her Greek island, her hotel and her Greek boyfriend, Andreas, in search of a new life back in England.

Freelancing for a London publisher, she's given the last job she wants: working on an Atticus Pünd continuation novel called Pünd's Last Case. Worse still, she knows the new writer. Eliot Crace is the troubled grandson of legendary children's author Miriam Crace who died twenty years ago. Eliot is convinced she was murdered—by poison.

To her surprise, Susan enjoys reading the manuscript which is set in the South of France and revolves around



the mysterious death of Lady Margaret Chalfont, days before she was about to change her will. But when it is revealed that Lady Margaret was also poisoned, alarm bells begin to ring.

The more Susan reads, the clearer it becomes that Eliot has deliberately concealed clues about his grandmother's death inside the book.

Desperately, Susan tries to prevent Eliot from putting himself in harm's way—but his behaviour is becoming increasingly erratic. Another murder follows . . . and suddenly Susan finds herself to be the number one suspect. **PW, AZ & DP**

****A KILLING COLD**, Kate Alice Marshall (Flatiron, \$28.99, February). When Theodora Scott met Connor – wealthy, charming, and a member of the powerful Dalton family – she fell in love in an instant. Six months later, he's brought her to Idlewood, his family's isolated winter retreat, to win over his skeptical relatives. Theo has tried to ignore the threatening messages on her phone, but she can't ignore the footprints in the snow outside the cabin window or the strange sense of familiarity she has about this place. Then, in a disused cabin, Theo finds something impossible: a photo of herself as a child. A photo taken at Idlewood. **Kirkus, BL**



& AZ

****HANG ON ST. CHRISTOPHER,** Adrian McKinty (Blackstone, \$28.99, March). 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 protege 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**

****HEAD CASES,** John McMahon (Minotaur, \$28.00, January). 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, AZ & DP**

****LEO,** Deon Meyer (Atlantic Monthly, \$28.00, February). 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**

****BEEN WRONG SO LONG IT FEELS LIKE RIGHT,** Walter Mosley (Mulholland Books, \$29.00, January). 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 & AZ**

****THE RAILWAY CONSPIRACY,** John Shen Yen Nee & S. J. Rozan (Soho Crime, \$29.95, April). London, 1924. Following several months abroad, Judge Dee Ren Jie has returned to the city to foil a transaction between a Russian diplomat and a Japanese mercenary. Aided by Lao She—the Watson to his Holmes—along with several other colorful characters, Dee stops the illicit sale of an extremely valuable “dragon-taming” mace.

The mace's owner is a Chinese businesswoman who thanks Dee for its retrieval by throwing a lavish dinner party. In attendance is British banking official A. G. Stephen, who argues with the group about the tenuous state of Chinese nationalism—and is poisoned two days later. Dee knows this cannot be a coincidence, and suspects Stephen won't be the only victim. Sure enough, a young Chinese communist of Lao's acquaintance is killed not long after—and a note with a strange symbol is found by his body. **BL, PW & AZ**

****BLOOD TIES,** Jo Nesbo (Knopf, \$30.00, February). Nesbo'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 GHOSTS OF ROME,** Joseph O'Connor (Europa, \$28.00, February). 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, AZ & Kirkus**

****THE RELUCTANT SHERIFF**, Chris Offutt (Grove Press, \$27.00, March). 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. When two more bodies turn up, seemingly unconnected to the first, Mick is forced to reckon with the mysterious circumstances of a case not so open-and-shut as everyone believes. Meanwhile, Linda is slowly healing when a familiar business tycoon with a vested interest in her returning as sheriff makes it difficult for her to remain on the sidelines. **Kirkus, AZ & DP**

****THE WHITE CROW**, Michael Robotham (Scribner, \$28.99, July). Philomena McCarthy has defied the odds to become a young officer with the Metropolitan Police despite her father and her uncles being notorious London gangsters.

On patrol one night, Philomena finds a barefoot child, covered in blood, who says she can't wake her mother. Meanwhile, three miles away, a London jeweler has a bomb strapped to his chest in his ransacked store and millions are missing.

These two events collide and threaten Philomena's career, her new marriage, and her life. In too deep, and falling further, Phil must decide who she can

trust—her family or her colleagues—and on what side of the thin blue line she wants to live. **DP**



****DARK MAESTRO**, Brendan Slocomb (Doubleday, \$28.00, May). Curtis Wilson is a cello prodigy, growing up in the Southeast D.C. projects with a drug dealer for a father. But through determination and talent, and the loving support of his father's girlfriend, Larissa, Curtis claws his way out of his challenging circumstances and rises to unimagined heights in the classical music world—even soloing with the New York Philharmonic.

And then, suddenly, his life disintegrates. His father, Zippy, turns state's evidence, implicating his old bosses. Now the family—Curtis included—must enter the witness protection program if they want to survive. This means Curtis must give up the very thing he loves the most: sharing his extraordinary music with the world. When Zippy's bosses prove too elusive for law enforcement, Curtis, Zippy, and Larissa realize that their only chance of survival is to take on the criminals themselves. They must create new identities and draw on their unique talents, including Curtis's musical ability, to go after the people who want them dead. But will it be enough to save Curtis and his family? **Kirkus, LJ & AZ**

****DEAD IN THE FRAME**, Stephen Spotswood (Doubleday, \$28.00, February). 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. **LJ & BL**

****PRESUMED GUILTY**, Scott Turow (Grand Central, \$30.00, January). 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**

Best First Mystery Novel

****A THOUSAND NATURAL SHOCKS**, Omar Hussain (Blackstone, \$26.99, May). Dash, a reporter in Monterey, California, is desperate to outrun his past. During the day, he investigates the reemergence of a long-dormant serial killer. At night, he has become entangled with a criminal cult that promises a pill to erase his traumatic memory.

But as Dash begins to lose his memories—and his sense of self—he discovers a dark secret about the cult, one that would horrify its members. And soon he finds himself in a race against time to evade the cult, unveil the killer, and reconcile his past before his own memories fade away. **PW & AZ**

****DEAD MONEY**, Jakob Kerr (Bantam, \$30.00, January). In her job as unofficial "problem solver" for Silicon Valley's most ruthless venture capitalist, Mackenzie Clyde's gotten used to

playing for high stakes. Even if none of those tech-bro millions she's so good at wrangling ever make it into her pockets. But this time, she's in way over her head—or so it seems. The lightning-rod CEO of tech's hottest startup has just been murdered, leaving behind billions in "dead money" frozen in his will. As the company's chief investor, Mackenzie's boss has a fortune on the line—and with the police treading water, it's up to Mackenzie to step up and resolve things, fast. Mackenzie's a lawyer, not a detective. Cracking this fiendishly clever killing, with its list of suspects that reads like a who's-who of Valley power players, should be way out of her league. Except that Mackenzie's used to being underestimated. In fact, she's counting on it. **Kirkus, PW & AZ**

****THE MUSEUM DETECTIVE**, Maha Khan Phillips (Soho Crime, \$27.95, April). 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.

But there is no news of Mahnaz. Instead, Gul is summoned to a narcotics investigation in a remote desert region in western Pakistan. In her wildest dreams, Gul couldn't have imagined what she'd find there: amid a drug bust gone wrong, there is a mummy—life-size, seemingly authentic, its sarcophagus decorated with symbols from Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire. The discovery confounds everyone. It is both too good to be true, and for Gul, too precious to leave in careless or corrupt hands. **LJ, DP & AZ**

****JOHNNY CARELESS**, Kevin Wade (Celadon, \$27.99, January). 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, AZ & DP**

Best Paperback Original Mystery



****LEAVE NO TRACE**, Jo Callaghan (Random House, \$18.00, January). 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. **DP**

****THE UNDOING OF VIOLET CLAYBOURNE**, Emily Critchley (Sourcebooks Landmark, \$17.99, March). 1999: When successful writer Gillian Larking receives a letter from the nephew of an old friend, she knows that her past has finally caught up with her. Violet Claybourne, her old boarding school roommate, was a girl who captivated Gillian with stories of her charming sisters and their picturesque home at Thornleigh Hall. Violet Claybourne pulled Gillian into her life, into her family, and changed Gilly's path forever. Violet Claybourne also spent the past sixty years in a psych hospital, and now she wants Gillian to tell her story. The real story. **LJ & BL**

****MAKING A KILLING**, Cara Hunter (Morrow, \$18.99, May). Forensic evidence found on the body of a young woman discovered in a shallow grave belongs to a girl that police believed was murdered 8 years ago. Now DCI Adam Fawley and his crew must figure out where they went wrong and where the young girl can be found. **DP**

****THE KILLING PLAINS**, Sherry Rankin (Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, February). Crescent Bluff, West Texas. Everybody knows everybody. And everybody has a secret. When a boy is found dead with the skin of a hare's head in his hand, everyone knows who killed him—Willis Newland, just released from prison after serving twenty years for an identical murder. But what if everyone's wrong? Detective Colly Newland reluctantly agrees to investigate a case that seems to involve the whole town, including her dead husband's extended family. But the deeper she digs, the more secrets she unearths. And as threats against her escalate, Colly realizes someone is willing to kill to keep theirs. **AZ & CWA Debut Dagger**

****VERA WONG'S GUIDE TO SNOOPING (ON A DEAD MAN)**, Jesse Q. Sutanto (Berkley, \$19.00, April). Ever since a man was found dead in Vera's teahouse, life has been good. For Vera that is. She's surrounded by loved ones, her shop is bustling, and best of

all, her son, Tilly, has a girlfriend! All thanks to Vera, because Tilly's girlfriend is none other than Officer Selena Gray. The very same Officer Gray that she had harassed while investigating the teahouse murder. Still, Vera wishes more dead bodies would pop up in her shop, but one mustn't be ungrateful, even if one is slightly...bored.

Then Vera comes across a distressed young woman who is obviously in need of her kindly guidance. The young woman is looking for a missing friend. Fortunately, while cat-sitting at Tilly and Selena's, Vera finds a treasure trove: Selena's briefcase. Inside is a file about the death of an enigmatic influencer—who also happens to be the friend that the young woman was looking for.

Online, Xander had it all: a parade of private jets, fabulous parties with socialites, and a burgeoning career as a social media influencer. The only problem is, after his body is fished out of Mission Bay, the police can't seem to actually identify him. Who is Xander Lin? Nobody knows. Every contact is a dead end. Everybody claims not to know him, not even his parents. **Kirkus, AZ & DP**

Best Thriller

****THE OLIGARCH'S DAUGHTER**, Joseph Finder (Harper, \$30.00, January). 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, AZ & LJ**

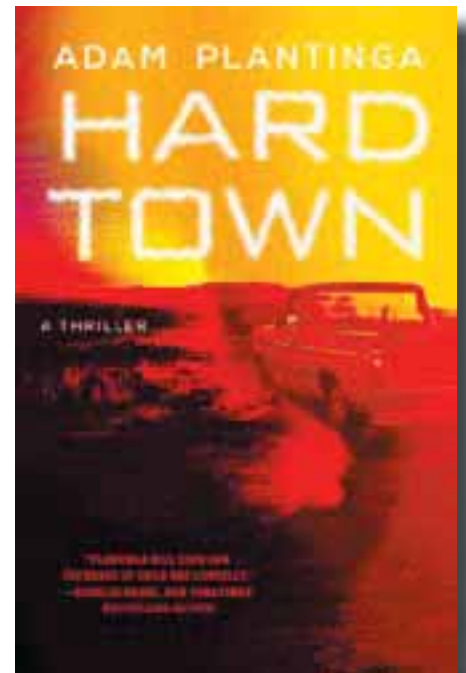
****MIDNIGHT BLACK**, Mark Greaney (Berkley, \$30.00, February).

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 (3)**

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

****HARD TOWN**, Adam Plantinga (Grand Central, \$30.00, April). After surviving a deadly prison break, ex-Detroit cop Kurt Argento is ready for some quiet. Still working through his grief over the passing of his wife, Argento finds himself house-sitting for a friend with his loyal companion, Hudson, a Chow Chow-Shepard mix. It's a simple life, but it's one that Argento is content to live. Then Kristin Reed shows up, begging Argento to find her missing husband and son.

Argento starts to notice that Fenton, Arizona is more than meets the eye. First there's the large, overly equipped public safety team complete with specialized tactics and sophisticated weaponry. Then there's the unusual financial boosting of failing small businesses by the U.S. government. Finally, there's a man with no name with unprecedented control over the town. Argento finds



himself unraveling not just the truth behind the disappearance of a family, but a conspiracy that's taken a whole town to cover up.

Fenton, Arizona is going to push him further than he's ever had to go. And along the way, he may just lose a part of himself. Because justice isn't as black and white as Argento would like to believe. **PW, AZ & DP**

****THE MAILMAN**, Andrew Welsh-Huggins (Mysterious Press, \$26.95, January). 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. **AZ, LJ & DP**

John Lawton

In Conversation with Mike Ripley



JOHN LAWTON has been described as one of ‘the fifty crime writers to read before you die’ and ‘the best writer of spy fiction you’ve never heard of.’ His novels, it is said, ‘contain a wealth of period detail, character depiction and background information that they are lifted out of any category. Every word is enriched by the author’s sophistication and irreverent intelligence, research and his wit.’

MIKE RIPLEY said none of those things, though he did review an early Lawton novel for the *Daily Telegraph* almost thirty years ago. Since then he has followed with interest the fortunes of the Troy family, Joe Wilderness and all the other characters historical or fictional, which have populated Lawton’s books. He has even managed to meet and occasionally talk to the famously reclusive author. Their latest conversation was fortunately recorded and is reproduced here with scarcely any redactions.



Mike Ripley & John Lawton

Our Conversation

MR : Let’s begin with a bit of getting to know you —

JL : **Thereby ignoring the last 25 years.**

MR : I’ll pretend you didn’t say that. Five things you really don’t like?

JL : **Travel, sport, cars, champagne, instant coffee.**

MR : And five you do like?

JL : **Schubert, Titian, Kate Atkinson novels, negronis, Florence.**

MR : Substituting B.B. King, Caravaggio, Gore Vidal novels, a big Amaroni and, okay, Florence, and it’s as if we were meant for each other. Favourite novelist?

JL : **Nabokov, but you’re right, Vidal is worth more than a passing mention. He once said “Before ‘Myra’ there was the novel. After ‘Myra’ it was something else.” He was right.**

MR : And ... TV ... a series you’d binge watch if only you weren’t working so hard?

JL : ***Dix Pour Cent*, on France 2 and Netflix now. I know the writing is team work, but Fanny Herrero has put together an amazing team. It is the best-written series I’ve seen since *Better Call Saul*.**

MR : Enough. I hear you’ve written some books?

JL : **Yep.**

MR : Was **BLACK OUT** your first published book?

JL : **First published novel — yes. But I’d worked on one of the early *Films on 4* and written the novelisation. Appalling term, but the director told me he wanted more than a few inserted he/she saids. I think I delivered on that. Never did get to see the film though. I was out of the country when it was televised, and I don’t think it’s been repeated. I was in discussion with the director about a second film when I moved into what I’d call Channel 4’s heavy side layer, the kind of programmes they’d never dream of making today. The day after that I was offered a non-fic book on the year 1963, which I wrote between C4 programmes. So ... **BLACK OUT** was effectively my third book.**

MR : It read (to me) as if it was already part of a series (in your head) with established characters, settings and plot threads. Was it, or did the idea of the Troy Saga develop from it?

JL : **It was definitely conceived as a stand-alone. I began it in 1983. Took almost ten years to finish. By then I’d written — more importantly researched — the 1963 history which accidentally gave me the material for a series. I’m not sure if any writer begins with that notion. It’s something publishers ‘do to you.’ You roll with it or you don’t.**

MR : Was there any logic to the chronology of subsequent titles? For a time you were known as someone who

wrote a series backwards.

JL : I'm still doing that. Current novel is set in 1905. No, no logic whatsoever. I'd finished the first three as a distinct trilogy and I'd paused. It was the late Diana Norman, ever my muse in these matters and better known now as historical novelist Ariana Franklin, who said, 'go back and fill in the gaps.' Only ever had one rule — I will not write about the 1970s. I was looking the other way when that decade happened. Besides, the music was awful — until Chrissie Hynde came along.

MR : Are you a thriller writer or a historical novelist whose books involve policemen and spies?

JL : The latter.

MR : Is British history 1930 - 1960 (?) your 'sweet spot' or comfort zone when writing?

JL : It probably began that way, and I think I read an interview with Ian McEwan (might have been David Hare) saying he wrote about his own era, and I took that to mean his formative years, and as McEwan and I are the same age, that means the Age of Austerity straight after WW2. The same might apply to Martin Amis and Kate Atkinson. I still have my ration book. Pinned above my desk. Memento mori? That said, I moved some way out of British history a while back. I'm as likely to write about Germany or Russia, and I've one book set entirely in the USA in the 60s the other formative years.

MR : But you weren't there, in the Sixties?

JL : Of course not, but the civil rights movement was the most politicising series of events imaginable ... in any country where there was a television set. Channel 4 sent me there a lot in the eighties. I even got to interview John Lewis. One of the most remarkable politicians of the Movement. In the nineties I got fed up with transatlantic flights and decided to live there. On and off that lasted about 12 years. Except for BLACK OUT, all my early books were written in New York.

MR : Did your university studies have a bearing on your writing fiction? You read Politics at Essex didn't you?

JL : No, I didn't. I went to Essex as it was the only university in the country in the Sixties that offered a degree in American literature. Needless to say I was asked to vacate the premises after a while ... and by the time they let me back in the course had been shoved into a single year and I realised I'd never get past Hawthorne ... well ... fuck that ... so I looked around for something more interesting, and I found that I could do a crash course in Russian and study Russian lit as part of a degree in European literature, so instead of Tennessee Williams I found myself knee-deep in Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy ... and that did have a huge bearing on what I eventually wrote ... and eventually taught. I stayed on at Essex far too long and



taught Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. I might have written sooner if I'd left sooner.

MR : 'Vacate the premises'? Are you saying Essex kicked you out?

JL : In '69? Yes, but I've always

found being fired advantageous. It makes the decisions that you've been putting off. I got fired a lot. I think I've been fired from most jobs I've ever had. No harm done.

MR : If you could have had any job or career you like, what would it be?

JL : Time travel permitting I'd be a Victorian naturalist specialising in amphibians. Newts and toads. How can anyone resist a word like Natterjack? Preferably after 1859.

MR : Why 1859?

JL : That was the year Darwin and Wallace presented their paper on evolution to the Linnaean Society in London, and ripped the lid off the biggest can of worms in history.

MR : Enough with the day-dreaming, we're supposed to be talking about your Troy novels, though I suppose we'd better mention your second-string character Joe Wilderness. Where did Joe Wilderness come from, and more importantly why?

JL : Trying not to sound like a tosser I don't find characters they find me. We can stop now if you like ... that did sound like a tosser talking.

MR : No. Go ahead, dig yourself a hole.

JL : I wanted a change from Troy. Troy's an utter bastard. Joe is a nice guy. Albeit, Troy is a copper and Joe a crook. Troy is a philanderer, Joe a happily married man. I had the idea to take a scene from BLACK OUT and rewrite it from the point of views of the other character. This was Troy's first encounter with Swift Eddie ... and I think the plot grew entirely from that ... but Eddie is not a lead, he's 'best supporting actor.'

So along came Joe. One of my tutors at Essex had been drafted circa 1950 and was told he could do six months on the parade ground marching up and down or go to Cambridge, learn Russian and become a comms monitor for [MI] 5 or 6. I forget which. My twist was to make Joe an active agent, not an observer. The tutor, by the bye,

was Peter Frank. He never did become an agent ... he became the Kremlin-ologist (no, I did not make that word up) at Channel 4 News, which is where I worked with him years later.

MR: Is it just me or has anyone else noticed the regular cameos in your Troy novels of the anonymous "Fat Man" who seems to be something of an expert in pig-rearing?

JL: No, it's not just you. Although you may well have been the first. But it begins with Philip Roth.

MR: Weird. You'd better explain that.

JL: In PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT, Portnoy laments that he is a perennial student and always reads with a pencil in his hand. That was me too ... so I decided in my 20s that bed-time reading would be books without pencils and for years I read golden age crime in bed and left Levi-Strauss and Marshall McLuhan to daylight. I got hooked and my favourite character was Allingham's Magersfontein Lugg. The pig man. I was, fortunately, at that time represented by Marje's agent, and published by the same publisher. Both said I could use him as long as I did not name him. She's out of copyright in a few years, and at that point any old tosspot will be able to write Lugg stories.

MR: Your author blurbs are baffling.
JL: So?

MR: Are you trying to confuse people or are you really the curmudgeon some wicked critics make you out to be?

JL: Drop the plural. The wicked critic has always been you.

MR: Let me refine that. You say you belong to no societies and subscribe to no social media, rarely appear in public buying a pint of beer and often disappearing to a hill-top hideaway in Tuscany ... sounds curmudgeonly to me.

JL: Hmmm ... I saw my work in television as journalism. I was current affairs not news ... all the same I successfully annoyed a lot of people,

especially politicians ... such fun — I used to love hearing from them — so belonging to any society was, and is, never 'on', as sooner or later you have to piss on your own doorstep. Social media? You'd have to have been deaf and blind not to see Muskrat and Fuckerberg coming twenty years ago. It's pernicious, the legitimisation and universalisation of the school bully. It made Trump inevitable. It lifted Boris from a bit player in a Billy Bunter book to 10 Downing Street.

MR: Can I say you're a political animal?

JL: If you like. It's what I grew up in. It was immersive. My father, wisely in my opinion, turned down a crack at Westminster in '51. But don't ask me to state my present affiliation ... not while there's still a doorstep to piss on.

MR: I suppose we should talk about your new book, SMOKE AND EMBERS.



JL: If you insist.

MR: And ... ?

JL: It costs £16.99/\$28

MR: Is that all???

JL: Apparently.

MR: God give me strength.

JL: OK. OK. It's Troy 9. SMOKE AND EMBERS. I say Troy 9. There are a lot of other characters. Perhaps Troy is not the main one. But he is the solution to what takes place, if not the action. The novel spans seventeen years from the liberation of Auschwitz to the Eichmann trial. And I suppose it's about ... the fluidity of identity, about being able to assume and discard an identity. And Troy is central to that notion. I have long thought that the way to avoid writing the same novel over and over again is to keep shifting Troy's rôle and to surround him with a cast of characters of almost equal 'weight'. So this book is set in Poland, Germany, Israel, Argentina and ... London ... with a hefty number of players. He's still a copper — I forget what rank — but he doesn't really tackle murder-mysteries. He never did.

MR: Not sparing your blushes, 'the fluidity of identity' is a top notch description of the central theme, with characters sloughing off their original identities and pulling on new ones, and I'm not just saying that to prove I've read the damn thing. But with so many characters, time jumps and locations (from a body on a beach in East Sussex in 1950 to a body being cremated in Berlin in 1945 among them) plus a generous smattering of Russian, German and occasionally Italian, Yiddish and Hebrew, you don't make life easy for your readers, do you?

JL: I don't think that's deliberate. It is simply the way I work. I record (not the right word, probably) what talks to me — and if, along the way, I provide more of a challenge than watching reality TV ... so much the better.

MR: And next ... ?

JL: Another collaboration with Zoë Sharp, or if we move quickly two collaborations. The first was 'An Italian Job' — quite a while ago now — and was played out as game of consequences, necessitated by the fact that we weren't living in the same country at the time. The next is 'Acid Factory' — close to completion, but

I cannot hustle for a date as Zoë has other commitments. The TV world seems to be beating a path to her door for her Charlie Fox novels. A man beat a path to my door, but it turned out to be just a bill for lawnmowing. However, next up ... Bristol CrimeFest (UK) has asked for a contribution to their final anthology, so we'll be in that as a double act. Abbott and Costello once more.

MR : Who's on first?

JL : I'll pretend I didn't hear that.

MR: Then I'll pretend I didn't hear the one about the bill for lawnmowing. Just how much lawn do you have anyway?

JL : Move along, Mr Ripley

MR : And when can we expect Troy 10?

JL : Don't ask — just don't ask. The ink is still wet on the contract.

MR : So there is a contract for another....

JL : Oh yes. I am too young and too handsome to retire just yet.

MR: So when you said earlier that your 'Current novel is set in 1905' (see, I was listening), were you talking about the *next* Troy? i.e. the one you are writing now whilst waiting for the under gardener to finish the lawn.

JL: Yes. Provisional title DISHONEST TRUTHS. Very much a Troy Prequel ... 1905 – 1957.

MR : And finally....

JL : Are you sure?

MR : It's chucking out time and you've made a ginger beer shandy last well over an hour, so what has disappointed you in over thirty years in print? You can leave out politics and marriage or we'll be here till doomsday.

JL : Then I'll stick to Arts.

MR : Good idea. Take your time. We've all of three minutes before last orders.

JL : Marianne Faithfull died a few

weeks ago. Derided in her youth, greatly appreciated in later life, if only for one LP. The obits were legion. That set me thinking ... not just about neglected rock stars (eg. will Elkie Brooks get the same acclaim? She just turned 80 and has never, I think, been recognised as just plain brilliant at what she does), but writers too. Richard Burns — is there a single book in print? Adam Zameenzad ... same question. OK, they're both dead ... Burns at 33, Zameenzad at 80 ... both once 'spoken of in the same sentence as' Winterson or Okri, and I suspect, both forgotten. And Timothy Hallinan ... my exact contemporary, and very much alive ... one of America's finest crime writers I'd rate him with Carl Hiaasen does he even have an English publisher?

MR : And if you could change one thing about your life? Marriage and politics still inadmissible here.

JL : Time travel again. I'd get born a bit sooner, say 1944. Then I'd have experienced the Sixties instead of watching from the outside with my nose pressed up against the glass. I'd get to London around 1964 or 65, instead of 1970 ... and in 1970 I would leave London and never, ever return.

MR : You done?

JL : Yep.

MR : It's your round.

SMOKE AND EMBERS

by John Lawton

Atlantic Books, £16.99, May

Inspector Troy #9

Rating: A-

Reviewed by Jeff Popple

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, which unfolds 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.

Introducing ... Simon Mason

by Meredith Anthony

Simon Mason was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, on 5 February 1962. His father was the footballer Cliff Mason. He was educated at local schools and studied English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. During a career in publishing, he worked for a number of different companies, including Oxford University Press, Thames and Hudson, Pushkin Press and David Fickling Books, where he was managing director from 2012 to 2018. He has also taught at Oxford Brookes University, where he is Fellow of Creative Writing. From 2021 to 2023 he was a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Exeter College, Oxford.

Before coming to crime fiction, Simon wrote children's literature, and mainstream fiction, all to critical acclaim. That experience, as well as his career in publishing, sharply honed Simon's writing skills and perfectly prepared him for his next writing endeavor -- The Wilkins police detective series.

George Easter is a big fan of Simon Mason's work and his high recommendation was the impetus for my reading the series -- and I'm so glad I did. Here are my reviews of the four books that have been published so far. All are highly recommended. I think that Simon Mason is the best thing that has happened to British crime fiction in quite a long time.

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!



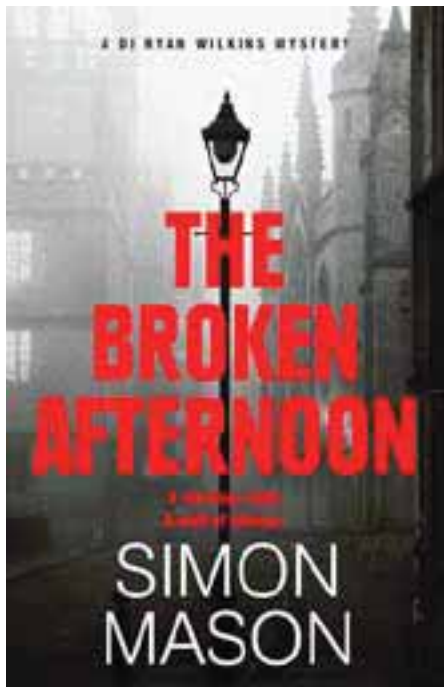
Newcomer to the DI rank, Ryan is accidentally called to a crime scene at Barnabas College, Oxford. Ryan is rough, white, hails from a trailer park, and looks like a swaggering young lout. DI Ray Wilkins is Black, affluent and well-spoken, himself a graduate of Oxford.

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.



THE BROKEN AFTERNOON

By Simon Mason
Riverrun, 2023, \$18.43
Rating: A

First line: Poppy Clarke, four years old, standing in the sun-dazzled gateway of Magpies.

Simon Mason's second book in the fantastic DI Ryan Wilkins mystery series, is, amazingly, just as terrific as the first book, *A KILLING IN NOVEMBER* (which I reviewed in the February 2025 issue of DP).

THE BROKEN AFTERNOON begins with a missing child. DI Ryan Wilkins (no relation) is at his low-paying security job, having been fired from the police. He sees his former partner, DI Ray Wilkins (no relation), with the new police Superintendent on TV at the press conference. A little girl went missing from her nursery school while her mother was talking to staff. She had been waiting just outside the door.

Ryan's night shift at an industrial site full of rental trucks is interrupted by a fleeting movement on one of his security cameras. When he goes to investigate, he finds a man he knew from his youth

in the hard-scrabble fringes of Oxford, Mick Dick. Just out of prison, the big man is frightened and trembling and incoherent. Ryan lets him go.

Within a day, Mick Dick is found dead. Hit and run. Ryan can't believe it. He tries to ignore it, but his instincts tell him to investigate. Meanwhile, the new police Superintendent, hoping to raise his diversity and inclusion statistics, calls Ryan and says he may start proceedings to reinstate him. Ryan's disadvantaged upbringing and low-income status make him a candidate for rehabilitation.

Fighting his impulse to solve the mystery of Mick Dick's death while trying to keep his job and not run afoul of the official investigation, Ryan breaks every rule and gets into every jam.

When the case of the missing girl and the death of Mick Dick begin to converge, he appeals to his former partner, Ray, to partner with him in the investigation. Naturally, mayhem ensues.

Oxford, like so many storied places, has two sides: the historic precincts of the university and the wealthy are in stark contrast with the scabby outskirts full of grifters, criminals and the homeless. The contrast between the two Oxfords mirrors the contrast between handsome, well-bred, Oxford educated DI Ray Wilkins and trailer park trash former DI Ryan Wilkins. But somehow, they manage to work together.

A brilliant book. A heartbreaking plot. Twists galore. And some of the most memorable characters you'll find in crime fiction today.

LOST AND NEVER FOUND

By Simon Mason
Riverrun, 2024, \$28.99
Rating: A

First line: The illegal car wash on the southbound road out of Oxford is the cheapest in the city, a makeshift compound of oily puddles and streams, slick and black under dripping awnings.

This British procedural series just keeps getting better. In this, the third entry in this amazing series, a beautiful socialite, Zara Fanshawe, is missing

and her Rolls Royce Phantom has been found damaged in a disreputable byway in the bad part of Oxford. Despite her notoriety, no one could say for sure what she was up to recently. Her past was well-documented. The daughter of a Viscount, she graduated from Oxford, jumped horses in the Olympics, had a string of celebrity boyfriends, and eventually married a wealthy man about town. She also had a serious drug addiction. When she came out of rehab she seemed to be back in control. Then her car was found crashed and she went missing. Emergency services got a call from her but all she said was, "Lost and never found," before the call cut off. Had she relapsed? Was she in hiding? The only thing found in the abandoned Rolls was a paperback book on Catholic doctrine.

Reinstated in the police, disreputable Ryan is assigned lead on the case, much to the chagrin of his suave partner, Ray. Ray is especially anxious to solve this case and quickly. A legendary cop, Deputy Chief Constable Chester Lynch, a black woman with a low-class background to match Ryan's, has singled Ray out for great things. Ryan has acquired a girlfriend, a woman who owns a florist shop, and he, too, has hopes for the future.

The case stutters and stops, veering



off into the homeless camps and grimy drug dens of the dirty side of Oxford. When Zara's body is found, her neck broken, one of the items in her handbag is one of Ryan's girlfriend's business cards.

Again, Simon Mason has produced a perfectly paced, beautifully written procedural so absorbing and twisty that you'll want to read it all in a gulp.

The separate story lines that involve the personal lives of the two partners is also so beautifully drawn and so engaging that you want to know them better and see where they end up.



A VOICE IN THE NIGHT

By Simon Mason
Riverrun, 2025, \$20.00

Rating: A

First line: It comes out of the darkness, tearing the silence to shreds.

Simon Mason's fourth novel in the DI Ryan Wilkins series is just plain amazing.

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT begins when a professor's wife, Greta, gets a call from emergency services in the middle of the night. Her husband's fall alarm, necessary because of his failing physical condition, has gone off. Then the GPS feature failed. Greta's husband isn't in

the house at all.

He is found early the next morning, dead, in his pajamas, on the lawn of a high-class hotel. There are signs of a scuffle, but forensics report that the cause of death was drowning, probably in the nearby river.

He had been speaking at a debate in Oxford Union, where he antagonized several in the audience with his iconoclastic atheism and scathing views on right-wing Christianity. Had one of his opponents killed him? Unable to walk very far or very fast, how had he gotten to the hotel?

There is a new Superintendent of Police, a young woman, and she declares her intention to rid the force of the less competent. Ray and Ryan, the two Detective Inspectors, both named Wilkins (no relation), and from very different backgrounds, are assigned to the case. A more prestigious case, involving a break in at a college storage room for ancient artifacts, is given to Ryan and Ray's nemesis, the smug DI Hare.

The investigation, as usual, is full of false starts, dead ends, confusing leads, and indecipherable clues. DI Hare's case, meanwhile, is smooth sailing.

The complex plot begins to take shape and the narrative is adjusted, again and again. I can't think of an author better at keeping us informed and interested no matter how snarled the threads seem.

The through-lines of the main characters, Ryan, his sister Jade, and his motherless little boy, also named Ryan, are finely drawn, as are those of Ray, his wife, and the twins they tried so hard to conceive. The extent to which you become engaged in the private lives of these mismatched detectives is astonishing. Mason juggles twisty plots, disparate characters, heart-breaking story lines, funny occurrences, and savage violence with the kind of ease that is rare in the crime fiction world.

His ability to throw out a wealth of detail and then laser in on the element that turns the plot is breathtaking.

For authors or would-be authors these books are a master class. For readers lucky enough to find them, they are a pure pleasure.

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.

THE MISSING HALF,

Ashley Flowers

THE IMPOSSIBLE THING,

Belinda Bauer

HUMAN REMAINS,

Jo Callaghan

FORTRESS OF EVIL,

Javier Cercas

SHAW CONNOLLY LIVES

TO TELL, Gillian French

THE GHOSTS OF ROME,

Joseph O'Connor

SILENT HORIZONS,

Chad Robichaux w/ Jack Stewart

Already read for the next issue s--

THE BLUE HORSE,

Bruce Borgos

MAKING A KILLING,

Cara Hunter

THE WITCH'S ORCHARD,

Archer Sullivan

WE ARE ALL GUILTY HERE,

Karin Slaughter

WHAT THE NIGHT BRINGS,

Mark Billingham

CARVED IN BLOOD,

Michael Bennett

THE WHITE CROW,

Michael Robotham

THE VANISHING PLACE,

Zoe Rankin

THE HOUSE OF THE BURNING

BONES, Stuart MacBride

KISS HER GOODBYE,

Lisa Gardner

GUNNER, Alan Parks

CLOWN TOWN,

Mick Herron



The mystery fiction community has lost four quite significant authors over the last few months. Our condolences to the families and to the authors' fans.

Peter Lovesey



Peter's passing is a big loss to the mystery fiction community and to many of us that knew and loved him on a personal level. When we created the Barry Awards 28 years ago, Peter won the very first Barry Award for Best Mystery for his Peter Diamond novel **BLOODHOUNDS**. He has been a loyal subscriber to *Deadly Pleasures* since that time. A few years ago when Peter came to Salt Lake City for a signing I met him at the airport and we spent the day together — a cherished memory for me. At the Dallas Bouchercon where he was honored, I got the opportunity to interview him. I always described him as a class act in all respects. He has left a great literary legacy that should not be

forgotten. We all can't live forever, but if you are a writer of Peter's calibre, your works certainly can — and should.

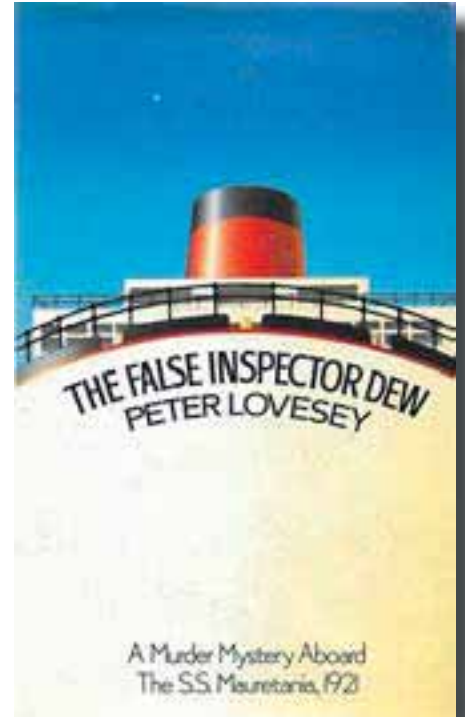
Here is what his American publisher Soho Crime says about this sad event:

It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of our dear friend and MWA Grand Master Peter Lovesey. Peter passed away peacefully at his home in Shrewsbury, England, on April 10, 2025, after a courageous battle against pancreatic cancer. He was with Jax, his wife of 65 years. He was 88 years old.

Peter Lovesey was born in 1936 in Middlesex, England, and counted as his earliest memory the 1944 Blitz bombing that destroyed his family's house. In 1955, he entered Reading University, pursuing a degree in visual arts, but in December of his first year was persuaded to switch departments by an English professor who had been impressed by one of Peter's essays. He graduated with honors in 1958 and the next year married his sweetheart, Jackie "Jax," with whom he would have two children, Kathy and Phil. After a decade spent as a teacher, Peter got his start as crime fiction writer via a first novel contest sponsored by Macmillan/Panther.

In a writing career that spanned six decades, Peter published forty-three novels: five stand-alone crime novels, including the CWA Gold Dagger winner **THE FALSE INSPECTOR DEW**, which was selected to be on the CWA's list of the Top 100 Crime Novels of All Time as well as *The Times*' Top 100 Crime Novels of the 20th Century; eight Victorian crime novels featuring Sergeant Cribb, which were developed for television starting in 1979; three featuring Bertie, Prince of Wales; two novels in the Hen Mallin series; three novels under the pen name Peter Lear, including the sports novel *Goldengirl*, adopted into a 1980 film; and twenty-two novels in his flagship Peter Diamond procedural series, starting with his Anthony Award-winning classic **THE LAST DETECTIVE** and concluding with his poignant final novel, **AGAINST THE GRAIN**, published in 2024, which he wrote after his diagnosis. He was a prolific short story writer, and published

seven collections during his lifetime. He was also the author of four works of sports nonfiction; it was his expertise in the history of track and field that gave birth to his prizewinning debut, **WOB- BLE TO DEATH**, a murder mystery set over the course of a Victorian speed-walking race.



Peter Lovesey was the recipient of numerous honors and awards. He was one of the very few writers to have been awarded both the Mystery Writers of America Grand Master Special Edgar and the Crime Writers' Association's Cartier Diamond Dagger for Lifetime Achievement; the short list of other such double honorees includes Sue Grafton, John le Carré, Walter Mosley, and Sara Paretsky. In addition to his Gold Dagger for **THE FALSE INSPECTOR DEW**, he thrice received the Silver Dagger (for **WAXWORK**, **THE SUMMONS**, and **BLOODHOUNDS**); multiple Macavity (**BLOODHOUNDS**, **THE HOUSE SITTER**), Barry (**BLOODHOUNDS**), and Anthony Awards (**THE LAST DETECTIVE**); and nominations for the Edgar Award for Best Novel (**THE SUMMONS**) and *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize (**THE HOUSE SITTER**). He received the 2014 Strand Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2010 Grand Master Award from the Swedish

Academy of Detection, and the 2008 Malice Domestic Lifetime Achievement Award. His short stories garnered many prizes, including the CWA Short Story Award and Veuve Clicquot Award, the *Ellery Queen* Readers Award, and the MWA Golden Mystery Prize. In French translation, his novels received the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière and the Prix du Roman d'Aventures.

In addition to the scope of his unparalleled crime fiction career, Peter Lovesey will be remembered by his many grieving friends as the paragon of decency, compassion, loyalty, self-discipline, and pride in good work—in short, a human example of what it means to live a good life. We at Soho Press have been privileged and honored to be Peter's American publisher for over thirty years, beginning with his now-classic **THE LAST DETECTIVE**. Fifty years after the publication of his own prize-winning debut, **WOBBLE TO DEATH**, Peter collaborated with Soho Crime to sponsor his own first novel contest, launching the career of Edgar-winner Eli Cranor with the publication of **DON'T KNOW TOUGH**. A lifelong member of the Detection Club, Peter was respected as a scholar and advocate of the genre as well as a mentee and supporter of new writers.

His absence will be deeply felt but the legacy of his remarkable life and work will live on.

Ken Bruen

Ken Bruen has passed away at age 74.

George Easter on Ken Bruen

I met Ken Bruen at the Las Vegas Bouchercon in 2003. His first book in the Jack Taylor series, **THE GUARDS**, had come out earlier that year to high critical and fan acclaim. If I recall correctly, he came unannounced and was surprised at how many fans had read **THE GUARDS** and liked it – and knew who he was. If I would characterize Ken's personality in one word it would be "charming." And, in like manner, if I would characterize Ken's writing style in one word it would be "unique."



Ken Bruen

In 2008 he won the Barry Award for **PRIEST** and at other times was nominated four times for the Barry Awards. One of those nominations was for the Barry Award for Best Book of the Decade for **THE GUARDS** (which lost out to Stieg Larsson's **THE GIRL IN THE DRAGON TATTOO**). He also won two Shamus Awards and two Macavity Awards.

I have recently read and enjoyed his latest Jack Taylor book **GALWAY'S EDGE** (March 2025). Little did I know it would be his last. Rest in peace, Ken. You have left a great literary and personal legacy and will be remembered long into the future.

Comments by DP Contributors

Meredith Anthony

Sad news. Last week the great Ken Bruen died. He was one of my all-time favorite authors and one of my favorite people to have a drink with at a conference. I will miss him.

Ted Hertel

Ken was a great guy! He and his amazing writing will be missed. The first time I met him he told me that he had read a review of mine of one of his early books. He liked the review so much he bought me a drink – though I know that I am far from the only one he did that for. The next time I saw him, I bought the drinks.

From his Editor and Friend Otto Penzler

One of the true greats of the mystery world is gone. I'm broken-hearted to report that Ken Bruen, my dear friend of more than 30 years, has died. In addition to being one of the most talented and original writers I've ever read, he was also one of the best people I've been privileged to know. Unfailingly kind and generous, he had a heart as big as the universe. Fifteen years ago, when the bookshop was struggling mightily, I had the idea to publish bibliomysteries in the store to help as fund-raisers. The first person I asked to write one was Ken because I knew he would say yes. After he delivered the manuscript of his most recent novel, **GALWAY'S EDGE**, to the Mysterious Press, he said that it was his final Jack Taylor. I've been pressing him to keep on, that he couldn't let his superb, memorable, tough but poignant character die. It seems that Ken may have known more than he let on.

Kerry Greenwood



Kerry Greenwood

From Janet Rudolph:

Australian Kerry Greenwood, author of the **Phryne Fisher mysteries**, died on March 26, at the age of 70. I really enjoyed all of her books. She will be missed.

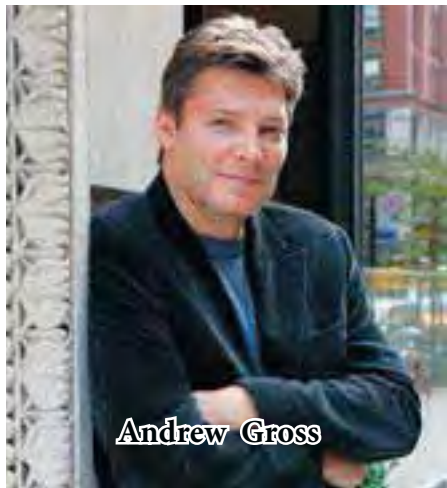
Kerry Greenwood published the first Phryne Fisher novel, **COCAINE BLUES** in 1989 and went on to write **22 novels featuring the glamorous 1920s detective**. An adaptation of the series, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* (2012),

starred Essie Davis in the lead role and ran for three seasons.

Kerry Greenwood, who was also known for the Corinna Chapman mysteries, was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2020.

Alongside her career as a professional writer, Greenwood worked as a legal aid solicitor in Melbourne, Australia.

Andrew Gross



Andrew Gross

From Janet Rudolph:

Thriller writer **Andrew Gross** passed away today at the age of 72 from a rare form of cancer. Andrew wrote 18 novels, his first six with James Patterson. When he struck out on his own, his novels instantly became NYT best sellers. His thrillers were filled with action, and also family relationships and themes of loss and betrayal. His taut writing takes you along on the adventure!

I got to know Andy better when he and Lynn were seated next to me at Larry Gandle's birthday party during Bouchercon in New Orleans in 2016. It was an exceptional evening -- the food, the celebration, and their conversation. We talked about life, writing, thrillers, and so much more. It was so fun and convivial. I felt like I knew Andy all my life. It was great to follow his and Lynn's travels and grandchildren on social media since then. And, of course, I read his latest books.

Associate Editor's Message



It is award season again and many awards have come out with their shortlists. As I said in my Edgar column, this year's Edgar list is another disappointing one. As you know, every year George Easter looks forward to collecting the best of the year lists from dozens of knowledgeable well-read sources. The list he accumulates is the best of the 'best of' lists. These are the books we have been talking about all year. Yet, the Edgar judges live in their own little insular world and often their shortlists are totally bewildering. It is truly a shame as, in my opinion, the Edgar Award is considered one of the most prestigious awards in crime fiction, if not the most prestigious. The Edgar, along with the Thriller Award, the CWA Dagger awards and the Strand Awards are the only awards where the judges have read all the books on the shortlist. (At least that is what we are told.) To me, that gives these awards some gravitas. Yet, looking at these shortlists, I wonder what world these judges are living in. I am familiar with only a few of the books on all these lists. George, who I consider to be one of the most knowledgeable crime fiction readers on this planet, also claims to have heard of much less than would be expected.

I have always said that the problem with fan awards such as the Anthony, the Barry, the McCavity and others is that the people voting have not read all of the books. Therefore, some great books do not win. I will admit, the Barry does tend to award what many of us consider the best books in spite of this. Yet, it is not a perfect system.

The CWA Dagger Awards in Great Britain has added several new categories -- best traditional crime and best psychological suspense. So, they now have seven different fictional categories with some overlapping books. It is to the point that if a book is not longlisted on one of their lists, there must be

something wrong with it. Last year, I expressed my doubt in reading their shortlists which are always at least six books. I asked the readers in the magazine if they still wanted me to do it. We got one positive response and no others. Therefore, I feel the interest is not there and I am ending my reading of those shortlists. I just don't have the time nor the interest. For the time being, I will continue with the Edgars reading in the best novel and best first novel categories.

We have had several deaths in the crime fiction community recently. The ones that hit me the hardest were Steele Curry and Andrew Gross. George already talked about Steele -- a true gentleman and a great fan of crime fiction and thriller books. He will be sorely missed at upcoming Bouchercons and as a contributor to this magazine. I was looking forward to visiting his hometown next year in Calgary. It is a shame he won't be there with us.

I got to know Andrew Gross at a very small thriller conference here in Tampa. We talked for quite some time about the thriller world -- the books, the conventions etc. I also saw him at Thrillerfest and Bouchercon. I looked forward to seeing him at Bouchercon but his health deteriorated and he recently passed away. He was a great guy and I will miss him, as well.

George has just turned eighty. I am not saying his demise is imminent but it does remind us that we have a limited time on this planet and we need to take advantage of seeing our friends and loved ones while we still can for as long as we can. None of us are getting any younger.



Editor's Message



Next Issue. The cover article of the next issue is going to focus on missing person cases and the amateur and professional detectives who seek them out. And in some cases the missing persons themselves. I have already read some current titles that fit this description and am having no problem finding more, and yet no one has come up with a sub-genre category for them, such as domestic suspense. The theme of missing person(s) weaves its way through mystery series and standalones. There are a few detectives that specialize in this area such as Tim Weaver's David Raker, Lisa Gardner's Frankie Elkin and Simon Mason's Finder. I've also come up with a list of my favorite missing persons novels. I hope you will find it as interesting to read as I'm finding to write.



Use of "They/Them" in Mysteries. I live in the hinterland so I was late to the game in finding out that a group of people who don't identify as either male or female (non-binary) have appropriated the plural pronouns "they/them" – the same pronouns that have been used for centuries to signify more than one person. I've noticed the use of "they/them" to refer to binary characters in three mysteries this year, all by talented authors. I find it confusing. I'm reading along and all of a sudden the author is using "they" or "them" to refer to an individual character. Two things happen in my mind: 1. I think "who is the author referring to?" And then I make the connection "Oh, it's that non-binary

character."; and 2. That thought process takes me right out of my reading zone. To say the least, I don't like it. If non-binary people want to be distinguished from males and females, why didn't they create new words to signify their difference instead of appropriating old terms and assign them a new and confusing meaning? No one asked for my vote, but it would have been "no." I won't boycott books that use these terms, but I'm registering my displeasure. Please don't cancel me. Just call me an old fogey.

The Value of Self-Published Novels.

As a general rule, mystery reviewers look down their noses at self-published novels – mainly because such books have not usually gone through an editing process. And if the novel isn't deemed good enough for publication by a name publisher, it most likely will not be worth spending time reading it. Also, we mystery reviewers don't have the time to read and review all the books by established publishers and authors that they would like to read.

But there are always exceptions to any rule. Just last year, the well-established author Stephen Leather self-published the latest books in two of his series. This was after being published for many years by Hodder & Stoughton in the U.K. From what I have been able to find out, Hodder turned down his 2024 Spider Shepherd novel **FIRST STRIKE** because it depicted the events of the October 7 attack by Hamas on Israeli civilians in a pro-Israeli light. The publisher thought that the subject was too controversial and refused to publish the book. (I suspect that someone in a position of power in the publishing house had pro-Palestinian sympathies.) So Stephen Leather self-published the book. I bought it, read it and considered it the best thriller I read in 2024. It is nominated for this year's Barry Award for Best Thriller. His depiction

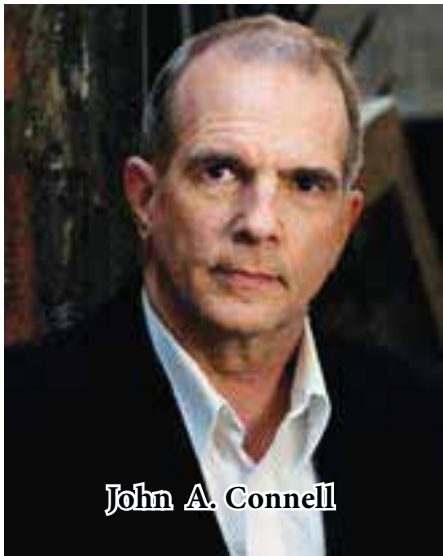
of October 7 was gut-wrenching. [last minute addition. Good news. Stephen's back with Hodder for the July 31 release in the U.K. of **LAST CHANCE**, a Spider Shepherd novel.]



Another exception is Jake Needham, who lives in Thailand and sets his novels in the Far East. He essentially is self-published, although the quality of the books in every respect is higher than most self-published book you find. I was introduced to him by the late Steele



Curry, whose recommendations I paid a lot of attention to. Jake has published 16 novels and has done a remarkable job of accumulating a relatively small but loyal fan base to support his work. Last year he won the Barry Award for Best Paperback Original Mystery with **WHO THE HELL IS HARRY BLACK?** I consider his books equal to, if not better, than most of the mysteries published by major U.S. publishers. Yet, they seem to show no interest in picking him up. Puzzling. His next Inspector Tay mystery, **GOODBYE, MR. BOOGIE**, is set for a U.S. release in July, 2025.

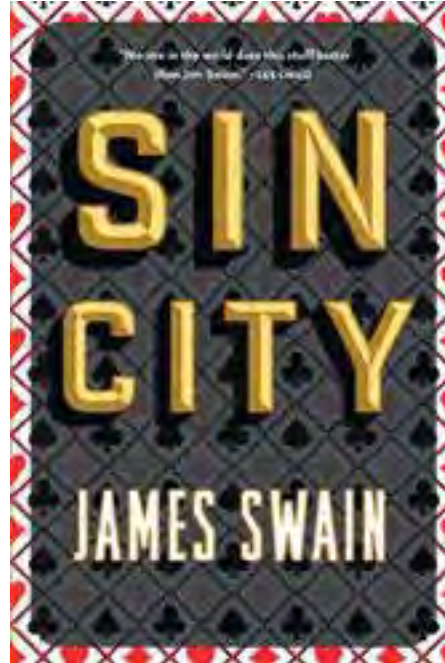


John A. Connell

John A. Connell's series involving a military cop in post-WWII Europe (Mason Collins) began its life with the first two books published by U.S. publisher Berkley. John has continued the series with five more novels, all self-published. I've read and positively reviewed the five in the pages of *Deadly Pleasures*. I don't know who binds them, but they do a fabulous job. They are among the best made books I own. Cover art is great as well. Another head scratcher as to why no mainstream publisher has picked up this series. The author lives in Paris.

James Swain started his career with a highly entertaining series involving a gambling expert (Tony Valentine) published by Ballantine and later Fawcett. Most of his later work was published by Thomas & Mercer, until his last one, **SIN CITY**, which, mysteriously, was self-published. I have been unable to find out the circumstances behind this.

Nevertheless, it managed to find enough members of our Barry Award nomination committee to be nominated for a Barry Award (Best Paperback Original). Needless to say, he's a favorite writer of mine and I'll seek out his books from any source.



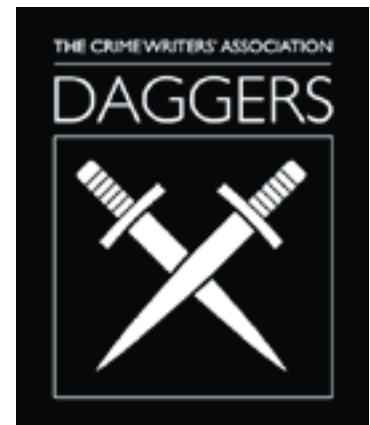
So what I'm trying to say with this thought is that there are a few exceptional writers who find themselves in circumstances that require them to self-publish. These few should be judged by the quality of their writing and not the means they take to get it to the public.

Bored with TV & Streaming? I recommend that you watch *Ludwig*, a new crime series that premiered in March (on my birthday – thank you very much!) and what a birthday present it was. It's the best thing I've watched in a long time. You may find it on Britbox. If you don't want to subscribe, sign up for a free month's trial (and then remember to cancel, if that is your wish.) The plot involves two middle-aged twin brothers. One is a married detective with a teenaged son. The other is a reclusive puzzle maker (elite class). The detective goes missing but only the wife knows. She twists her brother-in-law's arm to impersonate the missing detective to find out where he's gone to. The wonderful actors and intelligent scripts



pull this high-wire plot off with great aplomb. Oh, and did I mention that the impersonator manages to solve some puzzling crimes along the way? This should have universal appeal.

Dagger Award Listings. You will find graphics on pages 80-86 that illustrate the Long Lists for this year's CWA Dagger Awards. These lists will be whittled down to Short Lists for each Dagger. I want to make you aware that two new Dagger Awards have been added. The Whodunit Dagger will be awarded for the Best Traditional Mystery Novel and the Twisted Dagger will be awarded to the Best Psychological Suspense Novel of the year. The CWA realized that these were two large areas of crime fiction that needed a larger spotlight put on them. Hence, these two new awards.



A Visit From the Book Broad

Meredith Anthony



GALWAY'S EDGE

By Ken Bruen

Mysterious Press, 2025, \$26.95

Rating: A

First line: A notorious paedophile, named Cleon, managed to avoid prosecution despite appalling acts.

Raise a glass of Jay. Order a pint of the best. The late Ken Bruen, arguably the greatest Irish mystery writer (and for me one of the best mystery writers ever. Period.) has written the eighteenth and perhaps the last Jack Taylor mystery, **GALWAY'S EDGE**.

Jack is living quietly, for him, with a dog that doesn't hate him, on money he was bequeathed in a previous book and the little he makes as a private investigator and fixer. That quiet life is about to change. The Galway Edge, a shadowy organization of wealthy and influential Galway residents, is alternately the last resort for justice when all else fails, and just as often, an organized bunch of rulebreakers who exact vengeance on those who have wronged them. Either way, Edge is a problem.

An emissary from the Vatican, of all places, comes to Jack Taylor's door and asks that he dissuade Kevin Whelan, a local priest, from working with the Edge. Elsewhere, the Mother Superior of the nun's convent asks Taylor to help get back an elaborate crucifix that was stolen. A local woman asks Taylor to help her deal with her abusive husband. He is a policeman, a Guard. Then a man asks Jack to kill him. On his birthday.

Written in the poetic Irish prose Bruen has honed over the years, the narrative meanders among the various tracks. As Jack Taylor negotiates all these cases he receives visitors, goes to pubs, and

spends a few days in a hospital with a broken nose and a concussion. Somehow, everything gets resolved. Mostly.

If you are a fan of Ken Bruen's, you know that a straightforward solution to a single case is not on the cards. But plot twists aside, what makes Jack Taylor stand apart from the cops, ex-cops and detectives in the vast majority of crime books is the human touch. Taylor is a more fully fleshed out character than is found in most genre fiction. He interacts with the world more fully than most of his private eye peers, noting foreign affairs: with a focus on the war in Ukraine; sports, particularly the World Cup; politics: including immigration in Ireland, Biden in America, and England's Prince Harry and Megan; literature: Taylor reads, in this book alone, Dennis Lehane's **SMALL MERCIES** and gives a shout-out to S. A. Cosby. His sartorial allegiance to 501 jeans and Doc Martens is legend. His drinking is,

as well, with a preference for Jameson. His appearance with his broken nose and the aches and pains of his aging body is dispassionately dissected. His women regularly bed him and dump him. His dog leaves him for a better owner. His engagement with the world and his embrace of all it has to offer is so heartwarming that even his cynicism cannot impair.

I am not a crier. (I haven't cried since the seventh grade when I found out that my school nickname was The Walking Encyclopedia instead of That Gorgeous Girl.) But I cried when I heard that Ken Bruen had died. And I cried when I finished reading **GALWAY'S EDGE**.

Highly highly recommended.

CALLOUS

By Ken Bruen

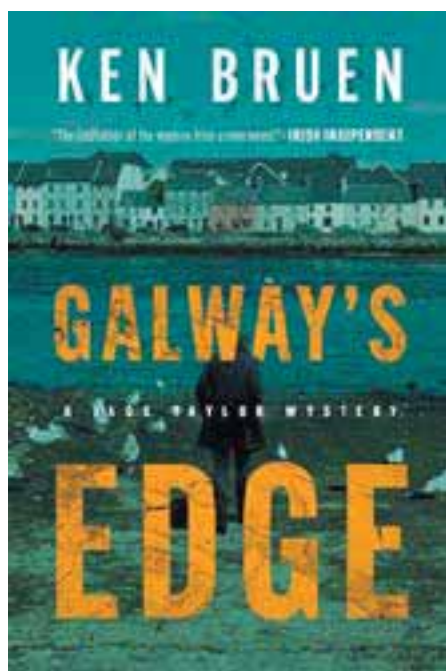
Mysterious Press, 2021, \$14.99

Rating: A

First line: Mary Casey, seventy-nine years old, a tough Galway woman.

A couple of years ago, Ken Bruen gave us **CALLOUS**, a brilliant crime novel, and I had hoped maybe the start of a brilliant new series.

Yes, the mantle had been passed. Literally. The protagonist, ex-cop, ex-priest, Tommy Mitchell, known as Mitch, briefly meets a stranger in a Galway bar. They exchange a few words. The next time he's there, the bartender gives him a package containing no note, nothing but a warm Garda coat. Fans of Ken Bruen will know that a Garda coat was a prominent motif in the legendary Jack Taylor series! For Jack Taylor to pass it on to Mitch is a very big deal.



Mitch's sister, Kate, has inherited a cottage and has left Brooklyn to live in Galway. Kate is hoping for a quiet life to recover from her addictions. But her unfortunate resemblance to Maria Callas brings her to the attention of a dangerous gangster, Dio, who is obsessed with the late opera singer. Mitch and Kate's other brother, Colin, an ex-Marine, fight to keep Kate safe and nearly die in the process.

As always, Bruen is obsessed with language. He gives us, over the course of the novel, several definitions of the word "callous" and several interesting usages, including a translation of a quote from a top Nazi, describing his actions during the war: "We may have been a little..." Pause. 'Callous.'

Naturally, it is also important that Maria Callas features in the plot.

Bruen's narrative is, as always, a kind of Irish poetry, fast-moving, erudite, full of cultural references, violent and completely gripping.

Highly highly recommended.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEVLINS

By Lisa Scottoline

Putnam's Sons, March 2024, \$29.95

Rating: A

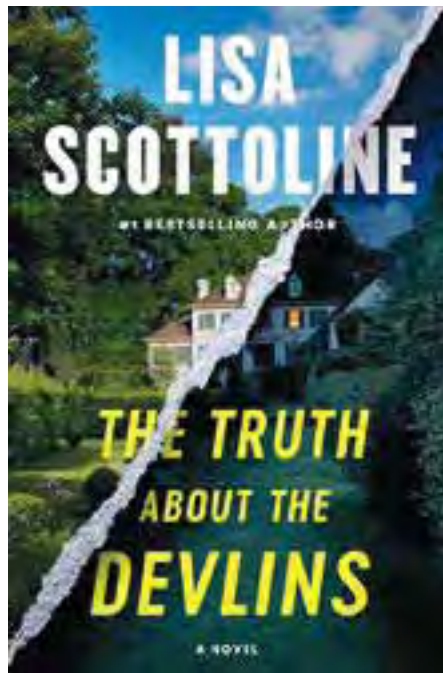
First line: At first I thought I heard him wrong.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEVLINS

is easily the best psychological thriller in years! The amazing Lisa Scottoline delivers a family drama that manages to marry the personal and the political in a unique and thoroughly engaging way.

TJ Devlin is the charmingly hang-dog black sheep of the illustrious Devlin clan, wealthy Philadelphia legal royalty. The white-shoe family law firm includes the patriarch and his wife, the elder son, and the daughter, all attorneys. It also includes, as an investigator, the hapless TJ, a recovering alcoholic who never finished college and who served a year in prison for a drunken mistake.

When his successful older brother comes to TJ for help, he leaps into action. But things are not what they seem, and trouble seems to follow TJ whichever



er way he turns.

The question is: can the family screw-up reverse course and become a hero?

Some of the stakes are intimate: can TJ Devlin stay sober one more day? Some of them are global: Big Pharma versus the oppressed. But the entire package is as breathtaking as any big hero-versus-terrorist thriller.

Highly recommended. A must read.

LEO

By Deon Meyer

Translated by K.L. Seegers

Atlantic Monthly Press, 2025, \$28.00

Rating: B+

First Line: Anjane van Tonder sat in the charge office of the Stellenbosch police station.

Marrying a standard issue police procedural with an international terror plot, Deon Meyer has crafted an excellent novel set in South Africa and beyond. I love a lot of mysteries with an African setting: Alexander McCall Smith's resonant Number One Ladies Detective Agency stories, the brilliant Detective Kubu books by Michael Stanley, Kwei Quartey's Ghana novels, and of course, Deon Meyer's Benny Griessel series.

In LEO, translated from the Afrikaans, Benny and his partner Vaughn Cupido have been seemingly demoted and are stationed in an outpost in Stellenbosch, far from the action in Cape Town. A college student is found dead on the path of her morning run. There are scratches and bite marks. Was it an attack by a leopard? They are assigned to find out what happened. They don't have enough evidence to arrest a businessman with two vicious attack dogs, but after they talk to him, he is found dead, his throat filled with industrial foam in a clear message: don't talk.

Meanwhile, far away, a beautiful wildlife guide with a troubled past is recruited to help a team of special forces veterans with a high stakes honeytrap and heist. When the operation goes terribly wrong, there is only a tenuous link between the businessman and the heist. Longtime colleagues Griessel and Cupido keep pulling at the flimsiest threads until the scheme begins to unravel.

The details of the lives of the two detectives and the characterizations of the criminals involved in the heist elevate this thriller into the ranks of the greats. Beautifully translated, there is a helpful glossary of Afrikaans slang included.

MARBLE HALL MURDERS

By Anthony Horowitz

Harper Collins, May 2025, \$31.00

Rating: C-

First line: Is there really such a thing as a happy ending?

There are two types of mystery readers: those who live in the present, and those who live in the past. An astonishing number of readers are of the second type: they reread Agatha Christie obsessively, they are ardent Sherlockians who write endless pastiches and Conan Doyle-inspired fan fiction, and they are members of the Wolfe Pack, a bunch of crazed Rex Stout aficionados who host a banquet in New York every year, take trips to Stout's home and other landmarks, and give prizes to books that seem to continue the Nero Wolfe tradition. (Yes, I confess, I am myself a member of The Wolfe Pack. Don't judge.

But I prefer books grounded firmly in the present.)

No one has capitalized on this trend better than Anthony Horowitz, who writes about a present-day book editor, Susan Ryeland, who works on books featuring a Poirot-style detective, Atticus Pünd. A smart woman (but evidently a slow learner), Susan has already nearly been killed as a result of her work on these books by a famous author, Alan Conway, but finds herself sitting down again with a manuscript that will, again, nearly be the end of her.

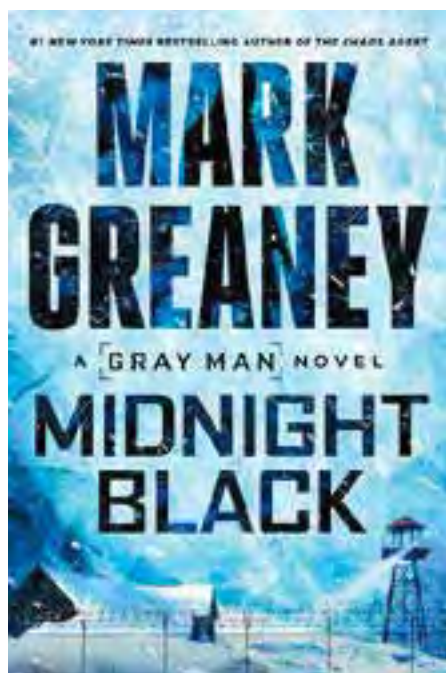
In addition, there are two types of mystery books: the kind that feature famous mystery writers with bizarre personality traits, crazed fans, and a dizzying assortment of family secrets, and the rest of the oeuvre. Just recently, we have seen J.T. Ellison's **A VERY BAD THING**, about a hugely successful author who seems somewhere between Louise Penny and J.K. Rowling with a little Mary Higgins Clarke thrown in for good measure. Benjamin Stevenson has given us the silly **EVERYONE ON THIS TRAIN HAS KILLED SOMEONE** about an author on a book-writer's trip through Australia. And then there is the egregious **THE DEEPEST LAKE** by Andromeda Romano-lax, about a famous writer with obsessive fans who runs a strange writers' retreat in Guatemala. And many more, of course. **MARBLE HALL MURDERS** is one of these. And it is book three in a series about the hapless Ms. Ryeland. Again, I am willing to make exceptions for books like J.T. Ellison's, but I prefer mysteries about anybody but mystery authors.

On the good side, if you do opt to buy this doorstopper of a novel, you are actually getting two novels for the price of one. The Atticus Pünd novel at the heart of the mystery is included in toto within.

So, if you love books that harken back to the golden age of Miss Marple, and if you love books about crazed and possibly murderous authors, you may love this one. I did not.

MIDNIGHT BLACK

By Mark Greaney
Berkley, 2025, \$



Rating: B+

First line: Courtland Gentry sat at the bar, his drink in front of him, and he flashed occasional looks up into a grimy mirror, first to identify and then to prioritize all those in the crowd preparing to kill him.

The Gray Man is back! After an ill-judged dip into the world of tech, Mark Greaney has returned to what he does best: lone man versus terrorism on a global scale. And nobody does it better.

MIDNIGHT BLACK opens with Court in a dive bar in Bucharest at midnight, evaluating the five men who were there to kill him. Just another day at the office for the Gray Man.

Court is actually trying to break into Russia and hopes to cross the well-defended border very soon. His Russian girlfriend, Zoya, is rumored to be held in a Russian prison. Or she may even be dead already. Only Court believes she is still alive. He calls upon a small cadre of fellow operatives to help him and goes off on an impossible mission no one believes in but him.

Meanwhile, Zoya is alive and being held in an impenetrable gulag where she's treated like slave labor and plots her own impossible escape.

Full of action and political intrigue,

MIDNIGHT BLACK is a good addition to the long Gray Man series. My only caveat is a trace of petulance in Court. It is suggested that while he's there, he might also free an important political couple, the man modeled after the noted imprisoned Russian dissident Alexei Navalny. The Gray Man sulks and agrees only if he can first get his girlfriend back. Sometimes, evidently, saving the world has to take a back seat to romance. Even for the Gray Man. Go figure.

DOUBLE BARREL BLUFF

By Lou Berney
William Morrow, 2024, \$18.99
Rating: A

First line: Of all the ancient wats near Siem Reap, with lotus flowers floating in secluded reflecting pools and stone ramparts broken to pieces by strangler figs, French's favorite temple by far was Banteay Srei.

I loved **DOUBLE BARREL BLUFF**, a delicious thriller that takes us from Indiana to Cambodia. Former mob driver Shake Bouchon is in hiding. He has settled down in Bloomington, Indiana, of all places, with the love of his life. He teaches drivers' ed. He's hoping to lead a normal life far from the murderous Armenians he used to work for in Los Angeles. When Dikran, the most lethal thug in the world, tracks Shake down but doesn't kill him, Shake knows that his serene new life is about to change.

Soon, Shake is in Cambodia, looking for a woman who tried to kill him. She is the head of the fabled Armenian criminal empire and she mysteriously has gone missing. Is she dead? Or is she the victim of a terrible misunderstanding? Either way, if Shake doesn't solve the mystery very quickly, his amazing wife is definitely going to kill him.

Berney is one of my all-time favorite authors. His plotting is impeccable. His humor is irresistible. His characters are perfectly drawn and oh so memorable. This book is fantastic! A must read!

OUR WINTER MONSTER

By Dennis Mahoney

Soho Press, January 2025, \$26.95

Rating: ?

First line: Little car, lonely road, night.

OUR WINTER MONSTER is a horror/mystery mashup, the uneasy progeny of a supernatural and a procedural. Let me say, straight up, that I don't read much horror. I make exceptions for Steven King, of course, but that's about all. So, I'm not anything like up to date in the field.

A troubled young couple decide to take a healing ski getaway in far upstate New York, but a blizzard intervenes. They get separated. Meanwhile, a troubled town police chief tries to find her footing again after losing a young couple some weeks earlier in a similar blizzard. No trace of them was ever found. The town's jack-of-all-trades handyman is out plowing to try to keep the roads open in the face of the terrible storm. Then, there's the monster...

There's plenty of action, lots of blood, and grisly details. There's even a human murderer thrown into the mix for good measure.

Maybe it's because I prefer procedurals to supernatural fiction, but the police chief's story works better for me than the monster part. The dogged determination of the beleaguered cop, who, like the monster itself, just keeps on coming, is satisfying. She patiently follows clues, makes deductions, and refuses to quit in the face of overwhelming odds. And there's a lovely pay-off at the end as a reward.

As for the horror, let's face it. We've all had someone we're close to turn into a monster. And I'm not just talking about my mother or my first husband...

I don't know how to rate it, but read **OUR WINTER MONSTER** if you dare.

A SHIPWRECK IN FIJI

By Nilima Rao

Soho Crime, June 2025, \$27.95

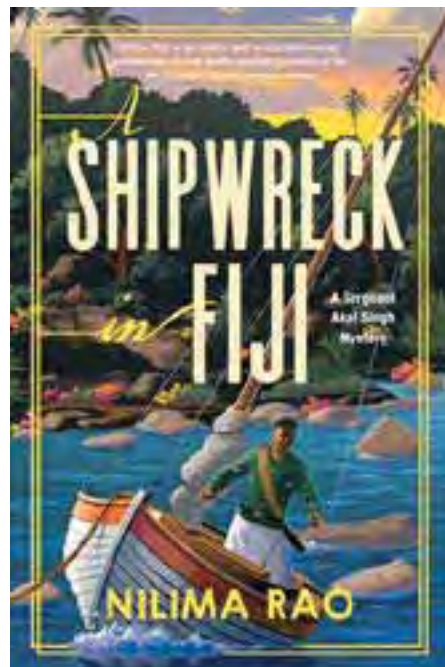
Rating: B+

First line: What did I miss?" Dr. Robert Holmes asked, sounding out of breath.

I was delighted to find a second novel from Nilima Rao, whose wonderful debut novel, **A DISAPPEARANCE IN FIJI**, was one of my favorite books last year.

A historical setting, an intriguing procedural, an exotic locale and a smart, intuitive protagonist. What more could you want?

The time is 1915. The war is on in Europe. Sergeant Akal Singh is an Indian policeman who has been assigned to work in Suva, the capital of colonial Fiji. It's his punishment for being too friendly with Europeans in his previous posting. His skeptical boss sends him to a neighboring island to investigate an unlikely rumor that there have been sightings of Germans. He is also told to escort two European women to visit their uncle's former home on Ovalau, one of the Fiji islands. He is accompanied by Taviti, his friend and colleague, an exuberant Fijian whose uncle is chief of a village on Ovalau.



The complex and satisfying plot is skillfully handled, but it is the finely tuned psychological subtleties that linger. Akal Singh is a memorable protagonist, and his emotional life is brilliantly delineated in these books. A nuanced character study and also a commentary on the injustices of the colonial system.

Recommended!

ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN

By John Brownlow

Hanover Square Press, 2024, \$18.99

Rating: A-

First line: I am waiting for someone to kill me.

John Brownlow's **ASSASSIN EIGHTEEN** is an excellent, propulsive thriller with one of the best openings I've ever read. A disaffected former assassin-for-hire known only as Seventeen makes himself a target. He's ready to retire and that means death in his trade. The world's top hit man doesn't get a severance package and a pension. He gets a bullet. He sees it coming.

Seventeen is ready to go, but finds he has one last mission. And this time, it's very very personal.

Brownlow has managed to craft a thriller that is both action-packed and emotionally engaging. It's a very difficult feat. His hero is like the Gray Man, but with more heart. If it stumbles a bit toward the end, it's understandable. Brownlow has painted himself into a corner and scrambles a little to get out. But this is a remarkable book.

THE MURDER SHOW

By Matt Goldman

Forge, April 2025, \$32.99

Rating: B+

First line: Twenty-two years after Ethan Harris heard Rick O'Shea's blood, yes *heard* Ricky's blood as it dripped from his body and splattered on the soft ground below, Ethan wheels his carry-on bag into his childhood home.

Matt Goldman delivers a surprisingly twisty thriller with **THE MURDER SHOW**, about a TV writer (Goldman himself is a TV writer) investigating an old murder to get a plot for his next TV season. Meta, anyone?

Putting a new spin on a familiar trope: the protagonist goes back to his hometown and is pulled into investigating the death of his friend who was killed when they were in high school,

THE MURDER SHOW adds surprising twists. Pairing up with his almost girlfriend, now a cop, they may or may not rekindle their old flame and they may or may not solve the murder of their friend.

Goldman takes this well-worn story line and makes it fresh.



THE IMPOSSIBLE THING

By Belinda Bauer

Atlantic Monthly Press, 2025, \$27.00

Rating: A

First line: Matthew Barr was in the crosshairs.

Brilliant author, Belinda Bauer, creates whole worlds like no one else. **THE IMPOSSIBLE THING** gives us a close-up of the rare birds' egg trade in England, from top to bottom. Yorkshire farmers, whose land abuts the sea, often allow their lightest young boys to dangle precariously from homemade harnesses over the cliffs above the wild North Sea. The boys reach into nests in the shelves and crevasses of the cliffs and pull out eggs from a startling variety of sea birds, while the birds swirl and dive and scream and peck at them. After the eggs are emptied and cleaned, they are sold to brokers who come to the cliffs to watch and buy. The brokers, in turn, take the colorful eggs to London and

sell them at a spectacular mark-up to gentleman collectors. Some of the eggs are quite rare and fetch thousands of pounds.

One farm's border has an overhang, and the cliff face is inaccessible. But a tiny girl, abused and mistreated by her family, begs a farm boy to let her try. She comes back to the cliff-top with the rarest egg of all, a very large, bright red egg from a seabird known as a guillemot.

The story of what happens to that egg, the tiny girl, the farm boy, and the various brokers and collectors is as gripping as any tale of cops and gangsters. It even gives you a look at the birds who produced it. I adored this book. I resented having to put it down for any reason.

Belinda Bauer is one of my favorite authors. Her **RUBBERNECKER** remains one of my all-time favorite novels. The autistic protagonist of that book, Patrick, makes an interesting appearance here.

I love diving into books set in Michael Connelly's Los Angeles, S.A. Cosby's rural South, Simon Mason's Oxford, and Lee Child's miscellaneous small American towns, but I really love a book that pulls me into a place and a milieu that I didn't even know existed. **THE IMPOSSIBLE THING** is that book.

Highly highly recommended!

THE WAITING

by Michael Connelly

Little Brown, 2024, \$30.00

Rating: A-

First line: She liked waiting for a wave more than riding the wave.

Just when you thought Michael Connelly couldn't continue to surprise you...

Renée Ballard, a detective in charge of a cold-case unit of the LAPD, loses her badge and gains a case. Ballard is not my favorite among Connelly's protagonists. I prefer the soulful stoicism of Bosch, the sly humor of the Lincoln lawyer. I always felt her lack of affect was a mistake. She has baggage, sure, emotional and sociopolitical, but she never seemed to develop her own personality. Her surfing is more a marker than a

trait and she has little to recommend her to the reader beyond a big brain and a strong work ethic. That bland façade begins to change in **THE WAITING**.

At the outset of **THE WAITING**, Ballard has several cold cases simmering and her new recruit, Maddie Bosch, Bosch's daughter now a cop, brings in the biggest cold case of all.

No one writes procedurals like Connelly. Cases pop up, amble along, twist a few times, and then, Pow! His detectives, both Boschs and even, to some extent, Renée Ballard, also grow and change. Each case alters them, resonating with their personalities and old issues and new. Politics, both within the LAPD and in the city itself come into play. The cases get resolved (or not) in interesting and telling ways.

But the real shocker in **THE WAITING**, is (minor spoiler alert) the reopening of a case from the 1940's: the Black Dahlia murder. Maddie Bosch brings in new evidence and a new theory. The pursuit of this iconic case electrifies an already excellent book. The result is mesmerizing. Crime fiction doesn't get any better than this.

Highly recommended.

THE FACE OF GREED

By James L'Etoile

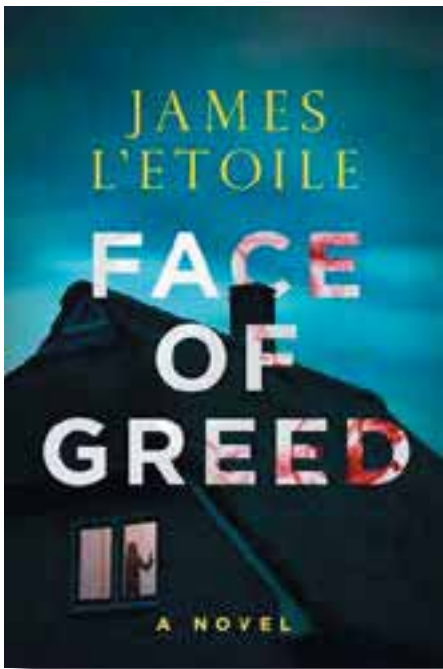
Oceanview, 2023, \$27.95

Rating: A

First line: Emily Hunter learned to be wary of open doorways when she rolled up to a call.

James L'Etoile's **THE FACE OF GREED** is an excellent and very twisty procedural set in Sacramento, California. Detective Emily Hunter is a single woman whose mother is showing the first stages of dementia and has moved in with her. She takes a call one evening when a wealthy businessman is found dead after a home invasion. His beautiful wife had been injured and left tied up. The safe was open. It is a high-profile case.

When Emily and her partner Javier Medina get to the scene, the mayor is already there, comforting the widow. The Chief of Police, under pressure from



the mayor, calls for a quick resolution to the case. But the more Emily and Javier investigate, the more complicated the case gets. Juggling her concerns with her mother and her nascent social life, Emily must also deal with the political pressure and her career trajectory.

The characters are engaging. The plot twists and turns. Suspects yield to other suspects. **THE FACE OF GREED** is a thoroughly enjoyable procedural. One caveat, the end turns the case into a bit of a parable, and it seems unnecessary to drive home the obvious message. Nevertheless, I liked it. A page turner.

SALTWATER

By Katy Hays

Ballentine, March 2025, \$30.00

Rating: NA, Not Finished

First line: Money is my phantom limb.

Looking for an Eat the Rich summer read? Katy Hays' **SALTWATER** is a beach read set among the rich and idle in Capri, where they go to enjoy the sun and sand, the food and cocktails, and the envy of all. The ultra-wealthy Lingate family go back every year, despite, or maybe because, Sarah Lingate died there years ago under mysterious circumstances. Was Sarah killed, was it an accident, was it suicide? Everyone has

a theory. Nobody talks about it.

Now, Sarah's daughter, Helen, is there with her father, Richard, and her uncle Marcus and his wife Naomi, among others. Their entourage includes an assistant, Lorna, who is the closest thing Helen has to a friend. The family is secretive and controlling, Helen yearns for freedom and love. Lorna brings her own secrets and hidden agendas with her. What could go wrong?

If you are a fan of TV's "*The White Lotus*" or films like "*Triangle of Sad-*

ness," you will perhaps like this turgid potboiler. I couldn't finish it. The plot is messy and overwrought, the characters overdrawn, the prose lugubrious. The repetitiveness was infuriating. Skipping back and forth from character to character, from then to now, from Capri to Los Angeles and elsewhere did not save it from the tedium the story induces. The plot twists are howlingly ridiculous and improbable. Yes, the very rich are very awful. So is this book.

Unfortunately, this summer read is a must miss.

The Times Best of 2025 So Far by Joan Smith



FORTRESS OF EVIL, Javier Cercas
NIGHTSHADE, Michael Connelly
A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO DIE,
Eleni Kyriacou
INNOCENT GUILT, Remi Kone
CARVED IN BLOOD, Michael Bennett
OUT OF THE DARK, Heidi Amsinck
BURN AFTER READING,
Catherine Ryan Howard
MARBLE HALL MURDERS,
Anthony Horowitz
THE NOTE, Alafair Burke
THE RELUCTANT SHERIFF,
Chris Offutt
THE SECRET ROOM, Jane Casey
SON, Johana Gustawsson
& Thomas Enger
THE MYSTERY AT RAKE HALL,
Maureen Paton
THE OTHER PEOPLE, C. B. Everett
THE VIPERS, Katy Hays
DEATH AT THE WHITE HART,
Chris Chibnall
THE SHADOW, Ajay Chowdhury
MURDER BELOW DECK,
Orlando Murrin

PAPERBOY, Callum McSorley
THE GRAPEVINE, Kate Kemp
THE MOUTHLESS DEAD,
Anthony Quinn
HER SISTER'S KILLER, Mari Hannah
A TRIAL IN THREE ACTS,
Guy Morpuss
THE STOLEN CHILD,
Carmel Harrington
THE GRAVE IN THE ICE, Satu Ramo
THE SURF HOUSE, Lucy Clarke
OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES,
Clare Mackintosh
TO PAY THE FERRYMAN, Pat Black
MAKING A KILLING, Cara Hunter
DIRTY MONEY, Charlotte Philby
THE FROZEN PEOPLE, Elly Griffiths
OPEN SEASON, Jonathan Kellerman
THE DAY OF THE ROARING,
Nina Bhadrashwar
THE BROKEN RIVER, Chris Hammer
DEATH IN THE ARCTIC, Tom Hindle
THE BOOKSELLER, Tim Sullivan
THE BIG EMPTY, Robert Crais
A VOICE IN THE NIGHT,
Simon Mason
THE LAST TRUTHS WE TOLD,
Holly Watt
MURDER MINDFULLY, Karsten Duse
INTO THIN AIR, Orjan Karlsson

This is the first such list that I've seen this year. It looks like a pretty good list of recommended reading. I've read 11 of the titles. Several of the titles are reviewed in these pages.

I will be posting on www.deadly-pleasures.com some of the DP Contributors Best of 2025 So Far lists in the next week or so. Stay tuned.

From The Lakefront

Ted Hertel



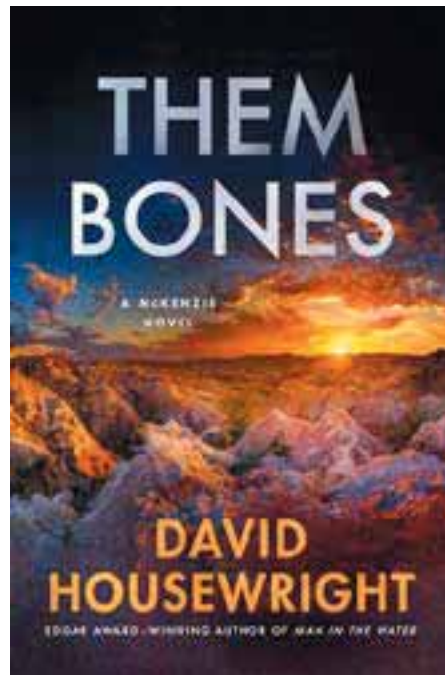
THE DOLLHOUSE ACADEMY
by Margarita Montimore
Flatiron Books, \$28.99, February
Rating: B

Two “lucky” girls are chosen to join the cast of the highest rated show on television, but is one really lucky if one doesn’t want the thing one is so lucky to have? That’s what confronts Ramona Holloway and her best friend, Grace Ludlow, discovered when they are plucked out of relative obscurity to join Dahlen Entertainment’s *In the Dollhouse* and its other projects. Ramona receives an anonymous note telling her not to go, but in her enthusiasm she ignores the warning. Once there, a fellow student in the program has a breakdown, screaming that they are all locked in a prison. As Grace begins a meteoric rise to stardom, Ramona is left behind. Meanwhile, the longtime star of the TV show, Ivy Gordon, feels trapped in a situation from which she can find no way out. Very little is as it seems, as all involved become more mired in the dreams turned inescapable nightmares.

Dahlen Entertainment is out to resurrect the old Hollywood studio and star systems. But Ivy, in particular, seeks escape from its rigid rules. This is clearly an indictment of the entertainment industry, of how it can chew up and spit out most everyone caught in its grinding jaws. We see each of these three women caught up in its maw, from the seasoned player to the successful new one (is she a replacement for the older woman?) to the embittered and talented (but not quite talented enough) friend. What’s more important: ambition or friendship?

What is the truth of the *Dollhouse*? Very little is revealed to the reader at

any point as to exactly what the attraction is of the TV show *In the Dollhouse*. Yes, the text points out other shows that inspired this one, but with little explanation of the content of the show itself. Perhaps as close as it comes is Ramona’s comment that “it would be a stretch to believe [what is going on at] the *Dollhouse*.” Quite a stretch indeed. It turns out that a granted wish doesn’t always look like one expects it will, much to the chagrin of all the *Dollhouse* players in this novel of psychological suspense.



THEM BONES
by David Housewright
Minotaur Books, \$29.00, June
Rating: B+

Retired police detective and now unofficial private investigator Rushmore McKenzie has been asked by a friend, doctoral candidate Angela Bjork, to help

recover a rare dinosaur skull, potentially worth millions of dollars. Bjork and other archeologists had been on a dig in Montana when she discovered the skeleton of an Ankylosaurus, a heavily armored dinosaur that lived about 70 million years ago. Its huge skull had been placed on a truck for delivery to the Science Museum of Minnesota, but the night before transport, the truck was stolen from the dig site by armed men. McKenzie decides to take the case, only to discover that those behind the theft and those who want to own the skull will stop at nothing to acquire it.

A mystery without a murder is a refreshing change of pace. If anyone can pull it off and keep the reader’s attention, it’s Edgar winner (for Best First Novel) and past president of Private Eye Writers of America’s David Housewright. Not only does he know how to craft a solid story, he knows his paleontology, as well. He brings the dinosaur to life . . . well, at least figuratively. The setting in the Montana desert, with its oppressive heat, sand, and excruciatingly slow excavation, makes the difficulty of the dig very believable. There’s a bit of humor, as well, in this twenty-second adventure in the McKenzie series.

The plot, which starts out a bit slowly as the characters and the dig are described, quickly becomes complex as more possible motives and suspects are uncovered. There are several twists and double-crosses along the way. Housewright never writes the same book twice and this one is just as fresh as all of his earlier novels. So, who doesn’t love the combination of dinosaurs and a bit of entertaining skulduggery? Or in this case, “skull-duggery.”

NEVER ODD OR EVEN
by Frank M. Young
Stark House, \$15.95, June
Rating: B+

It’s the 1960s. Charlie Jerome, creator of several award-winning short films, sets out to make a feature-length movie in the mold of director Joseph Lewis’ *Gun Crazy*, a terrific 1950 noir film involving a bank heist. But in order to do so, he can only get studio back-

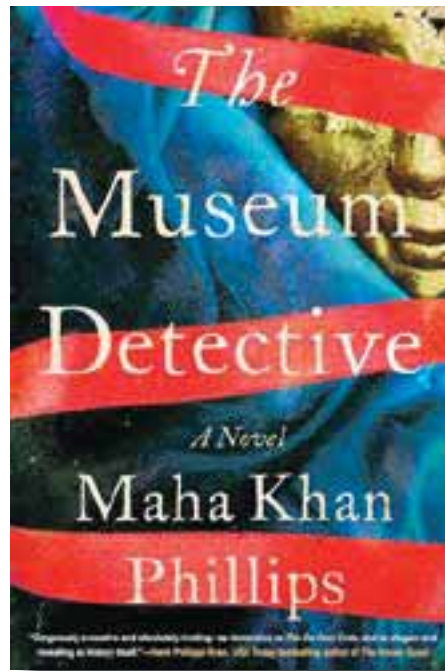
ing to make a different film, *Summer and Sandy*. In spite of this, he decides to make his heist film, *Never Odd or Even*, and he will do so by financing that film with the proceeds of an actual bank robbery which will be filmed as it is happening. Charlie finds a small-time criminal breaking into his car and convinces the man to be the male lead in both films, as well as the “technical adviser” on the heist itself. “What’s it pay?” “All you can steal.” It’s great fun along the way, as the cast and crew seek to capture Hollywood fame and illicit money. Can they pull off the filmed heist in broad daylight, *a la Gun Crazy*, and make an art house success out of the other film at the same time?

This is a thoroughly entertaining book, one that lets up a bit only near the end of the caper. Author Young has created a fascinating cast of characters who propel this short novel (160 pages) rapidly along. With settings in both Hollywood and Oregon, and humorous commentary on both locations and film-making in general, the reader will root for the success of all involved. Those who enjoy “behind the scenes” looks at how a low-budget film can get made (sneaking a camera into a bank inside a suitcase with a hole carved into it, for example) will get a kick out of this story. It may not be *Gun Crazy*, but the films described here certainly have their crazy elements that will get you caught up in them.

THE MUSEUM DETECTIVE

by Maha Khan Phillips
Soho Crime, \$27.95, April
Rating: A-

It’s the middle of the night when Dr. Gul Delani’s phone rings. The Sindh police are calling – but not to tell her that her long-missing niece has been found. They are instead seeking her assistance as an archaeologist and the curator of the Museum of Heritage and History in Karachi, Pakistan. They ask her to accompany them to a drug investigation site in a remote desert in the western part of the country. In a dark cave that forms a part of the investigation, the cops have found what appears



to be an authentic mummy whose sarcophagus bears symbols from Persepolis. The discovery is both shocking and mystifying. Can it be real or is it a brilliantly conceived fake? Suspicions grow when almost immediately after it arrives at the Museum, it vanishes in the night.

This fascinating tale is inspired by an actual scandal in Pakistan in the year 2000. The author has created a complex plot around that serious bit of criminal behavior. Gul learns early on in her career that she, as a woman, was not welcome in her field. Not one to be easily discouraged, she sets her sights on succeeding where other lesser people might turn aside.

Gul has to piece together narratives that are conflicting, biased, and human in order to create a logical arc. Understanding history required understanding the stories that people told themselves, stories and people that were inevitably flawed. Along the way, she faces attacks, both physical and mental. Gul eventually comes to believe that there is a connection between the mummy and the disappearance of her niece three years earlier.

This is a novel that is rich in history of the land and the people who inhabit it. The reader is taken into neighborhoods that are filled with laughter, hap-

py children, and good-natured people enjoying their lives. Then, only a short distance away, there are beggars in rags, other children deliberately maimed by the local mafia in order to garner sympathy. The contrast is horrific. Pakistan is a country run on relationships and networks. It is a place of corruption and darkness, where one needs power just to survive, especially if one is a woman. Can Gul find the answers she seeks in the face of such opposition?

A REFINER’S FIRE

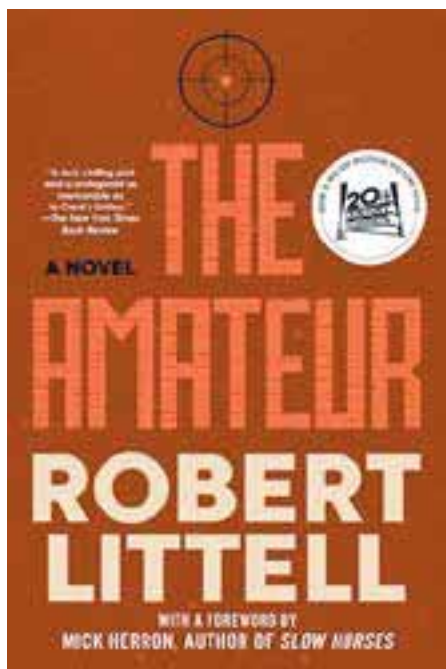
by Donna Leon
Atlantic Monthly, \$28.00, July 2024
Rating: C

Gangs of juveniles are running wild in Venice, Italy. When Commissario Claudia Griffoni is processing a group of them arrested for fighting in the beautiful St. Mark’s Square, she helps one teen, Orlando, whose father cannot be reached. Meanwhile, a judge, the grandfather of one of the other boys, orders the police reports to be white-washed in order to downplay the fight to a mere harmless sports celebration. Griffoni and Commissario Bruno Brunetti lead an investigation of a twenty-year-old bombing in Iraq by unknown individuals in order to dig into Orlando’s father’s past and why he was never awarded a medal for his heroism during the terror campaign.

This is Donna Leon’s thirty-third novel of Brunetti and Venice, a remarkably long-running and generally fine series. Leon has a way of making the islands of Venice and its surrounds come alive. With occasional gentle humor she puts the reader right in the center of its beauty and culture. For that alone the series is worth reading. The theme of redemption, central to the story, is nicely handled.

However, I found this book in particular to be slow going. It felt disjointed, taking its time as it moves along – finally – to its fiery conclusion. Here the cases take a backseat to the characters and life on the island. There’s nothing at all wrong with any of that, but for me I read mysteries (and frankly it’s a fairly light mystery here) for the plot.

It struck me that there were crimes without punishment (or even much in the way of actual detection), fiddling while the city burned. Those who read for things other than plot may enjoy this one more than I did. I can say that the book's cover is probably the most gorgeous (and at the same time realistically horrifying) cover I have seen in several years. It evokes only a very minor incident in the book, yet stunningly holds the reader in its grip.



THE AMATEUR

by Robert Littell

Soho Crime, \$19.95, March 2025)

Reprint of early classic

Rating: A-

CIA cryptoanalyst Charlie Heller has a nice back-office job making cyphers and breaking codes. But when his fiancée is murdered by terrorists in West Germany, the Company refuses to pursue her killers. Charlie decides to take justice into his own hands. He manages to blackmail his superiors into letting him, a complete novice, search out the people responsible; object: terminate them with extreme prejudice. Charlie gets some reluctant deep training by the CIA and is set loose in Europe. But almost immediately afterward the Company decides it needs to terminate Charlie instead before he accomplishes

his mission. Now not only does Charlie have to avoid getting killed by those responsible for his fiancée's death, he must also dodge his own employers before they can kill him. How can an amateur take on trained assassins, skilled players on the other sides, and live to tell the tale? I'm glad you asked!

This suspenseful and very twisty novel was originally published in 1981. It was made into a feature film of the same name starring John Savage. It has now been remade with an April 2025 release date with Rami Malek in the Heller role. But the book has much to recommend it: clever wordplay, coded messages, and the very serious question of who wrote Shakespeare's plays. Toss in stories of love, grief, and revenge and this is clearly a novel worth reading (or revisiting).

Charlie believes that the only thing that will save his life is the death of the assassins. He's "an eye-for-an-eye" sort of guy, a reasonable formula for his own survival. But as the pieces start to come together, he finds he needs help in the form of another CIA asset in Prague. As he continues his quest, he finds that he is becoming cold-hearted and brutal, more and more like those he is fighting, until in the end he wonders if there is really any difference between him and his enemies.

This is a thoroughly entertaining, if slightly old-fashioned, spy thriller, one I greatly enjoyed. It mixes in cyphers with the quest for vengeance and that question of who really wrote Shakespeare's plays. Sure, there are some implausible escapes but even James Bond had those and here Heller is up against some dumber (or at least less lucky) opponents.

THE SHORT CIRCUIT

SAFE ENOUGH and Other Stories

by Lee Child

Mysterious Press, \$28.99, August 2024)

Rating: B+

Lee Child, best known as the creator and author of thirty Jack Reacher novels (the last half-dozen with his brother An-



drew), has published a second collection of short stories. His first compilation was **NO MIDDLE NAME** (2017), gathering two novellas and ten short stories featuring his iconic protagonist. The difference this time is that these twenty shorts are all standalones, with nary a Reacher tale in sight.

Child shows that he has the ability to craft suspenseful stories even without any assistance from Reacher. It doesn't matter if his characters are cops, hitmen, bodyguards, drug-dealing criminals or what-have-you, Child will hold your interest in each of these "something for everyone" short stories. If you don't care for one breed of protagonist, the next story still will likely grab you. His style is terse, wasting no words to get the reader to the usually satisfying end in generally under twenty pages each. In such shorts, one wouldn't necessarily expect a lot of character development, but the author manages to make the reader care about the effects the resolution will have. The only theme connecting them is criminally good entertainment.

The Reacher novels are long (some might say "too long") on story details, often technical in nature. So here's it's nice to just be able to sit back, relax, and enjoy these brief excursions into the minds and actions of individuals living small lives, be they cops, cons, or commoners.

Neither Tarnished Nor Afraid

Kevin Burton Smith



GALWAY EDGE

by Ken Bruen

And Jesus f***ing wept.

I was writing this review when I heard the news.

Irish crime writer Ken Bruen, one of the great voices in crime fiction, is gone. I met him a few times, even had a beer or two with him, and I still can barely believe that that great dark heart has gone still.

Forever.

Ken was the owner of a bold and defiant prose style all his own, a style punctuated with vitriolic asides and unexpected heartbreak, stray scraps of poetry, doggerel, trivia and rock'n'roll lyrics, put-the-world-right lists and WTF? wordplay. He was unique and never quite tamed; an inspiration and challenge to his fellow crime writers, both young upstarts and seasoned contemporaries. He was both punk and godfather.

And so what to make of Galway Edge, long rumored to be the last novel to feature his errant, unrepentant, substance-abusing and occasionally violent Galway private eye, Jack Taylor?

Did Bruen know this was going to be Jack's last ride? In retrospect, it certainly feels that way, with Jack going all scorched earth for one last assault on the hypocrisies and abuses of the Catholic Church, always a favourite target.

When we first encounter him here, Jack is, as usual, in dubious shape; cynical and doubting, a "chip of ice" in his soul, taking comfort in alcohol, books, and occasional walks with his dog Trip, left to him by a dead nun (of course), musing over how the world is falling apart.

A prime example? The recent murder

of pedophile, a possible victim of Edge — a cabal of violent anti-Catholic vigilantes, who Jack became involved with in the last book, 2024's Galway Confidential. Whether he wants it or not, he admits that somehow priests (both living and dead) "litter his landscape."

"And nuns," he regretfully adds.

Phew-oh, indeed.

His musing are interrupted by a knock at the door. It's "the fattest priest (he's) ever seen." Father Richard, special envoy to the Archdiocese of Galway, Tuam, and Athenry, fears a local parish priest has joined the ranks of Edge (the Vatican is not pleased) and wants Jack to "dissuade" him.

Taylor's response?

"Am I allowed to bring my hurly?"

Turns out, however, that Jack doesn't need his hurling club. Before he can do much dissuading, the good father's corpse is found hanging from a rope in his own backyard. Which begs the question: is Edge cleaning up its own? And why would a priest join Edge in the first place? As other members are knocked off, Taylor wonders if another rival group of vigilantes on the rise?

But as the story unfolds, other cases, other tasks come to Jack.

The local Mother Superior wants his help recovering a stolen crucifix, an encounter with a powerful local business man goes sideways, an abused wife wants protection from her spouse, and a man with terminal cancer wants Jack to kill him (on his birthday, no less). And then there's all those dead cats being dumped at the convent.

No wonder Jack drinks.

In one chapters epigraph, Bruen, like Jack himself a fan of crime fiction, even conjures up the ghost Raymond Chandler:

"Down Galway's crooked streets

A man

Must walk

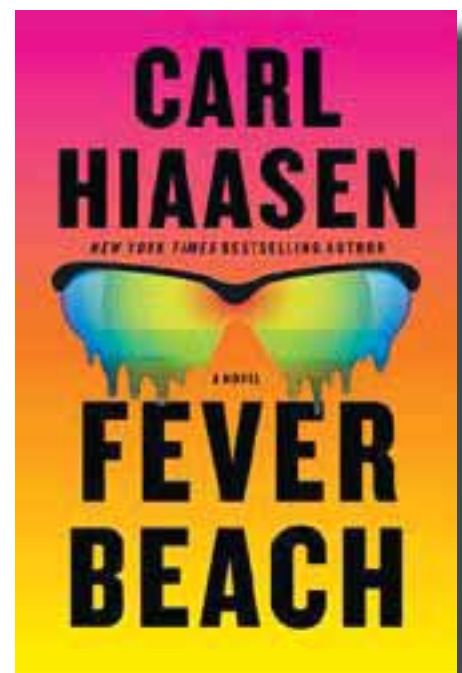
Who is not, his own self,

Completely crooked."

It ends. Eventually and abruptly, like a hard slap to the face.

But it caps one of the great series of all time, sixteen novels and a handful of short stories.

Sláinte, Ken.



FEVER BEACH

by Carl Hiaasen

Poor Carl. Used to be, Florida was his playground, an almost mythical fantasy land where he could set the most outrageous of yarns and tall tales with the most fantastic and ridiculous of creatures, and even the most glaring examples of scam or stupidity would ever be challenged, because this was FLORIDA, man!

We were all in on the joke, and if it ever skirted too close to reality, well, it was still Florida.

And so old Carl cuts loose with yet another tale of Sunshine State incompetence, greed, corruption and low-wattage IQ. Our reluctant hero this time out is eccentric millionaire beach bum Twilly Spree, a man with some severe anger management issues. All he does is pick up hitchhiker Dale Figgo, a once-proud member of the Proud Boys before they kicked him out (for destroying the statue of the wrong Confederate general), and before you know it Twilly's caught up in an escalating power struggle between two members of a fledgling white supremacist group secretly financed by the Mink Foundation, a supposedly philanthropic organization, and spurred on by ambitious Florida Congressman Clure Boyette, who has wet dreams about having his own January 6th moment to put him on the national political map.

Its soon becomes obvious, though, that these self-made patriots are out for themselves, and neither is particularly bright, and Twilly, his ire raised, figures it's up to him to put a stop to it all. Along for the ride is Viva Morales, an innocent employee at the Mink Foundation that he's befriended. She's reluctantly attracted to the erratic Twilly, and wonders if there's a future there.

But before any romantic sparks can fly, they have to sort out the tangled ball of graft and greed, automatic weapons, skin grafts, domestic terrorism, Nazis wannabes, clueless millionaires, staggering corruption, increasing violence and pure, unadulterated dumbfuckery, before somebody gets hurt.

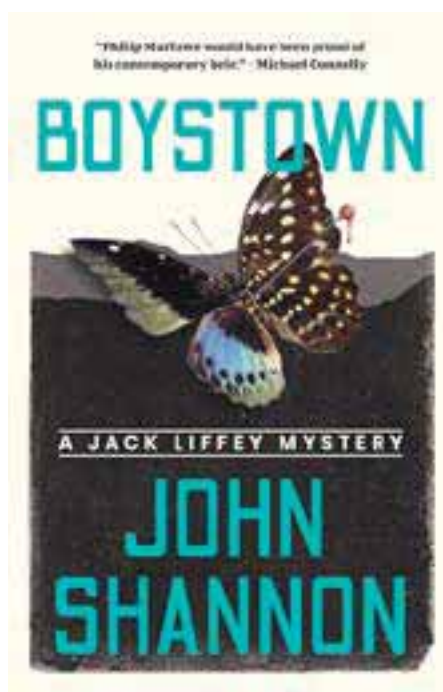
The problem for the author is that this is like shooting fish in a barrel. Florida is all of us now, and nothing Carl tells us feels quite as fantastic and farfetched as it used to be.

Or quite as amusing.

It's all still pretty entertaining, but reality is, sadly, the third rail of satire. Don't get too close.

BOYSTOWN

by John Shannon



Dumbfuckery plays a large part in John Shannon's latest, as well, but you could argue it's always been present in this long-running series. This time, however, it plays a major role.

The bigger news, though, is that Jack Liffey; one of the great lost Los Angeles private dicks, is back.

LA dicks are not exactly a rare breed (it's practically ground zero for the Shamus Game) but Shannon writes about Los Angeles in a way few have managed or even tried—with an intimate, unblinking and piercing eye. There's Chandler of course, and Mosley, Crais and a handful of others who have slashed through the glitz, the glam and the smog to give us a good look at the works, but only Shannon has really made it his personal mission to map out the endless communities and cultures of a city named for angels, but populated by too few; poking and prodding and picking at the scabs that never quite heal.

It's been too long since he made an appearance (can it possibly be eleven years?), but Jack abides — open-heart surgery, a stroke, a collapsed lung and major bouts of depression be damned; still walking the minefield of his relationships with his moody lover, Gloria, a cop, and his headstrong daughter, Maeve, a Lesbian art student at U.C.L.A.

Yet somehow, like the Energizer Bunny, Jack keeps on ticking.

Worried about her dad, she asks him for help looking into the disappearance of her lover's kid brother, Benjy, a member of West Hollywood's gay community — a neighbourhood with more than its fair share of both Ukrainian and Russian immigrants who, surprise, surprise, aren't getting along too well lately. Meanwhile, one of a quartet of shitkickers out "hunting" in the hills takes a pot shot at a random stranger waving a butterfly net.

For kicks.

Oh, what fun.

It sets off a chain of events that threatens the innocent and the guilty alike, and yet somehow Shannon manages to tie it all together. More thematically than narratively, perhaps, but the noirish levels of stupid, toxic masculinity, bad choices, bad luck, unintended consequences and pure dumbfuckery displayed in *Boystown*? You're soaking in it.

Welcome back, Jack.

And John.

AFTER HOURS

by Stephen G. Eoannou

This one, introducing World War Two-era private eye Nicholas Bishop, is a bit of a Frankenstein monster; a patchwork tale comprised of multiple parts gathered from all over the place. Instantly familiar, but quite fun if you've previously enjoyed those parts.

Bishop is a drunk, but at least mostly a functioning, if not particularly brilliant one, slotted somewhere between the bleak despair of Lawrence Sanders' Block's Matt Scudder and the frenetic screwball antics of Jonathan Latimer's Bill Crane.

The recent bombing of Pearl Harbor has left Buffalo, New York swept by a tide of Johnny-come-lately patriotism, and the world is at war. Bishop, however, missed that show, having been granted a 4-F deferment after an unfortunate encounter with a cab that hit him while he was drunk. It's left him with a bum right leg (he has to walk with a cane) and a reputation in town as a draft dodger and coward.

Mind you, his rep wasn't all that impressive to begin with — working almost exclusively on adultery cases and utilizing a variety of dirty tricks to nail his prey, he'd already earned the nickname "Nicky the Weasel."

The book even opens with a clever spin on an old noir scenario: Bishop awakens from a days-long blackout in his hotel room only to discover...

Nope.

Not a dead blonde. Instead, he finds his own .38 Detective Special. Recently fired. Missing two slugs. An empty bottle of Four Roses. And a one-eyed stray mutt giving him the eye. He decides to call her "Jake."

And, of course, a swirling kaleidoscope of fractured memories that don't add up. Plus his car is missing.

All of which may suggest the book would be about 90 per cent wallow and despair, but it's not. Its saving grace is his feisty former secretary (she quit because he hadn't paid her) who seems to have arrived wholly formed, a direct descendant of Hammett's Nora Charles. Gia Alessi's a pistol, that's for sure. A sassy, sexy, wise-cracking foil to Bishop, full of snappy patter and true grit, determined to save Bishop from himself, get her back pay and her job back, become an actual investigator herself, and maybe become Mrs. Bishop — but only on her own terms.

And so she dogs Bishop as he stumbles, limps and drinks his way (despite her best efforts) around Buffalo, while trying to piece together what happened during his woozy lost weekend, and what happened to those missing bullets. Vague and fleeting memories of a wild night on the town with "colored" nightclub singer Pearl DuGaye (now missing) come and go, and a quartet of thugs dubbed The Gospel Brothers and their boss, local mobster Joey Bones, seem overly interested in Bishop's whereabouts as well — and what he may have seen or heard during his prolonged bender. Meanwhile, wealthy socialite Elizabeth Brandt has hired him through his only real client, attorney Ira Weiss, to get the goods on her philandering husband, an aspiring artist of at least

local renown.

And just to add to the fun, Ira, a commanding but harmless figure weighing in at over 300 pounds, seems to have drawn the ire of some local Nazis. It starts with graffiti, but soon escalates.

So, a drunk private dick trying to stay sober and get clean, a mob boss, goons, a wealthy femme fatale, cheating lovers, a missing Packard, a missing singer, a pretentious artist, a scam or two, an occasional dead body, a stray dog, a not-all-there junkman, a booze-hound reporter who's even worse off than Bishop, a big heist, plenty of DTs, a Gal Friday with a heart of gold and... Nazis.

Gotta have Nazis.

So yeah, you may have heard it all before, but stick around. If you liked those parts before, you'll like 'em all again. This one's worth it.

THE CASE OF THE MISSING MAID

by Rob Osler

Is it just me? Or is Kate Warne having a moment?

A surprising number of books and other media in the last few years relating to — or inspired by — the Pinkerton Agency's (and America's) first female detective have been released over the last few years.

Some are endless retellings of the same facts, others offer fictionalized and romanticized accounts of the same events and some are outright fiction, taking significant liberties. And then there are those who have created completely new characters, clearly inspired by Warne.

This promising series launch by Rob Osler clearly fits in the latter category — it only takes him a few pages for the author to conjure up the spirit of Kate. But Osler ups the stakes considerably, taking the notion of a feisty female op working for an all-male detective agency, fast forwarding a few decades, and adding a few twists to hook 21st century readers.

Like, it's not enough that Harriet Morrow is the first female detective at Chicago's Prescott Agency circa 1898—she's also a feisty, bicycle-riding,

trousers-wearing Lesbian.

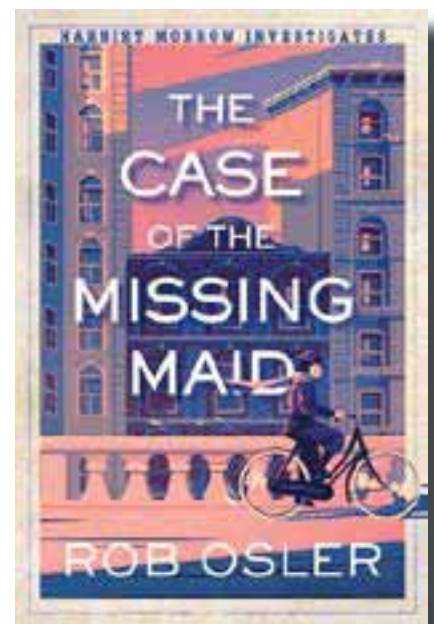
Of course she is.

She is also, despite being in the closet (it's 1898, after all), one tough and determined broad, pedaling her ass off around the Windy City and doing whatever she can to take care of her teenage kid brother Aubrey. Naturally she has to contend with an agency full of dubious male colleagues, a disapproving female office manager and the boss himself, Theodore Prescott, who remains skeptical. And so he gives her a nothing case — and a deadline — to test her mettle.

Prescott sends her off to the home of Pearl Bartlett, his batty old neighbour who insists that her maid, Agnes Wozniak, has disappeared. Prescott remains dubious, but Harriet soon comes to believe that Agnes may have indeed been abducted.

Sure, you can gripe about the woke-ness of tone, and even sniff at the DEI of it all, but Osler presents a solid mystery here, a complex but well-rounded detective, some star-crossed lovers, and the attention to historical detail and culture that feels right, as Harriet prowls posh mansions, shady nightclubs, burlesque theaters and the tenements of Chicago's raucous community of Polish immigrants, searching for Agnes, while some of the ignorance the rookie detective encounters remain uncomfortably relevant (and even fashionable) even now.

More, please.



Novels of Sensation and Other Stuff

Hank Wagner



FRIENDS HELPING FRIENDS

by Patrick Hoffman,

Atlantic Monthly Press, \$27.00, March

Rating: A+

As the title ironically suggests, this novel tells a story of relationships and connections, since friendships can reflect deep commitment, or something far more casual and tenuous. Hoffman's book is also all about exploring the bounds of those relationships and connections, as friends, colleagues, and fellow travelers are sorely tested by stressful events occurring in their lives.

The book's main character is Bunny, who meanders through life like Chance, the hero of Jerzy Kozinski's *Being There*. When Bunny's life-long pal, Jerry, a steroid dealer, asks for his help in roughing up a client's ex, he goes along, as is his nature. This eventually leads to his jailing, where he is offered a deal by the authorities to infiltrate his uncle's white

nationalist group to see what hijinks they might be planning. Bunny has no choice but to agree, reuniting with his problematic uncle. What he discovers while inside the organization is truly stunning, with horrific implications; it also places him in great jeopardy.

Fast paced, well crafted, and utterly engaging, Hoffman's fourth novel is an absolute gem, a book you're sorry, but almost relieved, to see end. It's like a game of dominoes in a way, as Hoffman chronicles the catastrophic chain of events that can emanate from simple actions.

Hoffman's involvement with, and affection for, his wide and varied cast of characters is apparent on every page, and in every scene.

KAUA'I STORM

by Tori Eldridge

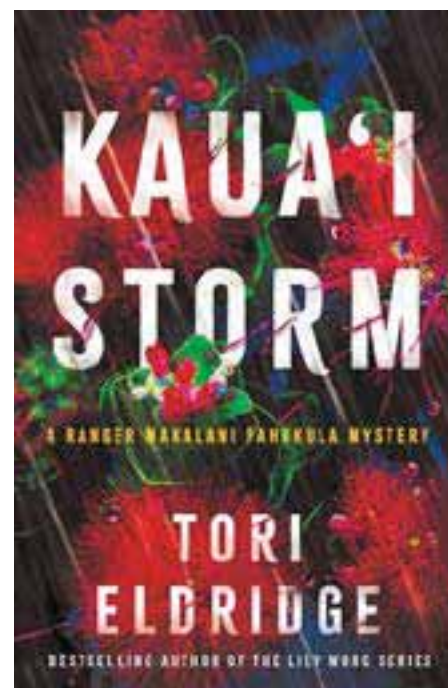
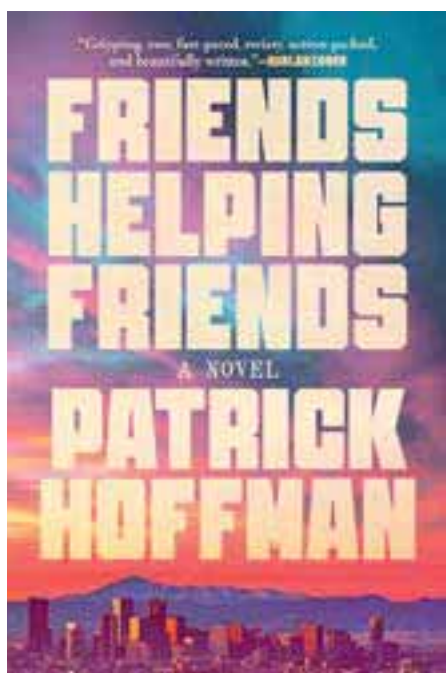
Thomas & Mercer, May

Rating: B+

I found the characters and the setting of Tori Eldridge's *KAUA'I STORM* exotic and utterly captivating; to this lifelong resident of New Jersey, the book felt like a mashup of James Michener's *HAWAII*, and James Cameron's *Avatar*, in that it provided a fascinating glimpse into a unique part of the world, and into a unique culture, a true melting pot if there ever was one.

The book begins as National Park Ranger Makalani Pahukula returns from Oregon (aka "the mainland") to her island home of Kaua'i to participate in a family event. She is anxious because it is her first time back in many years, and because she literally must face her entire family, who sometimes seem to be judging her for her life choices. Lucky for her, she doesn't know her profession-

al skills are about to be tested to their limit, as she is immediately plunged into an investigation as to the whereabouts of a pair of wayward cousins, who have vanished under mysterious circumstances. That investigation provokes some intriguing twists and turns, revealing secrets about the locals, and about her family.



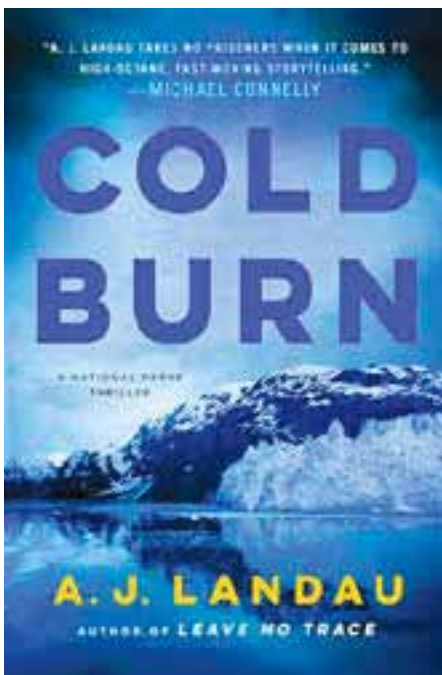
Makalani is a great character; although riddled with insecurities, she possesses uncommon common sense and a good heart, and a formidable professional skill set. But the real stars of the novel are her quirky family, and the island itself; Eldridge does an excellent job of conveying information about both in unobtrusive ways, making the book an excellent tutorial in both human nature and in the history and culture of Kaua'i.

A MOTHER'S LOVE

by Sara Blaedel
Dutton, \$18.00
Rating: B+

Another book with an able female protagonist is Sara Blaedel's **A MOTHER'S LOVE**. That protagonist is one Detective Loise Rick, head of the newly formed Mobile Task Force, created to handle Denmark's most baffling cases. When an innkeeper is found murdered, Rick and her squad are tasked with finding the killer. As it proceeds, the investigation gets curiouser and curiouser, as many sordid secrets are uncovered.

All the while, Rick juggles the case, her family, her friends, and her ex-fiancé. Kudos to Bloedel for a terrific story, and to Tara Chace, for her excellent translation.



Late entry:
COLD BURN

by A. J. Landau's
(a.k.a. Jeff Ayres and Jon Landau)
Minotaur, May 2025
Rating: A

My habitual tardiness in delivering my columns to George allowed me to get to this one, and I'm glad I did.

The second National Park Thriller is even better than its predecessor, **LEAVE NO TRACE**. It might have something to

do with working with established characters, but maybe not. This book races along at a giddy pace; the authors' throw several disparate balls into the air early on, expertly juggling them until they reach the book's breathless finale.

Graphic Novels

Yet another capable, and extremely lethal, female is Max Allan Collins and Terry Beatty's Ms. Michael Tree, featured in Hard Case Crime's sixth Ms. Tree reprint, **MS. TREE: FALLEN TREE** (December 2024, 224 pages, \$34.99). Typical of Ms. Tree's adventures, there's lots of mayhem, shooting and justified killing. It features four tales, "New Year's Evil," "Like Father," "Coming of Rage," and "Murder Cruise," completing Titan's welcome series of reprints of classic Ms. Tree stories.

While we're on the topic of graphic novels, let me mention **LIGHT IT SHOOT IT**, by Graham Chaffee (Fantagraphics Books, Winter 2024, 204 pages, \$24.99), and **TROUBLE IS MY BUSINESS**, by ArvindEtan David, Ilias Kyriazas, and Chris Peter (Pantheon Books, May 2025, 118 pages, \$29.00).

LIGHT IT SHOOT IT (awesome title!) tells the story of firebug and arithmomaniac Billy Bonney, who, after doing a stint in prison for arson, travels to Los Angeles to join his brother, Bobby, who is part of the local cut-rate moviemaking scene (think Roger Corman). There, he becomes a body man/baby sitter for a washed-up actor; he also unwittingly ends up on the fringes of an arson driven insurance scheme. The story meanders quite a bit for the first 3 quarters of the book, but comes together in an oddly satisfying way during its last fifty pages. While not on the level of a Ms. Tree, or an Ed Brubaker/Sean Phillips collaboration, it's still entertaining enough, in a Harvey Pekar (*American Splendor*) meets Quentin Tarantino (especially *Pulp Fiction*) kind of way.
Rating: B

TROUBLE IS MY BUSINESS is a clever adaptation of Raymond Chan-



dler's classic Phillip Marlowe novella, expertly capturing the noir feel and texture of that story. The Tim Sales like art slowly grew on me, and I enjoyed this version's slight departures from the original text. For some reason, I also got a special, and disturbing, sense of the extent of the alcoholic haze Marlowe must have wandered around in. **Rating: B**

Non-Fiction

The title truly says it all in the case of **THE RAMBO REPORT: Five Films, Three Books, One Legend**, by Nat Segaloff (Citadel, April 2025, 304 pages, \$29.00). Segaloff does an admirable and quite thorough job of chronicling the history of (John) Rambo, from his origin in the brilliant mind of Penn State graduate student David Morrell, to his initial cinematic appearance in *First Blood*, through the seemingly bottomless pit of sequels, to his brief stint as an animated cartoon hero. It is truly hard to believe that Rambo has been part of global culture for over half a century now. **Rating: B+**

Reading Westlake and Garfield

In describing, Rambo's genesis, Segaloff (who also penned the excellent Harlan Ellison bio **A LIT FUSE: The Provocative Life of Harlan Ellison** (2017)) mentions how the author was able to discuss the ins and outs of his first novel with the likes of noted agent Henry Morrison, Phillip Klass (aka sci-fi author William Tenn), and the crime novelists Donald E. Westlake and Brian Garfield (**DEATHWISH**). The mere mention of the latter two personages had me checking my shelves for books of theirs I hadn't yet read. I landed on two winners, **THE SEVENTH** (featuring Westlake's series character, career criminal Parker, with Westlake writing as Richard Stark), and Westlake and Garfield's winning collaboration, **GANGWAY!** In reading *The Seventh*, I was struck by Parker's resemblance to a more modern action hero, Reacher, especially in their penchant for casual violence. In reading **GANGWAY!**, I was impressed by what an excellent, but under-appreciated, caper novel it was, on a level with classics like George Clayton Johnson and Jack Gordon Russell's **OCEAN'S ELEVEN**.

Rating: THE SEVENTH: B+

Rating: GANGWAY! B+

Other classics read in early 2025 include:



John D. MacDonald's **A KEY TO THE SUITE** (1962). Set in the early sixties, this book exudes a Madmen type sensibility, some five decades before that was a thing. Blowing the lid off business conventions, MacDonald tells a slick, cynical, behind the scenes story of corporate espionage, infighting, and intrigue. Think *Hotel*, or *Airport*, but set at an off-site businessgathering. **Rating: B**

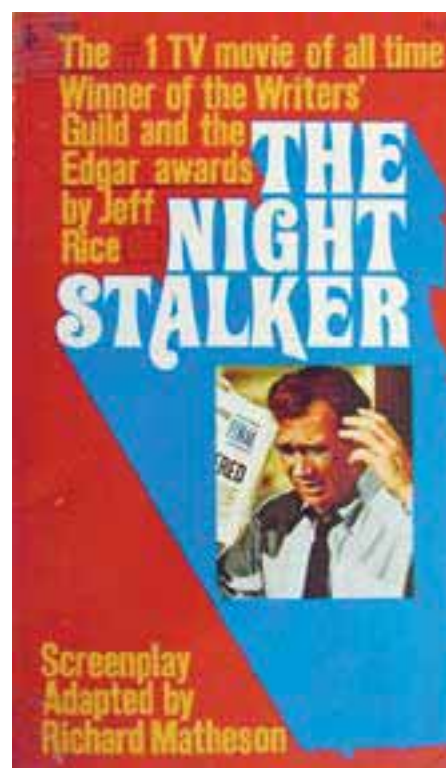


Elmore Leonard

CITY PRIMEVAL: HIGH NOON IN DETROIT, by Elmore Leonard (1980). Classic Elmore Leonard goodness, I had to read this after watching *Justified: City Primeval*, which swapped out Detroit Homicide Detective Ray Cruz for Federal Marshall Rayland Givens. **Rating: B**

KING KONG, by Edgar Wallace and Merian C. Cooper (1932). Yes, the all-time classic, the movie nerds like me watched incessantly as a kid. Sticking pretty close to the script as filmed, it's probably one of, if not the first, movie novelizations. I read the Bantam Books paperback from the early sixties, enjoying the smell of aging paper the entire time. **Rating: B**

THE NIGHT STALKER (1973) and **THE NIGHT STRANGLER** (1974), both by Jeff Rice. Shortly after re- watching two of the best TV movies I've ever seen, I was inspired to read the



short novel that inspired **STALKER**, penned by Jeff Rice, which inspired Richard Matheson's stellar screenplay. Then, I read Rice's novelization of the second movie, which borrowed heavily from Matheson's screenplay for the follow-up. **Rating: B for both**

Next Reviewed to Death Title



The Cozy - Traditional Mystery Cafe'

Robin Agnew Reviews



GLORY DAZE

By Danielle Arceneaux
Pegasus, March, \$27.95
Glory Broussard #2

Grade: A

This series, featuring an absolute genius creation of a main character is a delightful breath of fresh air. Glory Broussard, of LaFayette, Louisiana, is a divorcee of a certain age who suffers from arthritis, loves the Commodores (and really, who doesn't?), and works part time as a bookie in her favorite coffee shop on Sunday afternoons.

She's shocked when her ex's new wife, Valerie, shows up at her "place of business" on a Sunday and asks her to track down Sterling, her former husband. Even though she's had as little to do with her successor as possible, she finds herself agreeing.

Unfortunately, when she finds him, he's in the kitchen of a rented duplex with a knife through his heart. Naturally, there's lots of fallout. Glory and Sterling's heartbroken daughter, Delphine, rushes home for the funeral, and Valerie insists that since Glory's had such sleuthing success finding their missing

man, she should discover who killed him as well. A reluctant heroine, part of Glory's charm is her terrible attitude – she's pretty rude to Valerie who seems to be a decent person, and she finds the fact that Valerie and Delphine get along well to be a major irritant. However, despite her qualms, she, Delphine and Valerie manage to form a team to uncover what happened.

Their sleuthing eventually takes them to the stable and a casino where Sterling was working when he died. Lots of things seem off there and there's a fantastic moment where Glory dresses up to go "undercover" at the Casino (she's very good at Blackjack) to see what she can winkle out. Unfortunately, she gets drunk and makes a spectacle of herself at a Commodores concert. The whole scene is expertly written, funny, and sad at the same time.

These books are essentially private eye novels, and despite the fact that Glory is an extremely unlikely one, she still

gets results. Though unpaid, she does what every private eye in history has ever done: drive around and ask questions. Her car may be a Honda CRV and she may be a member of the Red Hat society, but she's still a private eye.

Glory is also dealing with the fact that she's taken on the Red Hat Mardi Gras celebration and is woefully behind in the prep, to the point where she's missed ordering the crucial king cake. Luckily, another nemesis, Constance, steps in to help and between the two of them manage to make it work.

Adding some extra oomph to the plot is Delphine's chef girlfriend, Justice, who arrives from New York to offer condolences and steps in when a king cake is needed. Glory, along with solving the crime, mends some bridges along the way and maybe even learns not to hold on to some resentments so tightly. However, you have to hope she doesn't completely mellow out, because it's those thorny warring instincts that make her character absolute reading gold.

The author does not condescend to this character, and obviously loves her, her faults and foibles making her a compelling, if not always completely loveable human. An utterly classic character, Glory feels so real that if she were to walk into your coffee shop or church you'd recognize her immediately. Arceneaux is also a great storyteller, so these books are a win in every way for the lucky reader.

THE CASE OF THE ELUSIVE BOMBAY DUCK

by Tarquin Hall
Severn House, \$29.99, March
Vish Puri #6

Grade: B+

You may not know that the world's greatest detective is Delhi based Vish Puri, but if you read this sweetly sunny book you will immediately find yourself fascinated by his family and work life. As the story opens, Vish has just been named "International Detective of the Year," but, unfortunately, the "confidential" news has leaked prematurely, and his office is quickly deluged



with congratulatory phone calls and sweets. Even worse, his mother phones to inform him that she plans to accompany him and his wife to London for the award ceremony, which an unwelcome associate has also pledged to attend.

Then Puri is summoned by a high up bureaucrat and instructed to find a notorious disgraced businessman who has fled to London with his ill-gotten millions, leaving in his wake victims of a medication that caused deaths rather than a cure. It seems rather a full plate, and even more, his investigation must take place without the knowledge of the diplomats in London.

He has so much on his mind when he boards the plane for London that his wife has to secretly drug him to overcome his fear of flying. When they land, he's irritated by the long line at customs and by the fact that he'll apparently have to shlep his own luggage (a friend had warned him that the West is "DIY"). It doesn't help that when they arrive at the cousin's where they are to stay and he discovers to his dismay that not only is she vegan, she's also a terrible cook.

Puri, however, soldiers on and reaches out to an old friend at Scotland Yard to find information on the whereabouts of the missing millionaire, dubbed by his friend the "Bombay Duck." Puri also has operatives back in Delhi watching the man's wife, and they are sure she's planning to make a run for it. Meanwhile, his own wife is delighted to be in London and wants to see all the sights there are to see. My favorite scene may have been high tea at the Savoy that Puri somehow ends up paying for in the hopes of spotting his quarry.

While still trying to accompany his wife when possible, he's assisted in his investigation by his young cousin, who speaks and behaves like a Londoner with the addition of some impressive tech skills and street smarts. Hall obviously loves these characters and every one of them is beautifully delineated. They would have appeared wooden on the page if there had been any kind of condescension on his part, but instead, they are fully alive, and while Puri can indeed be a bit ridiculous, he gets his man via some very sharp investigation.

He's also ably assisted by his incredibly observant mother who sees through him at every turn. Even his young cousin tells Puri to give her a break – she may irritate him (she's his mother, after all) but she knows what she's talking about. This concisely told tale is stuffed full of plot and wonderful characters. I had no problem starting with book six, but also now feel somewhat compelled to seek out the earlier books, with the worry that the delicious food described so vividly by Hall will make me want to order up too much Butter Chicken myself!



KILLS WELL WITH OTHERS

by Deanna Raybourn

Berkley, \$29, March

Killers of a Certain Age #2

Grade: A

This is the second in Raybourn's delicious, breakout series, which follows a group of sixty something lady assassins. These silver killers work for an organization called "The Museum," with a mission of eliminating those who are doing serious wrong (originally Nazis) in a way that the deaths can't be traced and don't appear to be murder. The first book was a smorgasbord of beautifully executed death vignettes, each one a sharp and precise how-dunnit. It also introduced the main characters, Billie,

Natalie, Helen and Mary Alice, who were on an enforced "retirement cruise" when it became clear they themselves were the targets, and were forced to take matters into their own hands.

The women, now technically retired, are called back to work by an old colleague who believes that the child of one of their past targets is bent on revenge. So, again the hunted, they get back to work, this time on board the Queen Mary II, their target occupying the swankiest possible suite. The assassination that follows is as clever and entertaining as anything in the first book, which is high praise.

Like the first one, this novel has a few different timelines, but, now that the origin story of the women is out of the way, this instalment is able to maintain more focus. There are some trips back in time, with subplots that eventually tie into the main story, and though this can be a tedious story telling method, in Raybourn's expert hands it's absolutely delightful and serves to illuminate rather than slow the action.

After their kill, they return to Helen's home in the UK only to find it in the process of burning to the ground. It becomes clear that their victim had deadly baggage, and the resulting going to ground and figuring out exactly who is after them becomes a memorable chase sequence. As the women undergo extreme travel and a series of attempts on their lives, I was reminded of the immortal Mrs. Pollifax, a hardy late in life adventurer and unlikely CIA agent who undergoes trauma, extreme travel and many adventures because of her profession.

While this book centers on four women, rather than just one, there's a similar feel and spirit to the Mrs. Pollifax series, though Raybourn's take is updated and a lot more lethal. The slow fleshing out of their various personal lives is also well done, as we learn their backstories and take a closer look at the organization they have worked for, with a focus on Billie.

Pro reader tip: I would not miss one scene where the women don their disguises – often travel pants from Chico's. Raybourn has a funny and affectionate

pen, and this book is as relentlessly entertaining, appealing and well told as the first one. I already miss these well-meaning assassins and hope to see more of them.

THE MUSEUM DETECTIVE

by Maha Khan Phillips
Soho Crime, \$27.95, April
Grade: B+

Dr. Gul Delani is an art historian working at the Museum of History and Heritage in Karachi, Pakistan. She has basically forced her way into the museum by more or less creating her own department and curating her own staff of eager grad students. When she gets a middle of the night phone call, she thinks it's information about her long missing niece, Mahnaz, who had vanished at 15, but instead, it's an order to get dressed and get in a car for a long ride. When she arrives, she's asked to take a look at what could possibly be the mummy of a legendary princess of Persepolis.

Since Mummification was not a known method of corpse disposal in ancient Iran, this discovery could be paradigm changing, and Gul is beside herself with excitement when the police agree to deliver the mummy to her museum for further investigation. Her grad students share her excitement and do their best to create a secure environment for remains that could be thousands of years old. For assistance, Gul calls on an old Cambridge friend, Harry, who facilitates the translation of the cuneiform on the mummy's tomb.

To me the actual main character of this novel is Karachi itself, and the author, who was born there, paints a vivid picture of daily life in the capital, as well as Gul's specific routine, which includes volunteering at a shelter where she teaches classes. Coming from a wealthy family she has an array of connections, both high and low, and it's the street connections who help her when the mummy disappears.

Meanwhile a miasma of grief surrounds Gul. Her niece has been missing for three years, but the powerful sense of loss remains, with the continuing



Maha Khan Phillips

uncertainty making things even worse. Mahnaz is always in the back of Gul's mind, but to her immense frustration her parents and upwardly mobile brother and straight-laced sister-in-law really don't want to talk about the situation anymore. Gul pushes forward to discover what has happened to the mummy, with several attempts made on her life as she begins to unravel the crime and the true origins of the mysterious artifact. Since this is a mystery, astute readers know the stories of the missing mummy and the missing niece must inevitably intersect.

I loved Gul the character, and was gripped by the story of her close relationship with her niece, who seems to share more traits with her aunt than with her uptight parents. As Gul reads through Mahnaz's diaries, the girl comes alive to the reader, making her loss all the more poignant. I won't give away the resolutions that Phillips provides, so you may have the pleasure of reading the book for yourself to discover them. When I closed the covers I felt I had been on both an armchair and emotional journey to the city of Karachi.

Maggie Mason Reviews



DOGGED PURSUIT

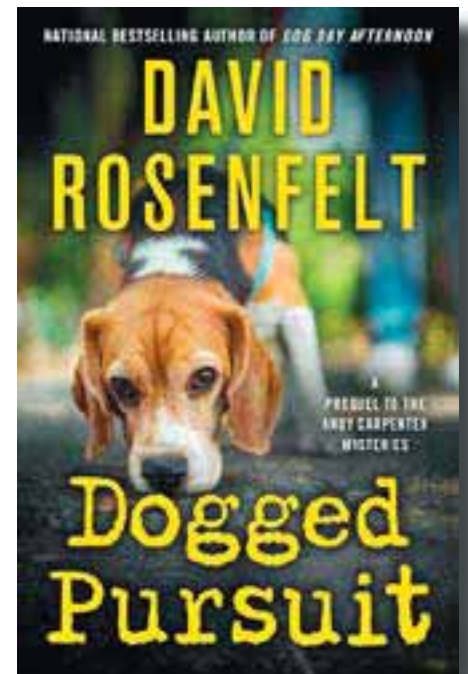
by David Rosenfelt
Minotaur, \$28.00

Prequel to the Andy Carpenter series

Rating: A

This book introduces the reader to Andy Carpenter and how he met Tara, his beloved golden retriever. It introduces us to a few other characters from the series, and shows how Andy decided to be a defense attorney, rather than a prosecuting attorney like his father.

Ryan Tierney had been a popular and efficient employee of a trucking company. He was suddenly fired without cause. Later, the man who fired him and 2 other employees are killed by a car bomb. Ryan is basically a slam dunk for the crime especially as he has a side gig creating fireworks and has the skills and equipment to make a bomb.



Andy and his wife are having issues, and his wife has been staying at one of her family's home for a while. Andy decides to adopt a dog, and goes to the local shelter. There he sees the dog of his dreams, Tara, a golden retriever. He decides to adopt her, and also adopts a dog that has been with Tara for a time. He has to get permission from Tierney, the dogs owner, and finds out he's in jail. He visits the jail and decides to take the case.

Near his new office is Sam, a computer genius who is helpful in the case. He also gets a referred to Laurie Collins, a cop turned private investigator. The case turns complicated the more they look into the crime. The trucking company has totally changed in the past year or so, and Andy has to comb through a lot of possibilities to find the truth.

I loved this look at how Andy began his career and how he & Tara met. One plus in this series is support for animals and how it's important to adopt animals. Andy is resourceful and can think quick on his feet. It's also fun to look back, while not having to worry about the future of some aspects of Andy's life. We haven't met all the characters who are in the series now, so I'm hoping for a sequel to this sequel. Highly recommended!!

THE RAILWAY CONSPIRACY

by SJ Rozan & John Shen Yen Nee,
Soho Press, \$27.95
Dee and Lao #2

Rating: A

In 1924 London, Judge Dee and his aide are adjusting to the changes in post world war London.

A man is murdered at a dinner party given by a woman for whom Dee had helped recovery a valuable artifact.

Dee and his protege Lao She are again helping to set things right for many people, people who are not able to protect themselves from international conspiracies. Bombings and political upheaval are occurring. There are con-

flicts with the Chinese Eastern Railway and the new communist party is beginning to gain power.

Dee and Lao She are smack dab in the middle of the action. They bring peace and justice through force and brainpower.

I thoroughly enjoyed this rollicking adventure. I learned something about the start of the Chinese political scene and how London natives and immigrants were affected. I look forward to their future adventures as I'm sure all readers will.

THE RETIREMENT PLAN

by Sue Hincenbergs
Morrow, \$30) Debut Novel

Rating: B+

Four California couples have been friends for 30 some years, and are looking forward to a nice retirement. Sadly, the investment they all contributed to is gone, and the future is looking bleak. It gets worse when one man is killed by an accident with his garage door. His widow is stunned to find she will receive a large payment from an insurance policy.

The other women are amazed to find out their husbands all have the policies. What they don't know is that the husbands have made other plans. They have been involved in a big theft from the local casino. One of the husbands is a trusted employee and they each have a significant amount of money stashed away. They plan to fake their deaths and



enjoy life in a tropical setting.

The wives discover this, and make their own plans, including hiring a hitman. Things go badly and soon it looks like no one is going to have a comfortable retirement, or if they will even survive

The plot gets darker when the casino management discovers the theft and brings in some thugs to get to the bottom of the massive loss.

I'm afraid if I say more it will ruin the ending, so I'm just going to say I enjoyed the book, and hope any reader won't get ideas to try this out.



My good friend "Mystery" Mike Bursaw is selling all of his stock of collectible first editions for 45% off for the foreseeable future. If you are interested in filling in some missing books in your collection, please go to mystery-mikes.com



Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



MR. WHISPER

by Andrew Mayne

Thomas & Mercer, \$16.99, March

The Specialists #1

Rating: B

The author has several series going and he has joined the lead characters of three of the series to form a group which someone has called the Specialists. Here is the group's makeup:

Theo Cray – a computational biologist who hunts serial killers

Jessica Blackwood – former FBI agent with a background in magic

Sloan McPherson – underwater investigator

Brad Trasker – former counterintelligence agent, now corporate security expert

Sloan finds a vagrant suffering from amnesia living in a Florida swamp. After some investigation, she learns he disappeared thirty years ago from Oregon when he was a teenager. Meanwhile, Jessica and Theo have made a connection to another teenager who disappeared from the same town around the same time. Both kept journals and referred to a figure they called Mr. Whisper. The case is also getting attention from Brad, whose research is leading him to a manipulator of one of his company's employees.

Jessica, Theo, Sloan, and Brad must now bring their unique skills to the table to take down a diabolical adversary. Unless Mr. Whisper's decades-long control of the vulnerable is too powerful and far-reaching to stop.

The set-up for the denouement takes way too long to tell and the pacing of the story suffers because of that. I'm a fan of the Sloan McPherson and her Underwater Investigation Unit adventures and,

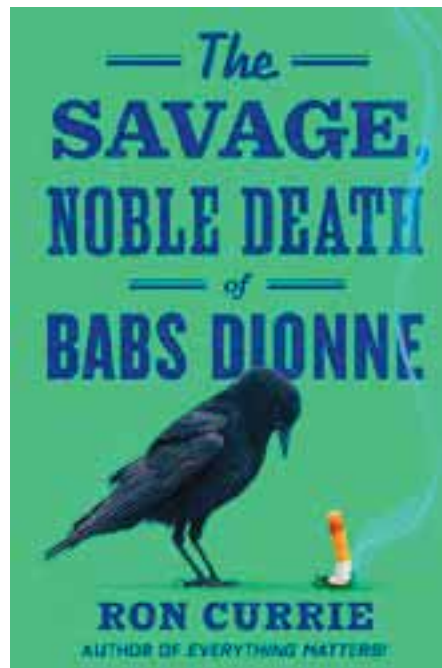
from my perspective, this story has too many protagonists to keep the reader's interest. There appears to be a sequel to this Specialists novel coming out at the end of the year.

THE SAVAGE, NOBLE DEATH OF BABS DIONNE

by Ron Currie

Putnam, \$29.00, March

Rating: A-



I would call this a crossover novel -- part literary fiction, part crime novel.

It is centered in the small French-speaking Franco-American community of Waterville, Maine and centers around the life of the particularly strong-willed Babs Dionne. We get glimpses of her early life from which she formed her own life path.

In the present day, we find Babs, a widowed mother of two troubled daughters and a doting grandmother to her

young grandson. She's also the crime boss of her town and some neighboring ones as well. She and her lieutenants, decades-long girlfriends, control the drug trade in Little Canada.

What Babs doesn't realize is that her operation is impinging on a much larger one whose kingpin has sent a very skilled and psychopathic enforcer, known only as The Man, to get Babs and her crew to work for him for greatly reduced remuneration.

While Babs is considering The Man's offer, her younger daughter Sis goes missing. [Spoiler alert] When Sis is found dead, Bab's wrath is unleashed.

This novel reads like a Greek tragedy with Bab's fatal flaw: she won't back down to anyone.

The denouement is exciting and quite violent. But the author saves one final twist that comes as quite a surprise.

This was recommended to me by C. B. Bernard, the author of **ORDINARY BEAR**. His comment: "Weird in some of the same ways as **ORDINARY BEAR**, peopled with unexpected characters, and just a page turner from start to finish." Those words got me to read the book and I'm glad I did. There was a lot to like about Babs and her circle of friends and family. But I had a hard time completely warming up to her because of her drug dealing and her failure to raise her daughters to have better lives. Currie's great writing skills are on full display here.

INTO THE GRAY ZONE

by Brad Taylor

Morrow, \$30.00, April

Pike Logan #19

Rating: B+

Pike Logan, Jennifer and the rest of the Taskforce are sent to India to provide security for a CIA honcho who is scheduled to meet with the Indian security services. The Taskforce disrupts an attempted attack on the meeting and later they are able to foil a terrorist operation at the Taj Mahal.

We, the readers, are privy to the fact that the Chinese are behind these events, using Indian separatists as their pawns. The Chinese goal is the destabi-

lization of India.

Then there is a wedding between two influential families that ends in violence and the taking of hostages.

Lots of action, action, action in this one with an added plus of a tour of India. Good, but not great.

THE MURDER SHOW

by Matt Goldman
Forge, \$32.99, April
Standalone
Rating: B+

The Murder Show is a television crime drama featuring a private detective who takes cases which the police have failed to solve. Its creator Ethan Harris has pitched a story line for a fourth season, but it is rejected by the network. Then a writers' strike occurs and Ethan returns to his hometown in Minneapolis to wait it out and possibly come up with a new idea for his show.

Ethan soon encounters some of his old friends such as Ro Greenman, who is now a policewoman. She has been doing some investigating into the death of their high school buddy – Ricky, who was purportedly a victim of a hit and run accident. Ethan becomes intrigued not only to possibly solve the mystery surrounding his friend but also as a potential storyline for *The Murder Show*.

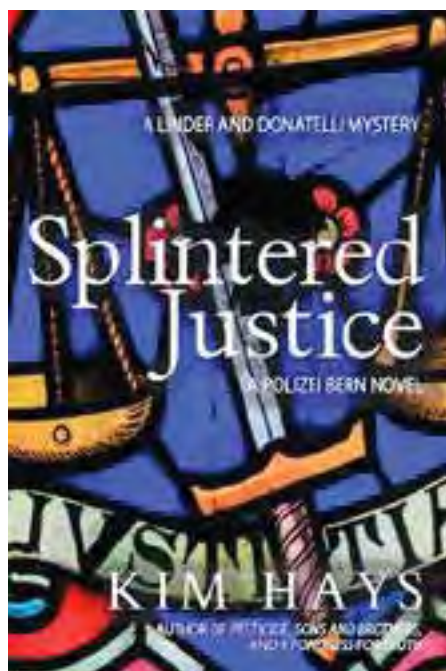
Soon Ro finds a connection with Ricky's death to a more recent event involving another teenager. She asks Ethan for help – but on the downlow. Someone is pushing back and wants to keep secrets buried.

Matt Goldman is a fine stylist and writes very pleasing prose. I've enjoyed books of his that I have read in the past. I can find no technical fault with *THE MURDER SHOW*, but for whatever reason, I just didn't connect with the characters (as I have with his prior books).

SPLINTERED JUSTICE

by Kim Hays
Seventh Street Books, \$22.95, April
Linder & Donatelli #4
Rating: A-

Giuliana Linder is a homicide detective in Bern, Switzerland. She is often



helped in her cases by Renzo Donatelli, who aspires to be promoted to detective one day. In the first three books of the series, there is a lot of sexual tension between the two even though Giuliana is roughly ten years older. They have not acted on their mutual attraction. In Giuliana's case, she is happily married with two children and she doesn't want to mess that up. In Renzo's case, he is married in the first three books of the series, but the marriage is troubled and we find him in the fourth book separated from his wife, switching residences every week to share the raising of their two young children. Will the issue of their mutual attraction be settled in this novel? You'll have to read it to see.

In *SPLINTERED JUSTICE*, Giuliana and Renzo are investigating separate cases with Renzo's the more prominent in the narrative.

A glassworker at the historic Bern cathedral is injured in a fall when a teenager intentionally shakes the scaffold on which he is working. The injured glassworker doesn't want to press charges because he was friends with the young man's sister many years ago. The issue of "why" is ultimately solved with a sad story of a Croatian family's dynamics that had led to a suspicious death fifteen years earlier. Was that death a suicide, accident, or homicide? Despite

how impossible the quest seems, Renzo is determined to find out as much about that death as he can, thereby showing the most important characteristic of a good detective: bulldog determination.

At first glance Giuliana's case seems much more straightforward. It involves an assisted suicide in which a wife gave her husband an overdose of insulin. Apparently Switzerland is one of the world's most liberal societies when it comes to this issue. But to keep things legal, a couple must sign up with one of the state's approved services before dementia sets in. The woman, accused of her husband's murder, did not follow all the rules. Were there mitigating circumstances?

Let me say at the outset that I consider the author a good friend. We have met and enjoyed lively conversation at the last two Bouchercons. That interaction was a result of my enjoying her books so much. They are very well written and should enjoy wide readership.

HIDDEN IN SMOKE

by Lee Goldberg
Thomas & Mercer, \$28.99, April
Sharpe & Walker #3
Rating: A-

Walter Sharpe is an expert arson investigator but has an abrasive manner which often alienates those he comes in contact with. His partner Walker is a former police detective and is much more of a people person who is very good with the non-fire elements of each of their investigations. In other words, they are a good pairing.

Someone is starting fires in cars under apartment complexes on stilts in the Hollywood area. 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 call on homicide detectives Eve Ronin (who has her own series) and Duncan Pavone to figure out whether the freeway disaster was a tragic accident or an intentional arson attack.

As things get more complicated, an old foe returns to town and may be at the centre of the fires and larger crimi-

nal enterprises.

Lee Goldberg's novels just zip along at a fast and pleasing pace. I'm always greatly entertained by his talent as a fine storyteller. Lee abides by Elmore Leonard's sound advice: leave out the stuff people don't want to read. I'm hooked on this series and the Eve Ronin one as well.

NOT DEAD YET

by Jeffrey Siger

Andreas Kaldis #14

Severn House, \$29.99, April

Rating: A-

Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis is married to Lila, a wealthy Athens socialite. She takes little or no interest in the day-to-day operations of the business interests that she owns. But one of them may cause her concern when a corrupt Greek businessman Dimitris Onofri is found barely alive when the private aircraft he was flying in crashed into the ocean. Onofri's beloved wife also survived the crash but died shortly thereafter. The downed aircraft was owned by a private charter company that was, in turn, owned by Lila and her father.

So why is this a concern? Dimitris Onofrio has a reputation for seeking revenge on those whom he perceives have wronged him. So Kaldis digs into the

details surrounding the crash to protect his family and in-laws.

Onofri is in a coma which complicates Kaldis' investigation but he devises a creative way around this roadblock.

What Kaldis eventually finds proves to be shocking.

I'm a fan of this series for a number of reasons. I like the fact that Andreas Kaldis is a happily married husband and father who appears to be a normal person with good common sense. He also loves his country and wants the best for Greece – and he is an honest policeman. The plots often give insights into what the country is going through at the present time and how Greece is dealing with its major political and social issues. We readers are also given a pretty good tour of the Greek Islands and its people (and food) as an added bonus. But most of all I admire the intriguing plotting of its crime stories and how they are resolved.

THE BURNING STONES

by Antti Tuomainen

Orenda, \$26.99, April

Standalone

Rating: B+

I've never read anything by this author before, but I kept hearing how funny he was, so I thought I'd give his new book a try. I was surprised that there was no humor to be found in **THE BURNING STONES**, but I wasn't disappointed. It turned out to be a pretty good mystery and a look into an aspect of Scandinavian culture that I'd not experienced before.

First you have to understand that saunas are a **big** thing in Scandinavia (not so big here in Utah). The plot surrounds the inner workings of a company that manufactures high-end saunas – not the typical setting for a mystery.

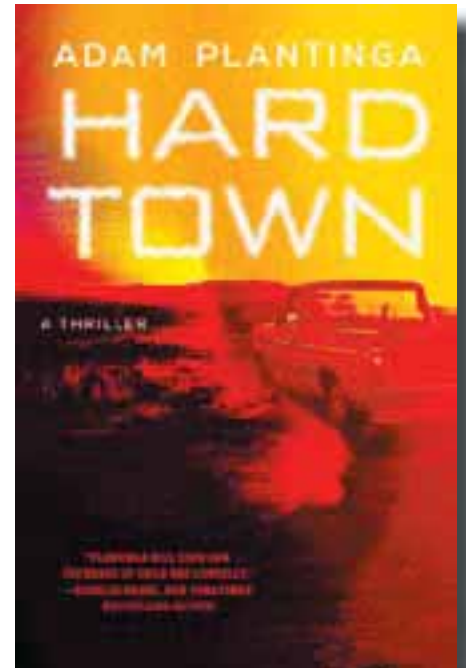
The narrative begins with the murder of the new head of Steam Devil, a sauna-stove company. The murder occurred in a sauna where the bound victim was burned to death. Yuk!

There are a number of suspects who work for the company, but the police have at the top of their list Anni Korpinen, the company's best salesperson and, per common belief, the perceived

successor to the murder victim.

The story is told through the eyes of Anni, who realizes what a perilous position she is in and hence, performs her own investigation.

THE BURNING STONES is full of quirky characters and unusual situations. I was entertained.



HARD TOWN

by Adam Plantinga

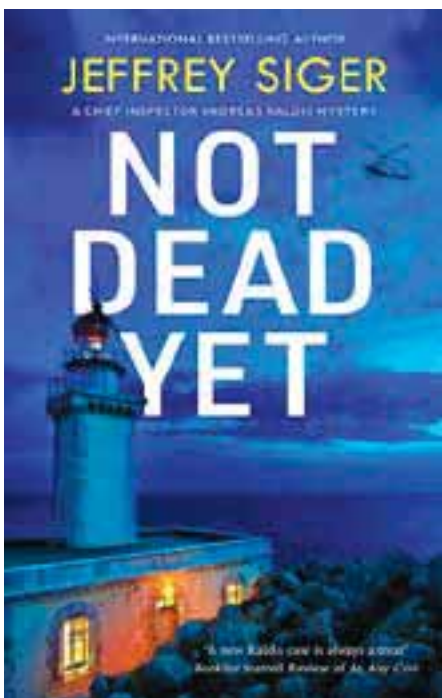
Grand Central, \$30.00, April

Kurt Argento #2

Rating: A-

Since retiring from the Detroit police and losing his beloved wife to a fatal illness, Kurt Argento has become a bit of a wanderer – in the Jack Reacher school of wandering. This school teaches its pupils that one usually doesn't have to look too far to find someone in trouble who needs your help.

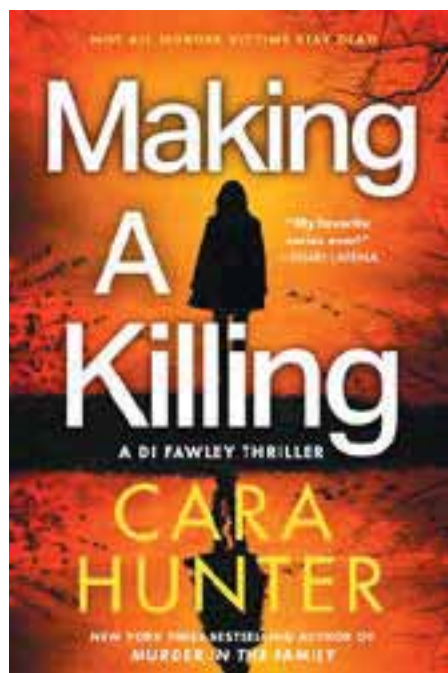
In this case, Kristen Reed and her young son Ethan show up on Argento's doorstep to ask him to find her missing husband who was last seen in a small town called Fenton, Arizona. Argento initially turns her down but afterwards doesn't feel right about it. He follows her to Fenton only to find out that she and her boy have also disappeared. And the town's large and overly equipped police force members are acting in quite a strange manner, which



only makes him suspicious of what is going on in this town.

After surviving an attempt on his life, Argento goes on the offensive. But is one man enough?

Adam Plantinga writes a darned good thriller with one important ingredient: realistic action scenes. If you like Nick Petrie and Jack Carr, I think you'll like this author's work.



MAKING A KILLING

by Cara Hunter

Morrow Paperbacks, \$18.99, May
DI Adam Fawley #7

Rating: B+

This series entry is a sequel to the first book in the series, the excellent **CLOSE TO HOME**. It reveals major spoilers (as does this review) for those who have not read this first book so my recommendation is to read **CLOSE TO HOME** first. Books one through six of the series take place over a two-year period. Then there is a six-year gap before we encounter the events of this novel, **MAKING A KILLING**.

A woman walking her dog in Hescombe woods discovers a shallow grave containing the body of a woman, who apparently died a few weeks ago. During a forensic examination of the duct tape binding the body a single hair is discovered. The hair is soon matched

to the DNA of Daisy Mason, a young girl believed to have been murdered by her mother eight years ago. No body was ever found, but there was enough circumstantial evidence to convict the mother on murder charges.

Now it appears that Daisy was never murdered and is alive today. So now the questions are: where is Daisy and what relationship does she have with the murder victim?

The former murder team from eight years ago is pulled together (with some additions) with Adam Fawley (now DCI) leading it.

MAKING A KILLING illustrates how faulty crime investigations can be no matter how hard detectives may work to come up with the truth and to bring bad actors to justice.

Some fans may be dissatisfied with the resolution, to which I will say – “Stay tuned.”

I will continue to read everything Cara Hunter writes and publishes, even though I don't consider **MAKING A KILLING** as good as most of its predecessors.

SOUTH OF NOWHERE

by Jeffery Deaver

Putnam, \$30.00, May
Colter Shaw #5

Rating: B-

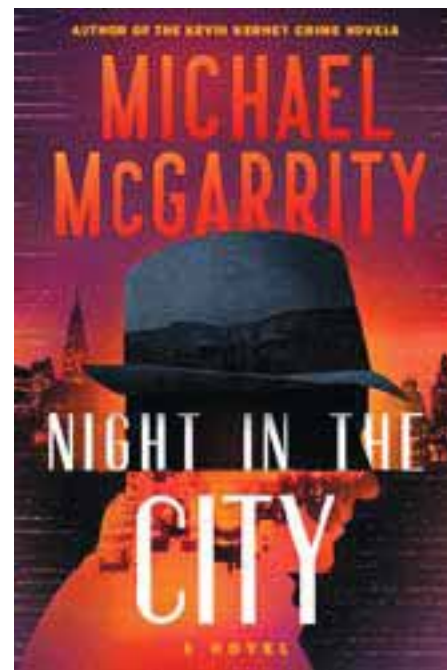
Hinowah is a small town in Northern California, protected by an earthen levee. Snow melt has created a raging river that apparently has caused a partial collapse of the levee. Tracker and reward seeker Colter Shaw is nearby when this happens and he joins with his sister Dorion, a disaster response specialist, to try to save the town and its inhabitants.

First order of business is to rescue the family of four whose vehicle was swept away when the levee was partially breached.

As time passes it becomes clear to Colter that something is amiss. Was the collapse intentional and if so who is responsible and why?

Other side story lines appear in this rambling (sometimes confusing) and implausible narrative. I like the char-

acter of Colter Shaw, but **SOUTH OF NOWHERE** is not his best outing – by far.



NIGHT IN THE CITY

by Michael McGarrity

Norton, \$28.99, May
Rating: B+

This is quite a departure for the author Michael McGarrity, whose prior novels have been set in the Southwestern United States (mostly New Mexico). Here we find all the action in and around my hometown, New York City in the 1950s.

Sam Monroe thinks his relationship with Manhattan socialite Laura Nielson is going well. And then it isn't. She breaks up with him without giving Sam a valid reason for doing so.

Time passes and his broken heart is on the mend when Sam gets a late night call from Laura asking him to meet with her in her apartment. When he arrives, Sam finds her stangled and naked body on the balcony with his dog tags wrapped around her neck.

Implicated in Laura's death, Sam conducts his own investigation. He is opposed by a corrupt policeman who is out to pin the murder on Sam. But with the help of some coworkers in the DA's office and Deborah Jean Ryan, a female private investigator, Sam takes a deep

dive into Laura's life to find the motive for her death.

This was a pleasant and easy read, but nothing special. The good guys were likeable and the bad guys were despicable. Not much nuance here.

DEATH ON WOLF FELL

by Nick Oldham

Severn House, \$29.99, May

Jessica Raker #2

Rating: B+

Sergeant Jessica Raker is a former London police firearms officer who has relocated her family to the rural Ribble Valley, where she grew up. Here she takes on the more mundane tasks of policing -- with one exception. Jessica is determined to take down the person behind the local drug trafficking -- her old nemesis from school days -- Mags Horsefield. Complicating matters is the fact that Jessica's daughter and Mags's daughter have become close friends.

Things come to a head when Jessica is called to investigate a possible crime at one of the local stately homes, Wolf Fell. She is told that everything is copacetic, but her suspicions are aroused.

I've read and enjoyed a number of Nick Oldham's novels, which I consider a combination of good detection mixed with action thriller elements. I like that combination.

A LONESOME PLACE FOR DYING

by Nolan Chase

Crooked Lane, \$29.99, May

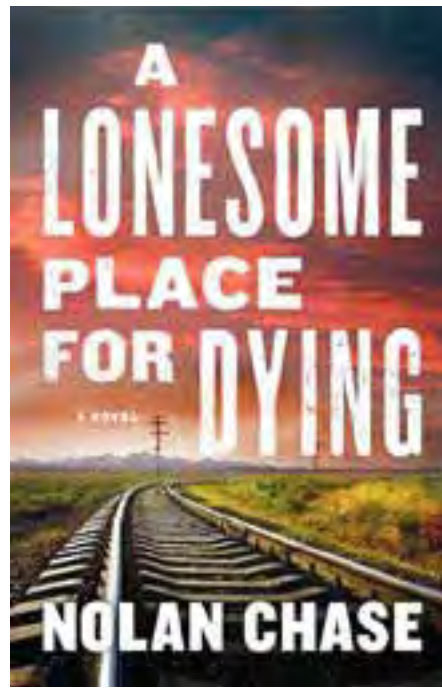
Ethan Brand #2

Rating: A-

Ethan Brand has just been elected Chief of Police of the quiet seaside town of Blaine, Washington, near the Canadian border. Previously he has worked for the department for fifteen years.

His first day as Chief is a doozy. It starts with finding a threat on his porch. Then when he gets to the station, he learns that a body of a young woman has been found near the railroad tracks.

As Ethan delves into the life of the young woman to determine if foul play was involved, he must also deal with a host of other issues including a talented



lieutenant who wants his job, a hostile mayor and his relationships with the opposite sex.

This is the second Ethan Brand novel that I have read and I enjoyed both of them. The author (real name Sam Wiebe) does an excellent job of describing small town life and the eccentricities of its inhabitants. I heard this series being compared to the Chris Offutt's Mick Hardin series and I can see that as a valid comparison. I'm confident that if you like the Mick Hardin books you will also like the Ethan Brand ones. I look forward to more Ethan Brand in the future.

NIGHTSHADE

by Michael Connelly

Little, Brown, \$30.00, May

Detective Stilwell #1

Rating: A-

A new character and a new Southern California setting for Michael Connelly. Cause for celebration? The jury is still out on that one, but I'm leaning towards a "yes."

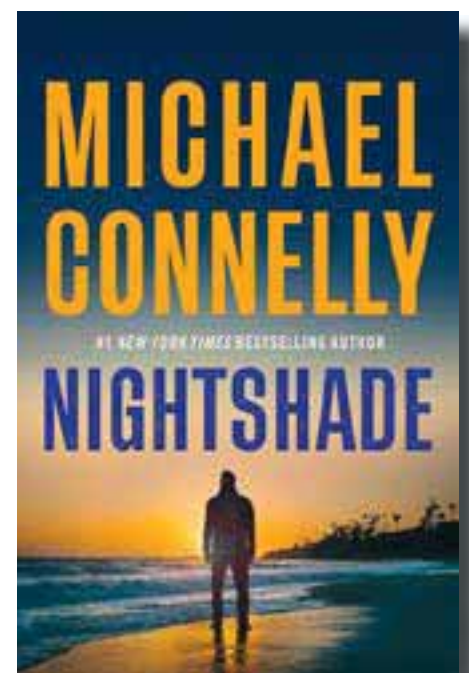
Detective Stilwell (no first name) is in the dog house and exiled to the island of Catalina, just off the coast from Los Angeles. He finds that his sharply honed skills as a homicide detective go largely unused as he deals with small

town issues of drunken tourists, minor thefts and easily solved crimes. But he finds that he is enjoying the freedom of being his own boss (more or less) and his new romantic relationship with the island's deputy harbormaster Tash.

One morning Stilwell is called to the harbor to investigate the sighting of a body in the water. A worker scraping the barnacles off the bottom of a boat noticed it. So Stilwell dons a wet suit and finds a wrapped up body tied to an anchor lying on the harbor floor. He reports it to his old boss on the mainland and turns the case over to him for investigation. Just his luck that the case is assigned to Detective Ahearn, the person responsible for Stilwell's relocation.

Stilwell is warned to not interfere in the case, but he can't help doing some snooping around when he discovers that the victim has a tangential connection to the theft of an expensive sculpture from an exclusive club for the wealthy.

NIGHTSHADE is told with the smooth, seemingly effortless prose that we've come to expect in a Michael Connelly novel. The new characters and the setting worked for me. It was an enjoyable reading experience as I gulped it down in two sittings. But as I turned the final page there seemed to me to be something missing. And then it dawned on me that there were few, if



any, surprises in the narrative – something else I've grown accustomed to experience in Michael Connelly's works. So I'll say something that can easily be interpreted as damning with faint praise – a so-so Michael Connelly novel is still better than most other novels I'll read this year.



RETURN TO SENDER

by Craig Johnson
Viking, \$30.00, May
Walt Longmire #21

Rating: B+

Walt Longmire's late wife's cousin asks for a favor. She's a postal inspector and one of her letter carriers, Blair McGowan, has disappeared. And she could be anywhere because her desolate mail route took her hundreds of miles into Wyoming territory. She wants Walt to find her and he agrees to give it a try.

Walt catches wind of a peripatetic religious cult that has been seen in the vicinity of Blair's route so he goes in search of the cult. To say any more about the plot would spoil some twists and turns that a reader will encounter along the way.

Walt Longmire's grit and determination are on full display in **RETURN TO SENDER**. Craig Johnson's often underrated prose continues to delight and entertain this reader.

GONE DARK

by Ryan Steck
Tyndale, \$32.99, June
Matthew Redd #4

Rating: A-

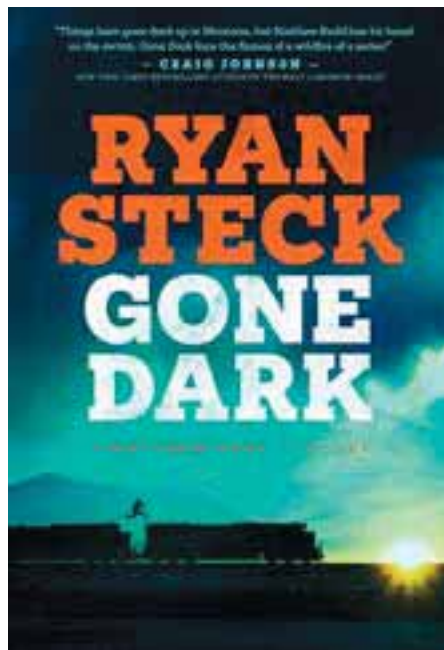
Things are going well for Matthew Redd and his wife Emily. She is about to give birth to their second child and they are rebuilding their home on the ranch near Wellington, Montana.

Matt has been appointed the head of the county's fledgling search and rescue team and as such he is called out when the late-summer wildfires start up. A group of firefighters have been dropped into the fire zone to create firebreaks, but communication has been cut for some unknown reason and Matt is asked to go and find them.

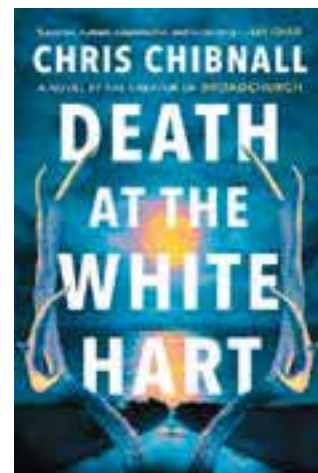
When Matt is dropped into the same fire zone, he finds that the firefighters have been murdered – all but one. He goes in search of the one and comes upon a remote cabin with two more murder victims. A terrified young boy named Jack appears to be the only survivor – and apparently the murderer wants to kill him also.

Matt rescues the boy and forms an attachment with him.

Soon other incidents lead Matt to believe that there are larger forces at work here so he calls in his estranged natural father Gavin Kline (acting director of the FBI) to investigate.



Ryan Steck fills **GONE DARK** with believable, hair-raising action scenes. This book was a pleasure to read from start to finish.



DEATH AT THE WHITE HART

by Chris Chibnall
Pamela Dorman Books, \$30.00, June
Debut

Rating: B

A debut novel by the creator of the highly praised television series **Broadchurch**.

The English town of Fleetcombe is too small to support its two pubs and The White Hart is on the losing end of that support. The death knell comes when its landlord, Jim Tiernan is found dead, sitting on a chair in the middle of a country road with a pair of antlers glued to his head.

The morose Nicola Bridge, recently returned to her home town from her days in the Liverpool CID, is assigned this difficult murder case. On the home front she is trying to save her marriage.

There are very few clues to follow so she looks into the dynamics of the small town and its inhabitants like the twitchy delivery driver Eddie and Deakins, an embittered farmer.

The narrative proceeds as one would expect and that was one of my problems with **WHITE HART** – it was too predictable. The other problem was that most of the characters were unlikeable.

Overall I was not impressed. This was a disappointment inasmuch as I loved his prior work in creating **Broadchurch**.

HISTORICAL EMPORIUM

Robin Agnew



A SLASH OF EMERALD

By Patrice McDonough
Kensington, \$27, March

Dr. Julia Lewis #2

Grade: B+

This new series featuring a female doctor in Victorian England is one to enjoy. Protagonist Dr. Julia Lewis began the first book called out on a criminal case, and by this one, the second, the police have quickly learned that although she may be female, she can help them solve difficult problems. Of course she also has a regular practice, but the focus of the books is her work with the authorities, specifically one very attractive yet damaged Inspector.

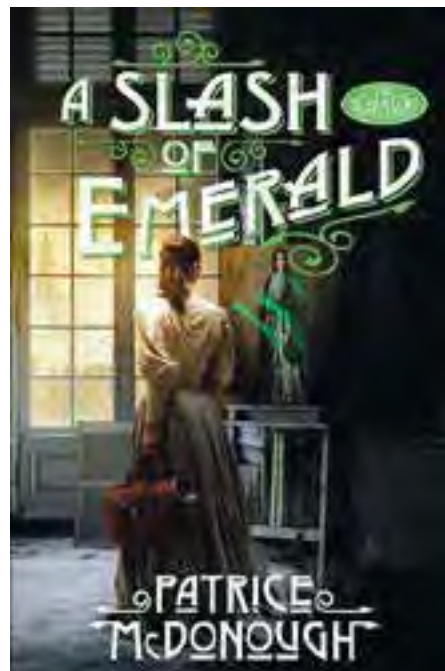
While I loved the first instalment, it was jam packed, as are many scene setting series debuts, while this sequel benefits greatly from a more focused plot. As the story opens, Dr. Julia is called in to perform a pelvic exam on a woman who was assaulted while walking close to an army barracks. Under British law at the time, the woman was required to be examined for infectious disease, while the man was not, and Inspector Tennant asks Julia to perform this exam, thinking it will be easier for the victim when conducted by a member of the same sex. She agrees.

The other precipitating event is a massive skating accident on a frozen pond at Regent's Park. Among those who went into the frigid water is a man whose sister is a friend of Julia's, and since Julia is on the scene, she's pressed into an exam, drawing her into the saga of the Allingham family. Her waterlogged patient is an important art critic and publisher, with a painter sister recently returned from Paris, and a wife mourning her several miscar-

riages. Puzzlingly, the man dies by his own hand shortly after surviving the accident, apparently having put poisonous green paint (which at the time was loaded with arsenic) in his own drink.

Because of the successful resolution of Julia's last case, his suspicious sister asks her to investigate. Since Julia and Inspector Tennant are now friends, she has a smoother path forward as their inquiries take them through the lively London art world of the time, one in which larger than life painters like Turner and Whistler reigned supreme. But as a woman, Mary Allingham, the dead man's sister, has had a much tougher path.

Both books to date share a strong focus on women's agency and place in society, this one examining the lives of both prostitutes and female artists, two professions not as dissimilar as they might seem. McDonough demonstrates her narrative chops and masterful



pacing as Tennant and Julia uncover a nefarious scheme of what we would now call human trafficking.

The look at the art world at the time, from small timers to members of the Royal Academy, is also a fascinating one, and there's an especially vivid scene set as the annual Academy show is about to open and the artists visit the gallery on "varnishing" day to put final touches on their work, which is already hanging on gallery walls. These books are the total package, with an evocative setting, tight plot, and two winning and intriguing central characters strong enough to support a long running series. Book three really cannot come soon enough.

MURDER OF A RECLUSE

By Jeanne M. Dams
Severn House, \$29.99, March
Oak Park Village #3

Grade: B+

I read the first book in this series, *Murder in the Park*, when it came out in 2021, and it was so memorable that when I picked up the latest instalment four years later, the setting and characters came back to me right away. Our heroine Elizabeth Wilkins is a new bride in the Chicago suburbs of the 1920s who has finally separated herself from a difficult and controlling mother. She finds life as a young married very pleasant as she and her husband are building a house, making sure to make room for his Aunt Lucy in their new household.

The loveable Lucy has basically served as a mother to Elizabeth's lawyer husband Fred, and the two of them step up when he is flummoxed by a new client, Caroline Dobbs. She's been accused of murdering her cranky Aunt Agatha who lived alone in squalor. While there's no direct evidence, Agatha's body was discovered by a neighbor shortly after Caroline's departure, and Fred is convinced her arrest is imminent.

This is a case that rests on hearsay, and what Elizabeth can provide to Fred is basically the same, in the form of her access to confidential conversations between women. She joins the prestigious Nineteenth Century Women's Club to access the network of connections

provided by the wives of judges and politicians and prominent society figures. Whenever she turns up a bit of a lead, Fred sets his investigator on it, allowing the two of them to begin to piece together the truth of the case.

Via the age-old method of offering fresh cookies, Elizabeth and Lucy make friends with some of Al Capone's men who are camped out in Oak Park. She met Capone in the last series outing, and his outlaw network is a help to Elizabeth and Lucy as they continue their low-key questioning of many of the town's residents.

The mystery part of this is well set up and thought out, but what most shines for me are the characters. Elizabeth is a young woman finding herself, setting up her own household and learning to stand up to her mother. Caroline, the accused murderess, is just as fascinating, reluctant to open up at first, but eventually sharing bits of information under Elizabeth's persistent but gentle interrogation. Some clues are revealed as the two women clear Aunt Agatha's home which is filled with junk, as is Caroline's own dusty home.

Dams really gives the reader a good feel for what life in 1926 might have been like. While Oak Park would now be considered a suburb, in 1926 it was a village near Chicago with its own separate identity. Elizabeth draws on her intimate knowledge of the community as she conducts her investigation, something that would be much harder in a big city like Chicago.

This was a pleasant read with characters I was overjoyed to meet up with again, and I savored the rhythm of Elizabeth's life. Dams made me feel like I was a part of it all as I read, no easy task. This author's work remains solid and consistently readable, and I am so appreciative of her decades of writing, which now includes over thirty five novels.

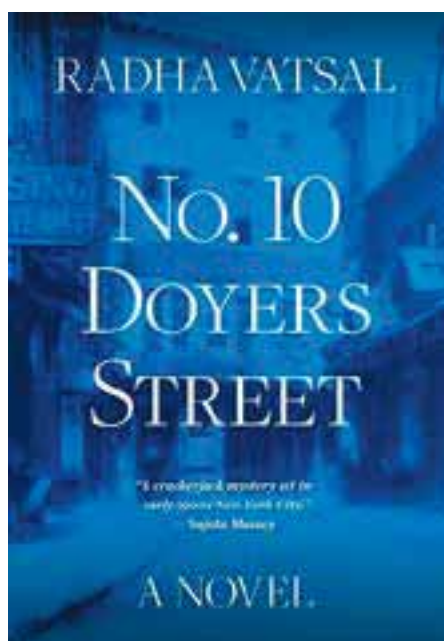
NO. 10 DOYERS STREET

by Radha Vatsal

Level Best/Historia, \$27.95, March

Grade: B+

Archana "Archie" Morley is a jour-



nalist working in 1907 New York City who, as a woman and a native of India, is a double outsider. Her physician husband, who defied his family to marry her, is quite tolerant of her unusual habit of donning pants and traversing dangerous parts of the city looking for stories. And boy, does she find some. Assigned by her editor to the notorious murder of Stanford White by Harry Thaw, she gets distracted by a gang style shooting in Chinatown and the gangster who may or may not be behind it, one Mock Duck.

Mock Duck, Harry Thaw and Stanford White were all real people in turn of the century New York, but Mock Duck is the person Archie – and the novel – chooses to focus on. While the book opens with a crime, it's really less of a mystery and more a straight up historical novel. Vatsal is deeply skilled at portraying the sounds, smells and people of New York, particularly the denizens of Chinatown, who are as outsider as it gets.

Chinese weren't allowed to vote or become citizens, though they were allowed to work, which they certainly did, creating their own community – an achievement the mayor of New York wants to rip down to create a park. So unimportant are the Chinese to New York "society" there's no thought given to where the population of Chinatown

might relocate once their entire community is torn down. That's the "meta" view.

The "micro" view is the one that draws you in as a reader, however. When Archie goes to interview Mock Duck at his home at No. 10 Doyers Street, she finds a crowd inside the apartment, because the city, in the form of what would now be called Child Protective Services, have arrived to take his daughter away. She's an adorable six-year-old, and the abrupt separation from her family is heartbreaking. Archie witnesses the bereft parents at the time, and later in court, the ridiculous reason she was taken from the household.

This episode is only the starting point for Vatsal's look at Chinatown, as well as her examination of Archie's unusual yet happy marriage, which at times takes her into the upper echelons of society. Through these connections Archie is able to interview the mayor to boost her career, and, perceiving this, Mock Duck begins to appreciate her intelligence and see that she might be useful to him. He does grant her some access, an access denied to other reporters.

While Archie is often "off the reservation," as far as her boss is concerned, she does turn in some great stories, but also tends to ignore specific assignments, making the tension at her job (filled with male reporters who look down on her) even more intense. This book begins with heartbreak and concludes as an extremely deft portrait of the way politics work, with both the heartbreak of Mock's family and the political levers and the way they are used appearing pretty timeless (and timely). This is a book that makes an impression, with an ending which may be realistic, but was on some levels unsatisfying, leaving me wanting a bit more of a resolution. However, Vatsal's portrayal of the city at a specific period, as it was growing and changing almost daily, is an adroit one, making the character of Archie and the story of a bursting New York City indelible.

Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



Much of my reading involves literary fiction, as well as, crime fiction. So much of literary fiction can fit into our category such as some of the books below. If I feel they are suspenseful or a death is a major part of the plot, I will review them here.

THE EMPUSIUM

by Olga Tokarczuk
Riverhead Books, \$30.00

Rating: A-

In September, 1913, Mieczyslaw Wozniak, a young Pole, travels to the village of Gorborsdorf to a sanitarium for the treatment of tuberculosis. He apparently has a minor case of it and the location of the village with its weather is believed to heal the illness. He stays at Wilhelm Opitz's guesthouse. Every night the other residents drink a liquor and debate many issues including politics, religion and are women inferior to men. After the unexpected death of Orvitz's wife, strange things start happening and there appears to be a sinister force watching the inhabitants of the village. Can they be eyeing their next target?

This book is based on Thomas Mann's **MAGIC MOUNTAIN**. It is shorter than that work and perhaps has more humor. The discussions of the various topics were very long and there is so much of them. The twist of the ending is actually quite brilliant. I really enjoyed this book.

THE DREAM HOTEL

by Laila Lalami
Pantheon, \$29.00

Rating: A

In the near future, Sara, upon returning to Los Angeles from London,

is arrested and held by the Risk Assessment Administration in the airport because, according to an AI algorithm, she is in danger of committing a crime in the future. That person who might suffer harm is her husband. She is detained and brought to a facility to be observed for, supposedly, twenty one days. This is a situation where Sara has not done anything wrong but this algorithm has put her at a elevated risk to do harm. Sara must try to get out by keeping her head down because every little infraction can increase her imprisonment. She desperately wants to get home to her young twins and her husband. However, as time goes by, it looks increasingly unlikely she will get home anytime soon.

This novel is a surreal look at the potential pitfalls of AI. The author conveys a setting for the prison that captures the helplessness of the women incarcerated for doing nothing wrong. The story

moves swiftly and is never dull. There is an underlying suspense as whether Sara ever gets out of this incredibly unjust prison. It is a book that is difficult to put down.

SMALL BOAT

by Vincent Delecroix
HopeRoad) 12.99

Rating: A

In November, 2021, an inflatable dinghy, carrying twenty nine migrants from France to England capsized in the channel causing the deaths of twenty seven of them. The passengers were recorded begging for help. The French woman in dispatch tried to push the migrants problems to the British and her dereliction of duty caused the deaths as help was nearby but never notified. In an interview with the police, the woman defends herself by stating that other factors were at play- the sea, the war that the migrants were fleeing from, or even the migrants who recklessly placed themselves into danger.

This extremely short novel, shortlisted for the International Booker Prize, is a riveting tale of a crime and it's attempt at a justification for it. The dialogue of the women is quite chilling as it illustrates evil on par with the Nazi atrocities in how the perpetrator justifies herself. It is a brief and brilliant work and is well deserving of the Booker International Prize. Highly recommended.

WILD DARK SHORE

by Charlotte McConaghy
Flatiron Books, \$28.99

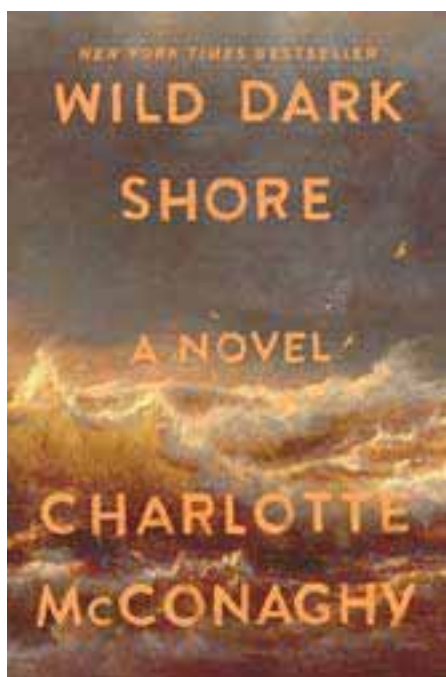
Rating: A-

Dominic Salt and his three children live on a remote island of Shearwa-



ter, close to Antarctica. Their job is to protect the world's largest collection of plant seeds collected by scientists. The ocean water is rapidly rising and the seeds will soon be collected and moved to the mainland to protect them. In the meantime, during an awful storm, a mysterious woman is washed ashore. They nurse her back to health and discover her name is Rowan. She is never clear as to why she sailed to Shearwater. When she discovers a freshly dug grave and a possible blood splattered room, she realizes there are secrets being kept from her. However, Dominic realizes Rowan is not being truthful with them either. Very slowly the truth comes out and it becomes quite deadly.

This is a beautifully written book. The locale is carefully described. The characters are well rounded, realistic and deep. The pacing of the story is initially languid- at least in the first two-thirds of the book. As circumstances are slowly revealed, the pacing picks up eventually to a relentless pace. This author is an exceptional writer. I will admit, that as beautifully as the author described the immediate settings, I never got a feel for the whole island and where the various events took place. A map would have been very helpful. Nonetheless, this is a worthwhile, well written story and is highly recommended.



Digging Into The Global Crime Spree

Craig Sisterson



Kia ora and giddy fellow mystery lovers, I hope that you've all enjoyed a lovely spring in the northern hemisphere, or autumn (Fall) in the south, and you've been enjoying some fabulous reads so far in 2025, whether new books or older ones. There are so many good and great crime and thriller stories out there, and plenty of cool authors to discover, as well as enjoying old faves.

For myself, I've certainly had a fascinating reading year so far, with a combination of awards judging for a couple of different prizes – so I'm getting to enjoy a diverse array of books from the past year, including some really outstanding standalones and series novels – and reviewing some fascinating upcoming and brand-new reads for magazines back home in New Zealand and Australia, along with this fine US-based publication, *Deadly Pleasures*. A few of my faves thusfar are sprinkled throughout this issue, along with others that may not reach the same heights but are still

worth a read.

In the UK, we're also in the midst of really gearing up for 'festival season', with a range of large and smaller crime and thriller festivals happening all across the country over the next few months. As I write this, we recently had Gwyl Crime Cymru Festival in Wales, which began as an online festival during COVID lockdowns but is now an IRL extravaganza in Aberystwyth, celebrating Welsh crime writing and crime writers while also welcoming other crime and thriller storytellers. I'm definitely keen to head along to that one in future years. While Gwyl Crime Cymru is a growing new festival, on the other end of the spectrum it's a sad goodbye later this month to Crimefest.

Running annually in Bristol since 2008, after first appearing as a one-off visit by Left Coast Crime to Bristol in 2006, Crimefest has always been a bit unusual among British book festivals as being a convention-style festival more common in the USA. Because of this, it has showcased a huge array of writers, and welcomed many newer authors to the crime and thriller writing community who often may not have received onstage spots at the invite-only lineups of other British books festivals, crime or otherwise. I've met a lot of really cool people in the British and international crime writing community thanks to Crimefest in my first years in the UK, pre-COVID, many of whom have had a great impact on me as a reviewer, features writer, awards judge, event chair and festival founder, anthology editor, and all the other hats I've found myself wearing in this weird and wonderful

world.

So haere ra (goodbye) to Crimefest, and a huge kudos to Donna Moore and Adrian Muller for keeping it going for so long in recent years. While it's sad to see it go, it's provided many people – writers and readers – many great memories. Hopefully the finale will be another fab few days.

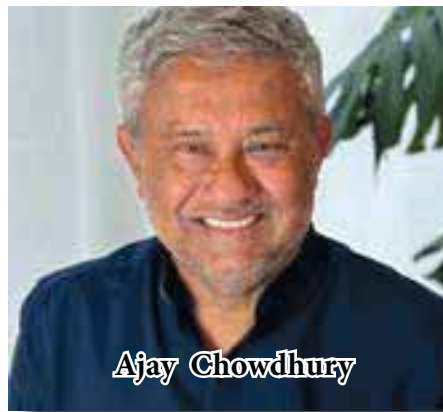
Later on in the UK calendar, I'm really looking forward Capital Crime in London in June, the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival in Harrogate in July, Bute Noir on a Scottish island in August, and Bloody Scotland in historic Stirling in September, among others. We're blessed nowadays with a plethora of opportunities to meet authors, share our passion for books and great stories, and hang out with fellow booklovers – it's a great 'tribe', and if you're a keen crime and thriller fan (I imagine reading a publication such as *Deadly Pleasures*, that's quite likely), I urge you to head along to an event or two, whether a bookshop or library event or a small or large festival or convention, and meet some of the authors whose work you love. As someone who has interviewed authors onstage and off, and seen in person lots of interactions, let me tell you that most authors are thrilled to meet readers, and discuss books and storytelling and more. Our bookish ecosystem lives and breathes on the enthusiasm and support of readers.

And if you're ever at an event where I'm onstage or off, feel free to come up and say kia ora (hello).

But for now, let's dive into some great new books from some cool storytellers, starting with a chat with a superb newer author who has joined our mystery and thriller community in recent years, Indian-born tech entrepreneur Ajay Chowdhury, the author of the Kamil Rahman series.

An Interview with Ajay Chowdhury

Ajay Chowdhury was born in India and has been the founder or CEO of several technology startups, including Shazam. Ajay lives in London, where he



Ajay Chowdhury

cooks experimental meals for his wife and daughters. He won the inaugural Harvill Secker-Bloody Scotland prize for what became his first crime novel, *THE WAITER*, which introduced former Kolkata detective Kamil Rahman, who had fled his homeland in disgrace and was working in a family friend's London restaurant. The series has grown in acclaim as it has continued with several further novels, which see Kamil investigating cases not only in London, but travelling back to the subcontinent for *THE SPY* and *THE SHADOW*. Ahead of the recent publication of the fifth in the series, *THE SHADOW*, Ajay spoke with Craig Sisterson.

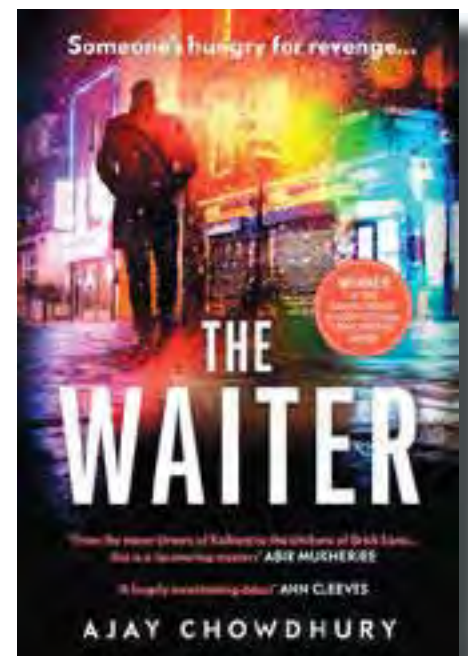
Can you tell us a little about where the character of Kamil Rahman came from, and how he first made it to the page in *THE WAITER* a few years ago?

Ajay Chowdhury: It was sheer luck, in a way, and I feel slightly bad saying this, because so many of my fellow writers struggled for years. But as you mentioned, I was a tech entrepreneur. I was one of the founders of Shazam, have done a bunch of other tech stuff, and I've always loved reading crime. About six or seven years ago, my wife saw a tweet from Harvill-Secker and Bloody Scotland, looking for first-time crime writers. It was a competition. So I submitted three chapters on her urging, and much to my amazement, I won. The chapters I submitted became *THE WAITER*, which was essentially the story of this guy, Kamil Rahman, who's a cop in the Calcutta police force, who gets thrown out and ends up as a waiter in a little restaurant in the East End of

London, in Brick Lane. And while he's licking his wounds and is a bit of fish out of water, and has an unrequited crush on Anjoli, who runs the restaurant, he gets involved with the death of a millionaire industrialist who's found dead in a swimming pool in a party that he's catering. So he ends up solving that crime with Anjoli. And you know, I was amazed by the reception *THE WAITER* had, and then, wonderfully, my publisher, said, "oh, we'll have a couple more. Suddenly, I'm five books in. So, yeah, it's been quite a journey. I didn't expect to have a completely new career, late in my life.

One of many things I love about your books is the mixture of dark and light. While you delve into some pretty heavy subject matters like antisemitism, homelessness, and terrorism there's also a real warmth in terms of the character relationships, humour, and delicious food. Is that balance something you're conscious of when writing, or editing, or just comes naturally?

Ajay: It is something I'm conscious of – in my third novel *THE DETECTIVE* there's a whole sub-stream about Israel and Palestine, and I didn't want to make it a big deal, but I did want to talk about Sabra and Shatila and what happened in those camps. It's a tiny part of the book,



but the idea is if someone reads and thinks that's interesting, they can go and look again. Someone told me today, which is fantastic, that they read **THE SPY** and didn't know about Kashmir so went and Googled it to learn more, and that's fantastic to have someone say they've done that.

So in Kamil Rahman, you have a main character who's evolved over time. What was the particular inspiration for that fourth book, **THE SPY, and for his character to become involved not only in London investigations, but be returned to dealing the troubled politics of his homeland?**

Ajay: Oh, it was very simple: what's happening to Muslims in India. I mean, that's something that's been angering me for years, in terms of how the right-wing Hindu government has been treating Muslims. And I really, really wanted to write about it. The final impetus came when they got rid of Kashmir's special status, which it's had since independence. I said to myself, I really want to write about this. I then read a whole series of books about what's happening in Kashmir, and got angry, so that was absolutely the inspiration. Then the whole idea of what happens if someone's asked to infiltrate a terrorist group and then starts agreeing with their aims. I just thought it was really interesting to explore, in Kamil's life.

While you have recurring characters in Kamil and Anjali, each of your novels deals with some distinct issues and very different stories – in **THE SHADOW the pair of them end up travelling to Mumbai together to try to help on two separate cases involving an old friend of Kamil's and the repatriation of a body of a British engineer who's been murdered. When you're writing a series and have the character in place, how do you know when you have a good idea for the next book?**

Ajay: It ends up being an interplay of two different things. One is where the characters are going, what their arc is, and that is the privilege of being able to write a long series. I can create an arc for Kamil. So when it started in **THE**

WAITER, he was this callow young guy who was very idealistic. And as the books have progressed, he's kind of become more realistic, a bit harder, a bit more desensitized to some of the stuff he's doing. And Anjali has gone from being a restaurant owner to actually become a pretty good detective in her own right. So following that arc is really important, and that provides the backbone, if you will, to each book about where are they in their current life.

But it's important for me to write about stuff that I'm passionate about, stuff I'm angry about, stuff that matters to me. So in **THE WAITER**, it was about corruption. In **THE COOK**, it was about homelessness. I'd read this article, which absolutely shocked me, where they hooked up some people to an MRI machine, and showed them different objects -- a chair or a baby or a homeless person or a desk, and what they found was the bit of their brain that lit up when they saw the homeless person was the same bit as when they saw an object, not a person. Yeah, that kind of made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. In **THE DETECTIVE**, it was about what might happen with AI. In **THE SPY**, it was about what's happening in Kashmir to Muslims.

But **THE SHADOW** came from a very strange source, which is a very

good friend of mine, who I dedicated the book to, a Parsi guy who I've known since I was 10 or 11 years old, who lives in Bombay. He said, why don't you write a ghost story? And I thought, well, I've no idea how to write a ghost story. I don't even read ghost stories. I've read very little Stephen King. I've read very little horror. But this idea kind of niggled at the back of my head, and suddenly I got this thought of, well, what happens if back on Independence Day there's this kind of very rich Parsi guy in this big mansion in the middle of Bombay, and around him, people are being killed because of the Partition riot, and he doesn't let them in. And the next day, he goes out and he finds his cook was one of the people who got killed, and his cook curses him to say, because you didn't help me and my family was burned to death, you will burn to death on your 47th birthday, and your son will burn to death on his 47th birthday and his son on his 47th birthday, etc. That struck me as an interesting idea. And sure enough, the guy who didn't let him in did suddenly self-immolate on his 47th birthday, and his son does too. Then his grandson, who's a friend of Kamil's, is scared this is going to happen to him, so he asks Kamil to come to Bombay (Mumbai) to stop it happening. So that's where the seed of the idea came from. Then it kind of added on to other things. I won't say too much, because that's where spoilers come in. But what's happening in Bombay right now, the politics, what's happening with the rich and the poor, that all sort of came together, and suddenly it became a really satisfying book to write. But the seed of it was my friend, saying, hey, why don't you write a ghost story?

Kamil is a disgraced Kolkata detective who works as a waiter, then chef, and even later in the series he still has connections to the Brick Lane restaurant. What's it like sharing Bengali food culture among the crime, and do you have a favourite Bengali dish yourself?

Ajay: I love it, and for the first few books it was all dishes I like, dishes I cook, dishes my wife likes, that my



mother cooked. But then I started having much more fun in the more recent books, because the restaurant becomes an Indicular gastronomy restaurant, and Anjoli gets this incredibly pretentious chef. So now I'm having great fun inventing bizarre Indian food that will probably never exist, but that's been a lot of fun. It's all inspired by a restaurant in Bangkok, which I've never been to, called Gaggan, which is like Heston Blumenthal does Indian. With a chef called Gaggan. So I've been looking at all his menu items and tweaking them a bit. My own personal favourite Bengali dish is there's a fish which you pretty much only get in Bengal, called Hilsa, or Ilish they call it, and it's the most delicious fish I've ever tasted.

Reviews of Recent Reads

THE LABYRINTH HOUSE MURDERS

by Yukito Ayatsuji,
translated by Ho-Ling Wong
Pushkin Vertigo, \$18.95, May
Rating: B+

Like Nordic Noir around fifteen years ago, translated Japanese crime fiction is now having a bit of a moment, globally. The Land of the Rising Sun certainly has a rich history of puzzling mysteries, dating back over a century (the country's main 'best mystery novel' prize also predates either of its major British and American equivalents, the Daggers and the Edgars, by a few years).

Thankfully, the recent translation boom has opened up Japanese tales new and old for English-speaking readers. A great example is **THE LABYRINTH HOUSE MURDERS**, a fascinating new-to-Anglophones locked room mystery originally published in Japan in 1988.

The third of nine books in legendary mystery and horror writer Yukito Ayatsuji's 'Bizarre House' mystery series, it involves ingenious sleuth Shimada Kiyoshi investigating a deadly game at the house of famed author Miyagaki Yotaro.

Four young crime authors are invited along with select others to celebrate

Yotaro's 60th birthday party, only to be trapped in the labyrinth as part of a deadly competition for a grand inheritance.

Ayatsuji crafts and intricate, clever mystery that leans into its Theseus and the Minotaur maze mythology, as well as serving as a near love letter to the classic mystery genre.

It's easy to see why Ayatsuji has achieved legendary status in his homeland.

THE LABYRINTH HOUSE MURDERS is a pleasantly puzzling read, and hopefully we'll see more of his stories (eg this particular series is nine books long in Japan) translated in future.

KING OF ASHES

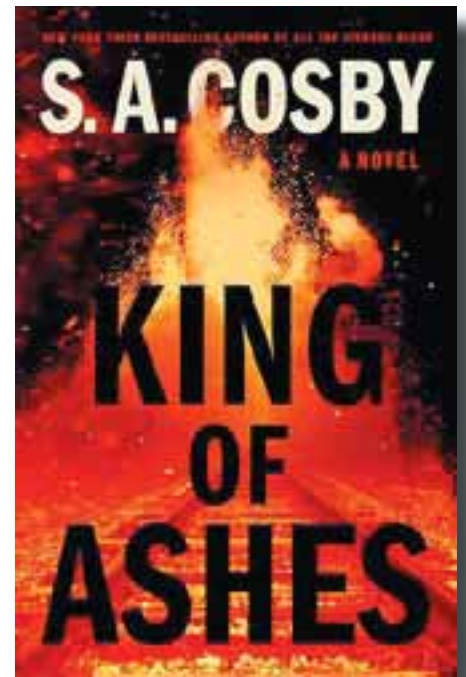
by S. A. Cosby
Flatiron Books, \$28.99, June
Rating: A+

What more can we say about Virginia author S. A. Cosby: a superlative storyteller who 'broke through' during COVID after a long apprenticeship working on his craft, and who's brought a welcome blue collar African American perspective to rural noir alongside a great touch for character and action?

With superb novels like **BLACK-TOP WASTELAND**, **RAZORBLADE TEARS**, and **ALL THE SINNERS BLEED** he has catapulted himself in a few short years to the highest echelons of top-quality crime writing, along with *New York Times* bestseller status and shelves creaking under the weight of many awards.

Cosby writes terrific stories, and terrific sentences, and that's on show once more in his latest novel **KING OF ASHES**, a thrilling and dark take on a twisted American Dream cum Shakespearean tragedy.

Roman Carruthers is living the high life in Atlanta, a financial advisor to the stars, when he's called back to his hometown by his sister Neveah when their father ends up in a coma following a hit-and-run incident. Maybe not an accident, given their younger brother Dante's deep debts to some very, very dangerous local gangsters. The Carruthers family was built on fire; their



parents began their own crematorium business, only for their mother to vanish following an affair. Many in the town, believe their father put her body into the flames. Some in their family, too.

Trying to hold together the family that he'd left behind, Roman quickly finds his brains and charm may not grant him easy passage with the ultra-violent gangsters who've infected Jefferson Run.

But can he buy his way out of trouble with his financial wizardry? He and Dante fall into a deadly game of cat-and-mouse that pushes them to the darkest parts of their personalities, while Neveah is determined to uncover the truth behind their mother's disappearance; can the siblings survive?

In **KING OF ASHES**, Cosby crafts an exquisite thriller; the pages whirl by on superb prose. Guilt, sacrifice, and family secrets collide. Everything burns, Roman's father used to say, but will he have to cast his own soul into the fire to save his family? Building to a cataclysmic finale, Cosby once again propels readers on one hell of a ride. Excellent.

NIGHTSHADE

by Michael Connelly
Little, Brown, \$30.00, May
Rating: A

Nearly a century ago, the world of mystery fiction had four 'Queens of Crime' in the form of Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy Sayers, and Margery Allingham. Nowadays if we were to recognise a quartet of crime writing royalty, or a 'Mount Rushmore' of modern masters, if you will, then surely Michael Connelly would be on the not-too-long list of main contenders.

For almost forty years, Connelly has been taking readers into the gritty underbelly of the City of Angels, first as an award-winning newspaper reporter then inarguably one of the modern masters of crime fiction, setting a high bar across nearly 40 novels, many featuring iconic detective Hieronymus 'Harry' Bosch. As the *Bosch: Legacy* streaming adaptation, starring Titus Welliver as the eponymous investigator, finishes its excellent ten-year run, Connelly has continued to expand his fictional universe. **NIGHTSHADE** introduces a new hero, and a new California setting.

Thanks to department politics and an unerring ability to step on the wrong toes, LA County Sheriff's Detective Stilwell has swapped the prestige of homicide investigations on the mainland for low-key policing on rustic Catalina Island. A land of exiles and misfit toys. Law enforcement in golf karts.

But when the body of an unidentified young woman is pulled from the harbour, Stilwell can't resist encroaching on the murder investigation being led by his nemesis. He knows it could put his career at risk, and more, but he ploughs ahead to uncover the truth.

Like watching a brilliant musician perform onstage, who makes things seem far easier than they really are, there a deceptive effortlessness to Connelly's storytelling that belies the high level of craft. **NIGHTSHADE** unfolds in a smooth narrative, speckled with telling details about character and place, incorporated with practised ease into an intriguing, page-turning mystery storyline. Detective Stilwell is an intriguing hero – like former 'Late Show' detective Renee Ballard, who'll soon be spinning off into her own screen series, he shares a dogged determination, moral centre, and sense of justice that has made fans

flock to Connelly's Harry Bosch books for decades, while still being a different character rather than a pale imitation.

Connelly plants some intriguing seeds for an ongoing series, perhaps. Coupled with his evocation of Catalina Island – place and people – it's another very good read from an exceptional storyteller who shows no signs of resting on his laurels or putting things in cruise control.

THE SUMMER GUESTS

by Tess Gerritsen

Amazon Publishing, \$16.99, March

Rating: A-

Almost forty years after she penned her first novel as a doctor on maternity leave, perennial bestseller Tess Gerritsen continues to offer page-turning entertainment with effortless mastery.

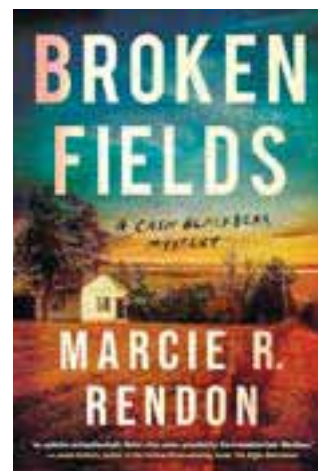
Over the decades, Gerritsen's oeuvre has traversed romantic suspense, medical thrillers, her Rizzoli and Isles mysteries (adapted into a TV drama starring Angie Harmon & Sasha Alexander), various standalones, and now tales set among the majestic scenery of Maine.

While **THE SUMMER GUESTS**, a sequel to **THE SPY COAST**, may initially have a whiff of Richard Osman and his massively popular 'Thursday Murder Club' (soon to be a film starring former 007 Pierce Brosnan and Dame Helen Mirren), with its cast of retiree sleuths who insert themselves into local police matters, Gerritsen crafts an engaging read all of its own that feels fresh in tone and setting.

Maggie Bird's 'Martini Club' are an atypical book group; retirees who've largely put away their 'particular set of skills'. Though they can't help giving local law enforcement unwanted help, especially when a friend becomes the prime suspect in the disappearance of a teenage daughter of the powerful Conover family, who summer by the lake in smalltown Maine.

Narrated largely from the perspectives of Maggie, Acting Police Chief Jo, and frantic mother Sue, **THE SUMMER GUESTS** is an enthralling one or two-sitting read where past secrets and long-held tensions between locals

and rich outsiders ignite in a summer holiday town.



BROKEN FIELDS

by Marcie R Rendon

Soho Press, \$28.95, March

Rating: A

Fans of Native American storyteller Marcie R. Rendon's wonderful Cash Blackbear mysteries have been pining since 2022 for a new novel starring the young Ojibwe farm worker, college student, and occasional sleuth. The wait was worth it: **BROKEN FIELDS** is a terrific fourth outing in Cash's escapades in the Red River Valley during the 1970s.

Cash is doing Spring fieldwork for a Minnesota farmer when she discovers him dead on the kitchen floor of a rented farmhouse. A young Native girl, Shawnee, is hiding under her bed, terrified.

Shaken by events in the previous book, **SINISTER GRAVES**, Cash questions her intuition, while feeling long-held anger and resentments flare when Shawnee is put into foster care, then with the grieving widow, a 'good Christian woman'. Triggering for Cash, given her experiences being near-slave labour for white families as an indigenous foster child.

While Cash and Sheriff Wheaton search for Shawnee's parents, another body turns up, and rumours swirl of 'Peyton Place' style scandals among their community.

Rendon, a poet and playwright, and

member of the White Earth Anishinabe Nation, crafts another immersive mystery that vividly evokes time, place, and historic attitudes.

Cash is a fantastic heroine; complex, fascinating, and authentic as she deals with PTSD and ongoing prejudices. Rendon's light touch means despite the dark acts and traumas **BROKEN FIELDS** never reads as too bleak. A terrific novel in a terrific series.

BEARTOOTH

by Callan Wink

Spiegel & Grau, \$28.00, February

Rating: A+

There's a deep contrast between the stark beauty of Callan Wink's writing and the visceral nature of what he describes at times in his sublime new novel **BEARTOOTH**.

A literary rural noir centred on the (mis)adventures of a pair of backwoods brothers, we initially meet Thad, the relative brains of the duo, and younger Hazen, the intuitive one, as they're elbows deep in an eviscerated bear. Freshly poached, emitting smells "with a flavour of nightmare"; the brothers are willing to get bloody as they grasp for the golf-ball sized gall bladders that can bring in as much cash as ten truckloads of firewood.

But how much would they risk in order to preserve their family home and way of life? Initially Thad doesn't entertain the notion put forward by their menacing buyer, 'the Scot' to surreptitiously enter Yellowstone National Park to harvest elk antler sheds.

Federal land and felony crimes = big-time prison time. But as things worsen, Thad and Hazen must make some tough calls; choices that could have deadly consequences.

Those who enjoy 'grit lit' are likely to love **BEARTOOTH**.

It's an atmospheric, vivid and finely crafted tale of family relationships, desperation and death set against a ruggedly magnificent backdrop. Wink, a fly-fishing guide in Montana as well as literary starlet, expertly soaks readers in "nature, red in tooth and claw".

Compact and powerful.

Down Under Crime



Jeff Popple Reviews

THE UNQUIET GRAVE

by Dervla McTiernan

Harper Collins, \$34.99

Rating: A-

After a five year break, Australian based Dervla McTiernan returns to her popular series about Galway detective DS Cormac Reilly.

When a mutilated corpse is found in a bog, it is initially assumed to be an archaeological find, but analysis quickly shows that it is a much more recent death. The victim 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 to for help. Her new husband has gone missing in Paris, and the French police are refusing to open an investigation into his disappearance. While in the background a nasty domestic violence case keeps Cormac's offside, Peter Fisher, busy, and a pair of ambitious thieves are plotting a clever robbery.

With consummate ease, Dervla keeps these various plot strands nicely

bubbling along and the book proceeds at a decent pace as the reader tries to work out how they all link. The writing is assured, and all of the characters are well developed and credible. Most of the story is seen through Cormac's eyes, but the inclusion of other viewpoints, particularly that of the unpleasant would-be thief Carl Rigney, adds extra interest and suspense.

The descriptions of Galway and the surrounding areas are rich and evocative, and the details of the police investigation are convincing. There are some slow patches, but Dervla keeps the reader interested in the various cases and in Cormac's and Peter's personal dramas. The ending is full of surprises, and it is clever how Dervla brings the various elements together in a logical way. An enjoyable and engrossing read.

BURNING MOUNTAIN

by Darcy Tindale

Penguin, \$34.99, May

Rating: B+

Eighteen years ago, five teenagers went for a hike up Burning Mountain in the Upper Hunter Valley in New South Wales, but only four came back. Despite an intensive police search, fifteen-year-old Oliver was never seen again. Now a skull has been unearthed on the mountain and the old mystery is re-ignited. Detective Rebecca Giles' father had been in charge of the original investigation into the disappearance of Oliver, now it is up to her to finally find out what really happened.

BURNING MOUNTAIN makes good use of familiar bush noir tropes to produce an engaging and enjoyable out-back mystery. The small rural town and its inhabitants are nicely evoked and

interesting, and Darcy really makes you feel the heat and hear the flies. The story proceeds at a decent pace and a couple of interesting sub-plots add drama and tension. Rebecca is a pretty standard central character, of the female detective in a small country town variety, but she has a couple of quirks and is quite engaging. Some of the other characters are very well done, especially a young boy caught up in a terrible situation.

The main plot is quite good with some unexpected twists and turns. At first it seems quite straight forward, but Darcy skilfully introduces some unexpected developments and pulls out some very good surprises, including one on the last page. Perhaps there are too many coincidences around timing, but overall **BURNING MOUNTAIN** is a very enjoyable example of bush noir.

BARREN CAPE

by Michelle Prak

Simon & Schuster, \$A32.99.

Rating: B+

Michelle Prak's **RUSH** was one of my favourite reads of 2023. A terrific 'pedal to metal' thriller, it made good use of a trio of female narrators, an outback setting and a slippery timeline to deliver some very good thrills.

Now with **BARREN CAPE** Michelle dives into slightly different territory, both thematically and geographically. Instead of outback Australia, **BARREN CAPE** is set in suburban Adelaide. When housemates Mac and Erika are forced out of the apartment that they are renting, they struggle to find new place to live during the so called 'accommodation crisis', which is infecting most of capital city Australia. Erika is fine, she just has to live with her parents until she can find another rental. Mac's situation, however, is much worse. Staying with her family is not an option, and she's surfing the couches of increasingly exasperated friends. Driving around one lonely afternoon, Mac discovers Barren Cape. Once destined to be a luxury escape resort, now it's just wire fence and grey cement. It's stark, but quiet.

Mac decides to sneak into the abandoned resort and stay there until she

can find somewhere more secure. Mac thinks that she is safe, but she is not, and things are only getting to get worse.

BARREN CAPE employs the same narrative technique as **RUSH**, with Michelle frequently shifting the viewpoint between Mac, Erika and homeless teenager Brex to good effect. The pace is a little slower than in **RUSH**, but Michelle skilfully builds up the suspense through the suggestion of danger and an unexpected flash of violence that changes everything. The final third of the book extrudes tension as the various storylines come together and the concluding pages are very hard to put down. Nothing plays out as expected and there is a good twist towards the end.

The three central characters are well formed and believable, and the subtle weaving in of themes around homelessness, poverty, misogyny and mental health give the book real substance. Recommended.

VANISH

by Shelley Burr

Hachette, \$A34.99, May

Rating: A-

Shelley Burr really hits the mark with **VANISH**, the third novel in her series about crime solver and soon to be released prisoner, Lane Holland.



Lane's crime-solving career ended the day he went to prison. Yet one unsolved case continues to haunt him: the disappearance of Matilda Carver two decades ago. Matilda is the long lost daughter of the head of the prison where Lane is being held. With Carver's lowkey assistance, and his own secret endeavours, Lane finally finds a lead: a mysterious farm community where Matilda lived briefly. The farm is led by the enigmatic Samuel Karpathy, and to Lane seems more like a cult than a working farm. It is a place that attracts lost souls. People looking for answers. People hiding from their pasts. People who have nowhere else to go.

On the day that Lane arrives at the farm on a prison education scheme, along with a prison guard, an accident claims the life of a member of the community. It also seems that there has been at least one other recent mysterious disappearance. With his typical singlemindedness, Lane dives in to find out what really happened to those who seemingly vanished from the farm without a trace.

Shelley is a very good writer, and she can really capture scenes and moods. Her characters are just a little different from the usual outback noir casts, and she mainly avoids the stereotypes we so often see. Lane is an interesting, offbeat central character, infuriating at times, but with an admirable inner determination that drives the story along.

The plot flows well and there is a good sense of unease from the first moments that Lane arrives at the commune, and the tension continues to mount as the book progresses. The story builds to a strong climax involving the almost obligatory outback noir bushfire, and there are the usual surprising revelations. My only reservation is that some of the elements seem a little unlikely, but not enough to diminish the pleasure from what is a very good crime novel.

THE REUNION

by Bronwyn Rivers

Constable, \$A16.99

Rating: B

Old friends, dark secrets, a remote

location and a past and present timeline, Bronwyn Rivers' debut suspense novel, **THE REUNION**, makes good use of some popular thriller tropes.

Ten years ago, six teenagers hiked into the Blue Mountains wilderness, but only five came out alive. The survivors have barely seen each other since the tragic bushwalk. When their dead friend's mother invites them to a 10-year memorial, they reluctantly return to the rugged landscape. The weekend at an isolated homestead, without phone signals, should be a time to reflect and reconnect. However, each friend harbors secrets from the hike, and someone is determined to unveil the truth.

After a nice bit of eerie foreshadowing, **THE REUNION** opens at an easy pace as the five friends regather at the scene of the earlier tragedy. The 'Ten years previously' timeline quickly sets the scene, and the present day story moves along at a decent pace. Not a lot happens in the early stages, but Bronwyn's enticing writing style keeps the reader interested and the gothic overtones of decay and death at the old farmhouse add to the sense of suspense. The tension mounts as the story continues, and there are enough twists and shifts of suspicion to keep things interesting. The characters are nicely formed and credible, and the creepiness of the bush is well conveyed.

I had queries about some of the plot details, but overall **THE REUNION** is an enjoyable suspense novel that will keep you engaged and turning the pages all the way to the last page surprise.

THE BLUFF

by Joanna Jenkins

Allen & Unwin, \$A18.99

Rating: B+

Joanna Jenkins made a good entry in the Australian crime writing realm with her 2023 debut, **HOW TO KILL A CLIENT** and she has now followed it up with a slightly stronger second novel, **THE BLUFF**.

After the events in **HOW TO KILL**



A CLIENT, Ruth Dawson has decided to take a break from big city law to fill in for a few months at a friend's small-town legal practice in rural northern New South Wales. It starts out peacefully enough, but the disappearance of a seventeen year girl and the murder of popular farmer soon has Ruth earning her money. What are the links between the two events and why is the local police presence unwilling to investigate the missing girl?

THE BLUFF is a confidently written novel that uses flashbacks and multiple viewpoints to tell the story of the events leading up to the murder. Ruth is the principal narrator, but the presence of other views helps to build the mystery and keep the story ticking over at a nice pace. Once the flashbacks catch up to the opening chapter, the tension increases and the unravelling of who did what is well orchestrated and exciting. Ruth's involvement in solving the various mysteries is well handled and logical, and her regular messages to her adult son overseas provide a good regular summary of events.

Adding substance to the plot are key themes around racism, environmental damage, misogyny and youth crime. As well, Joanna's portrayal of small town feelings and prejudices is well handled

and adds some depth. There is a touch of caricature about some of the characters, but Joanna does flesh them out quite well. A good sophomore effort!

Craig Sisterson Reviews

LYREBIRD

by Jane Caro

Allen & Unwin, \$34.99 AUD, April

Rating: B+

Twenty years after Jessica, a badly hungover ornithology student in the NSW rainforest videos a lyrebird mimicking a woman screaming in terror, a young woman's body is found in nearby bush.

Recently retired detective Megan Blaxland is coaxed back for the cold case; after all, it had originally been Megan's case as a rookie detective constable allocated the 'nutjobs, losers and cranks'.

As the male cops had quickly categorised Jessica.

Back then there'd been no body, no reports of a missing person, no evidence whatsoever (unless you believed Jessica that a lyrebird could only make such terrified sounds if it had overheard them).

Megan believed but got nowhere. Now there was a body, and a chance to catch a killer who believed they'd gotten away with murder.

In **LYREBIRD**, Jane Caro takes a fascinating hook and crafts a very engaging crime novel that has plenty of narrative drive, some fascinating characters beyond the twin leads of Jessica and Megan, and takes readers somewhat behind the curtain of issues like the scourge of human trafficking.

There's a good sense of the Australian bush, a place of daily life and death, and Caro has a really good touch for the complexities and kaleidoscopic range of human nature.

Building to a blazing conclusion, **Lyrebird** is well worth a read.

COLD TRUTH

by Ashley Kalagian Blunt

Ultimo Press, \$34.99 AUD, February

Rating: A

Bestselling Sydney author and pod-caster Ashley Kalagian Blunt garnered plenty of well-deserved attention and awards listings for her first full length crime thriller, **DARK MODE**, a chilling tale of stalking, the dark web, and the fragility of privacy in a digital age.

Now she returns to the frigid climes of her Canadian childhood in her twisting new thriller, **COLD TRUTH**, which stars Harlow Close, a tour operator and social media influencer who showcases the secrets of Winnipeg, 'North America's strangest city'.

Harlow's world is upturned when her loving father vanishes from his home amidst a brutal winter. Who would want to harm her father? Why did the police send two detectives and a forensics team, only to then drag their feet with the investigation, downplaying any danger?

As Harlow launches her own search, helped and hindered by her unreliable younger sister Blaise, she's forced to confront the fact that people she knows, even loves, may know what has happened and be gaslighting her.

Despite the isolated setting of a peculiar city encircled by snow-covered prairies, **COLD TRUTH** is a markedly modern tale, where timeless drivers of greed, envy, and revenge are supercharged by cryptocurrency, the dark web, and other tech.

Blunt crafts a harrowing thrill ride in minus 40 temperatures; **COLD TRUTH** is a chilling, propulsive tale with plenty of heart. Recommended.

**WHEN THE DEEP DARK BUSH
SWALLOWS YOU WHOLE**

by Geoff Parkes

Penguin Australia, \$34.99 AUD,
February

Rating: A

Stolen nights on a pile of jute sacks in the corner of a creaky woolshed may not be the epitome of romance, but for



law student Ryan and Finnish backpacker Sanna, they're highlights of a 1980s summer of tough labour on a shearing gang in the rugged King Country of rural New Zealand.

But that's a secret Ryan kept from police when Sanna vanished from the side of the road, while he was in a bar fight in the local Nashville pub. Then Sanna's abrupt sister Emilia comes to their small town the following summer, unafraid to stir things up by digging into local secrets and suspects the police wrote off; because it must have been an outsider, right?

Geoff Parkes, a Kiwi sports columnist in Melbourne, crafts a rich sense of time and place in **WHEN THE DEEP DARK BUSH SWALLOWS YOU WHOLE**, a superb crime debut that's deftly written and built on a shuffling lineup of character perspectives, rather than a singular investigator or protagonist.

From Emilia and Ryan to various locals, and Sanna herself, readers get a growing sense of the King Country town, those who work and live there, and what really happened on that tragic night.

Suspects, red herrings, and strong writing aplenty; a very good first bow.

HUMAN ERROR

by Patricia Dunmore
Upstart Press, \$37.99 NZD, 3 April

Rating: B

Long-time Kiwi publisher and novelist across various genres Patricia Dunmore sets key elements of her pacy new thriller against ruggedly magnificent nature – the Waitakere Ranges and dangerous coastline of West Auckland – while dealing in death on a shocking scale.

More than 300 passengers and crew are on board Oceanic Airways Flight 462 from Hong Kong when it vanishes as it prepares to land in Auckland. Emergency services scramble, but as hours pass it sadly becomes a recovery, rather than rescue mission. Time has evaporated; given fuel levels, the plane can't still be in the air. It's on the ground or in the sea; is there any hope of survivors?

DS Maki Hohepa and his Police Disaster Response Unit colleagues investigate, while the airline and local politicians rapidly move to blame pilot error. The equivalent of the 'lone wolf' explanation.

Meanwhile the US and Chinese governments, who both had citizens on board, loudly rattle sabres.

Was it a tragic accident, terrorism, pilot suicide, or something else?

Dunmore certainly asks readers to strongly suspend disbelief at times, while offering a cast that veers from intriguing or memorable to far too broad-brush. But overall **Human Error** is a page-whirring slice of entertainment; perhaps more 'beach read' than 'airport thriller' given events.

SEE HOW THEY FALL

by Rachel Paris

Penzler Publishers, \$17.95 USD, April

Rating: A-

A billionaire family's gated homes including a showpiece coastal estate on the Mid North Coast may seem among the safest and most secure places in Australia, but that's doesn't prove the case in New Zealand lawyer turned author Rachel Paris's impressive debut thriller.

“Succession meets Sharp Objects” was how Paris described her tale in late 2023 when her unpublished tale won the Phoenix Prize for a high-quality manuscript with commercial potential.

SEE HOW THEY FALL certainly ticks those boxes: it’s a riveting, pacy thriller kick-started by a twin poisoning among heirs to the Turner family fortune that then pleasingly goes beyond over-saturated domestic noir tropes by melding internecine family drama, secrets, and threat with police-centred crime thriller and some larger real-life issues.

Paris lures readers into an unpredictable journey via the alternating perspectives of two fascinating women dealing with past secrets and reeling from recent events: Skye, an artist who married into the powerful Turner dynasty and whose daughter Tiffany has suffered arsenic poisoning; and embattled Sydney detective Mei O’Connor.

While the wider cast isn’t as nuanced, and even sometimes stereotyped, overall *See How They Fall* is an impressive debut from Paris, overflowing with hidden truths and hidden evils.

A one or two sitting read that shows plenty of promise. I’m looking forward to what’s next.

THE BOOKSHOP DETECTIVES 2: TEA AND CAKE AND DEATH

by Gareth & Louise Ward

Penguin New Zealand, \$37.99 NZD,

April

Rating: B+

In a way, reading **TEA AND CAKE AND DEATH** reminded me of when I first began watching addictive New Zealand-set crime drama *The Brokenwood Mysteries* several years ago.

I confess I usually lean dark or gritty rather than cosier in my TV crime dramas, loving shows over the years like *Luther*, *Sons of Anarchy*, *Criminal Minds*, etc. So at first *Brokenwood* seemed a little light or perhaps – if I was feeling cynical – even twee. But within an episode or two I was hooked: on the characters and their interplay, the setting, the tone, the Kiwi sense of humour, sense of community, and more. It’s now

one of my absolute favourite shows.

Similarly, while the Bookshop Detectives escapades may be less dark than many others on modern-day crime and thriller bookshelves, they’re likely to delight not only cosy mystery fans, but win over other readers thanks to people and place, as much as the mystery plotlines.

This second outing for ‘the Bookshop Detectives’ is another bookshop-based mystery, featuring legendary Kiwi storyteller Dame Fiona Kidman amongst other real-life and fictional novelists, as cops turned booksellers turned amateur sleuths Garth and Eloise tackle a spate of mysterious poisonings.

The authors’ deep love for the world of books seeps from the pages of this intriguing co-written cosy mystery. From the staff and setting of the fictional Havelock North bookshop that stands in for Wardini Books, their own real-life ‘wondrous book emporium in Hawkes Bay’, to various author events, book talks, and writing workshops that provide key scenes in the novel. There are nods to local and overseas writers, and an array of booklovers that span victims, suspects, and sleuths.

After getting caught up in a decades-old cold case in last year’s #1 bestselling **THE BOOKSHOP DETECTIVES: *Dead Girl Gone***, this time Garth and Eloise – and their beloved Stevie, who’s more slumber-dog than guard-dog – become entwined in a very warm case that hits dangerously close to home. Could a series of local poisonings somehow be connected to Arthur Pinter, a literary agent and serial killer whose violence gave Eloise PTSD after she dealt with him as a British police-woman.

Pinter casts a cruel shadow, even from behind bars and thousands of miles away.

When famous Kiwi author Dame Fiona Kidman has to withdraw from annual charity fundraiser ‘battle of the book clubs’, Eloise and Garth are left scrambling to find a crowd-pleasing replacement, while dealing with all the usual pressures of running a small-town bookshop. Then there’s news from old British police colleagues who are monitoring the game-playing Pinter in

Belmarsh. Meanwhile, a few attendees at local book events begin ending up in the hospital. Or the morgue. Given the age of many in the audience, natural causes can’t be ruled out. At first.

But surely it’s more than a coincidence, or bad luck? And even if Eloise and Garth aren’t being targeted themselves, the people in the community they care about seem to be.

Tea and Cake and Death are all flowing in this warm-hearted tale. Modern crime writing is certainly a very big tent – far broader and more diverse in scope, setting and styles than the ‘Golden Age’ heydays of Dames Agatha and Ngaio – and the Wards have crafted a delightful mystery that nestles well into the cosier corner of the genre, alongside Richard Osman or classic TV shows like *Murder, She Wrote*. There’s charm, warmth, and humanity in among the dark deeds, and while the book may not delve as deeply into the psychological or sociological as some grittier New Zealand crime and thriller tales, it’s an entertaining read, full of characters that are fun to spend time with.

The banter between Eloise and Garth, who come across not just as protagonists but author avatars or roman-à-clef, along with the sense of community, adds a lovely tone to the mystery storyline.



DP Calendar



June 12-13, 2025

Capital Crime

London, England

Guests of Honor: Michael Connelly, Steph McGovern, Jeremy Vine, Vaseem Khan, Linwood Barclay, Karin Slaughter, Richard Armitage, Ruth Ware, Lisa Jewell, Clare Mackintosh, Andrew Child

Website: <https://www.capitalcrime.org/>



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

July 17-20, 2025

Theakston Old Peculier Festival

Harrowgate, England

Guests of Honor: TBA

website: harrowgateinternational-festivals.com



September 3-7, 2025

Bouchercon

Blood on the Bayou: Case Closed
New Orleans, Louisiana

Guests of Honor: Michael Connelly, Steph Cha, Craig Johnson, Charles Todd, Jonathan Maberry, Alafair Burke and Ali Karim



September 12-14, 2025

Bloody Scotland

Stirling, Scotland

Guests of Honor: TBA

Website: bloodyscotland.com

February 26- March 1

Left Coast Crime 2026

San Francisco

Guests of Honor: Robin Burcell, Gary Phillips

Website: leftcoastcrime.org/2026



April 24-26, 2026

Malice Domestic 38

Bethesda, Maryland

Guests of Honor: Jacqueline Winspear, Ellen Byron, Annette Dashofy

Website: malicedomestic.net



October 21-25, 2026

Cross-Border Crimes

Bouchercon

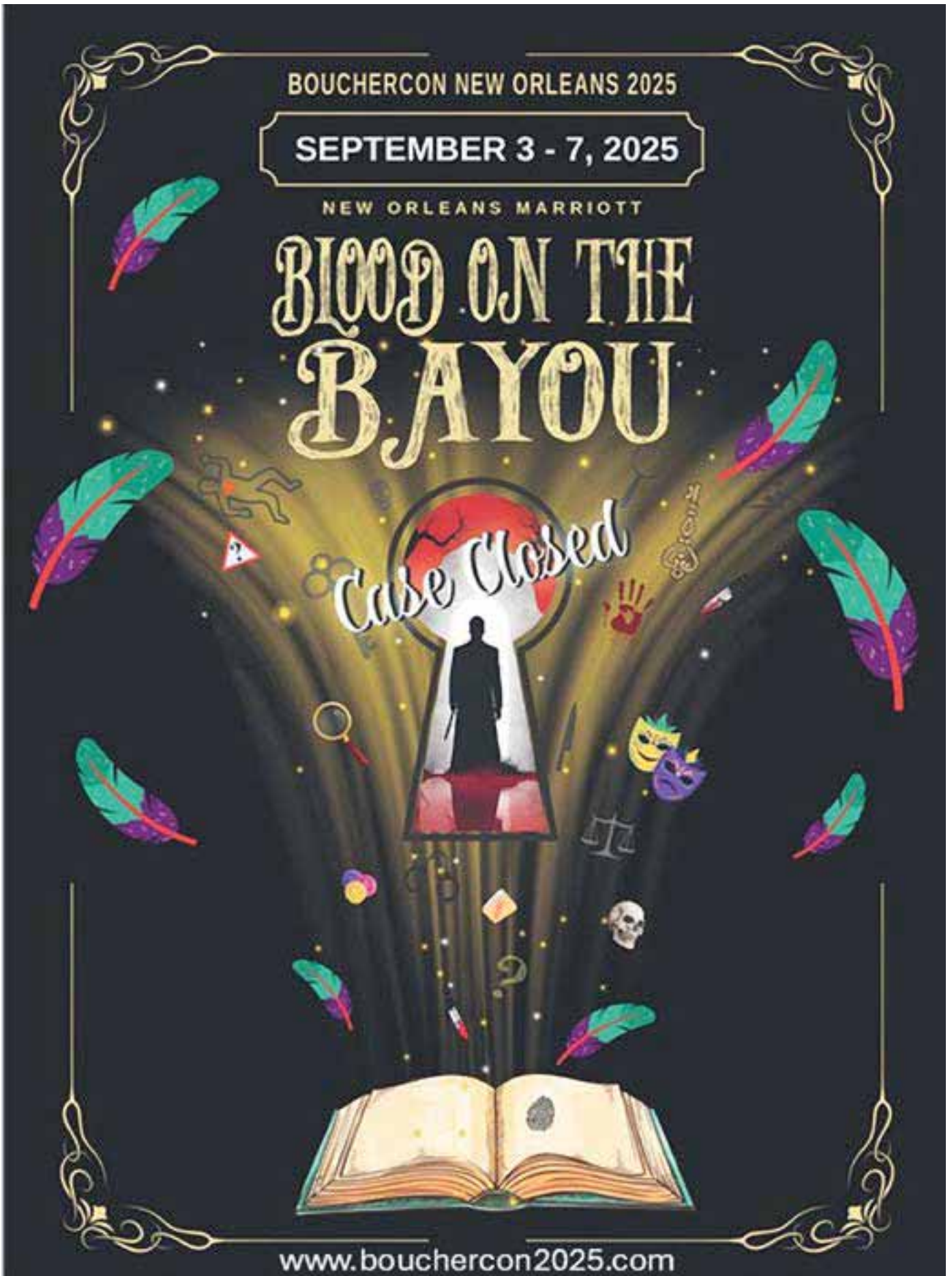
Calgary, Canada

Guests of Honor: Louise Penny, Kathy Reichs, Abir Mukherjee, Mark Greaney, Jennifer Hillier, Vicki Delaney, P. J. Vernon

Website: bouchercon2026.com



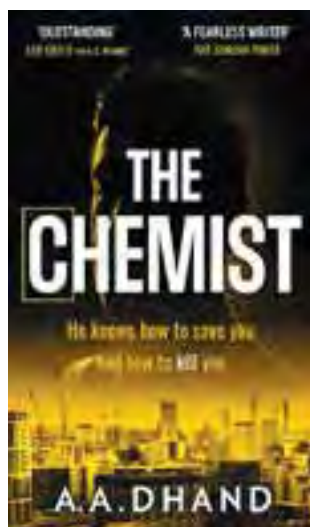
www.bouchercon2025.com



What's New In the U.K.



FORTRESS OF EVIL, Javier Cercas (MacLehose Press, £21.98, April). Years have passed since Melchor took revenge for his mother's murder and at last found peace with his daughter Cosette in the sleepy backwater of Terra Alta. But their idyll is shattered when one day Cosette, now seventeen, discovers that her father has been concealing the truth of her mother's death- that she was killed in a hit-and-run "accident" intended to scare Melchor off a case. Angry and betrayed, Cosette disappears to Mallorca with her friend Elisa. And that's the last Melchor hears of her. His texts and calls go unanswered, and when she returns alone, Elisa can only say Cosette needed "space to think." Now the former policeman has no choice but to travel to Port de Pollença, where his daughter was last seen alive, and enter the dark, looking-glass world of Swedish-American billionaire Rafael Mattson.



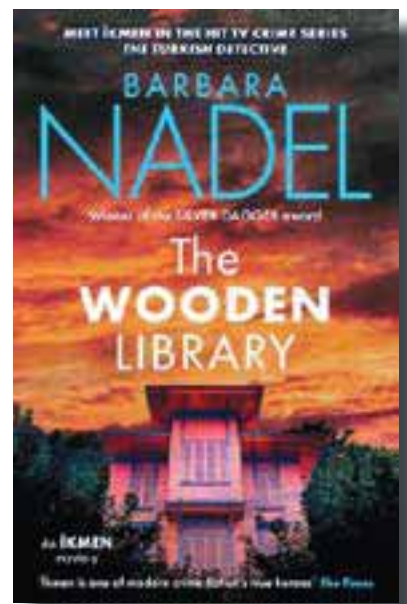
THE CHEMIST, A. A. Dhand (HQ, £16.99, May). Local pharmacist and pillar of the community, Idris Khan,

spends his days doling out methadone to the hundreds of addicts in his care. They trust Idris with their secrets, and so he knows more than his mild manner suggests. So when his childhood sweetheart, Rebecca, doesn't turn up for her daily methadone dose, Idris is worried. Worried enough to go looking for her in the most deprived area of Leeds, alone. The mess Idris finds catapults him into the middle of a turf war between the two most powerful drug cartels in Yorkshire. Now, he must use every bit of intelligence and cunning he has to keep those he loves safe.

BURYING JERICHO, William Hussey (Zaffre, £16.99, April). While Scott Jericho is tasked with investigating the most baffling case of his career, his partner Harry is set upon his own fateful path. In a rundown seaside town, a young man has vanished without a trace. Jericho's investigation of this disappearance will unravel a diabolical plot and expose a secret long buried. A secret hinted at by the paper men hanging from the trees in a nearby wood, by the ravings of the local 'wise woman', and by the eerie waxworks of a defunct fair-ground attraction.

THE WOODEN LIBRARY, Barbara Nadel (Headline, £22.00, May). Inspector Mehmet Süleyman is on holiday in Romania when his distant cousin calls. Nurettin Süleyman has bought the Wooden Library, an ancient building in Istanbul once owned by their ancestor. He needs help cataloguing its priceless contents and who better for the job than Mehmet's old friend Çetin Ikmen? As Ikmen sets to work, he detects a terrible smell pervading the library that leads to the discovery of a rotting corpse. The

dead body is that of Senol Ulusoy, the man who sold Nurettin the library. A long-running feud between the two families comes to light, as does the bitter rivalry between the three Ulusoy brothers, fuelled by their father's cruel manipulation. Then pathologist Arto Sarkissian makes a shocking discovery that turns this case on its head, and Süleyman's detective team must dig deep to reveal a truth that is rooted in the past as well as the present . . .



A SCHOOLING IN MURDER, Andrew Taylor (Hemlock Press, £20.00, June). England, May 1945. Monkshill Park School for Girls seems a world away from the violence that engulfed Europe during World War II. Yet its lonely, decaying grounds have witnessed a murder.

Annabel Warnock, a teacher with a secretive past, left for the holidays and never came back. Both teachers and girls assume she simply walked out, but the truth is quite different. Her body tumbled from the Maiden's Leap, a viewpoint on the clifftop Gothic Walk, and was washed out to sea. But Anna-
bel herself is still trapped at Monkshill, unable to move on. As she haunts the grounds and school, she discovers a hidden world – students, staff and servants are riven with deadly rivalries and dangerous tensions. And one of them is her killer

U.K. Reviews



Jeff Poppo Reviews



A DUTY OF CARE

by Gerald Seymour

Hodder & Stoughton, £22, April.

Rating: A-

From the start of his career way back in 1975, with **HARRY'S GAME**, Gerald Seymour's novels have always had a gritty, topical realism to them, and a focus on the foot soldiers of the espionage and crime fighting worlds.

A DUTY OF CARE is the fifth entry in his series about the nondescript MI5 agent Jonas Merrick. Generally despised and overlooked by his superiors and flasher younger colleagues, and not really forgiven for previously unmasking a Russian spy, Merrick has been banished to the Post Room where he is expected to pass his remaining days. An unexpected approach by a love stricken MI6 agent, however, sets Merrick off on a new mission to free a British prisoner being held in a Russian gulag. The key to the off-the-record plan is the kidnapping of an Albanian courier who holds the secret codes to the dirty money being laundered for members of the Russian elite. The plan is to swap

the courier for the prisoner, but things rarely go as planned in the field.

This is another high quality piece of espionage fiction by the always reliable Seymour. The pacing is a slow at the beginning as Seymour carefully places his various elements in place, but the tension steadily mounts once the operation gets underway. Probably too much time is spent on describing Merrick's caravan trip in the early chapters, but it all serves a purpose, and the book does build to a suspenseful and bloody conclusion.

The details and the descriptions of obscure locations in Albania and Russia bristle with authenticity and ground the story in a convincing milieu. The operation itself is credible and interesting, and the foot soldiers on both sides are well crafted and believable. The various acts of quiet heroism give the book a sense of poignancy and there some terrific little vignettes, particularly the early scenes involving the mentally scarred granddaughter of an Albanian gangster. There are also touches of humour, especially in Merrick's efforts to outwit his superiors.

As with most of Seymour's novels, the outcome is never clear until the final moment, which adds greatly to the tension.

An outstanding spy novel for those readers with patience and a love of well executed plots.

THE WOMAN WHO LAUGHED

by Simon Mason

Riverrun, £12, June

Finder #3

Rating: A-

Simon Mason is in good form with the third book in his Finder Mysteries series.

The Finder, a former police detective called Talib, is hired by the British police authorities when they have difficult missing person cases that they want reviewed. In the process he has become a respected specialist in finding missing people.

In **THE WOMAN WHO LAUGHED**, the South Yorkshire Police bring in the Finder when an old missing person case and a more recent murder collide.

In the first months of 2020 there was a spate of murders of black sex workers in northern cities. One of them was Ella Bailey, last seen talking to a punter in an alley in Sheffield city centre, and although no trace of her was ever found, the punter, Michael Godley, soon confessed to all three murders.

Five years later, as another sex worker is murdered in the same district, the bag Ella had been carrying with her reappears, hanging on the door handles of a café. A local vagrant also claims to have seen Ella sitting on a bench in a churchyard near the site of the murder. The Finder is given the difficult task of finding out if there is any link. His search takes him back to the strange days of the pandemic, to talk to those who knew Ella best, such as her wayward girlfriend 'Loz', abusive boyfriend Caine Poynton-Smith and her respectable foster-parents still struggling to



come to terms with Ella's life choices and death.

Bit by bit, the Finder pieces together what happened to Ella by carefully interviewing those originally involved in her supposed murder. The plot unfolds at a smooth pace and although there is not much action the story is never boring. Mason carefully brings an interesting cast of characters vividly to life through their words and the backdrop of the more unsavoury parts of Sheffield is nicely evoked. We are also given brief glimpses into the Finder's background and what happened to him

As with all good crime stories, there are twists and turns and the ending produces some well-crafted surprises. The narration is in the form of a report by the Finder on what happened and initially seems a little flat, but as the book progresses it becomes more engaging, and the final pages fly along.

I really enjoyed this low key mystery and thoroughly recommend it.

THE SECRET ROOM

by Jane Casey

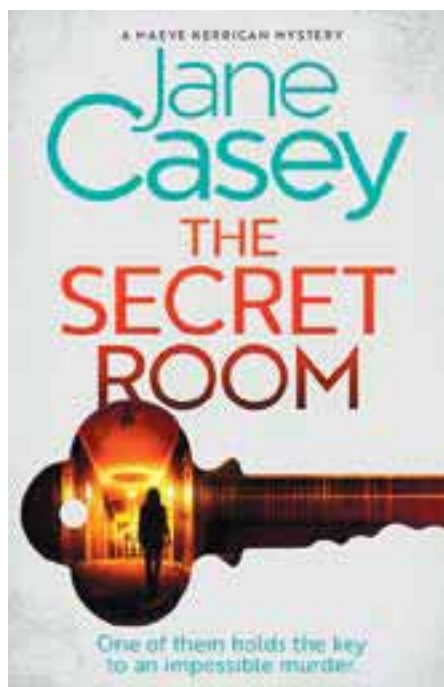
Simon & Schuster, £16.99, May

Rating: B+

THE SECRET ROOM is the twelfth book in Jane Casey's DS Maeve Kerrigan series and maintains the good quality of the earlier entries.

The previous book, **A STRANGER IN THE FAMILY**, concluded with a cliff hanger ending, but before dealing with that Jane neatly sets up the main crime at the centre of **THE SECRET ROOM**. At 2.32pm on a Wednesday afternoon, 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 Maeve the case is a challenge and a welcome distraction. With no obvious suspects and no clue as to how the murder was committed, Maeve struggles with what avenues to pursue, but soon her attention is further diverted



by another crime impacting her close colleague DI Josh Derwent.

The crimes at the centre of **THE SECRET ROOM** are well thought out and captivating, and it is good to watch Maeve skilfully work her way through both of them. There are several twists and shocks, and the outcomes for both crimes came as a surprise to me. There is also good tension generated by the second crime involving Derwent. The characters are well drawn and the relationships between the various members of Maeve's team are convincing. An interesting new character in the form of detective Roz Fuller adds some bite to the story and it would be good to see her again. Those who have read the earlier books in the series, will not be surprised that a lot of attention is paid to Maeve's waxing and waning personal relationships and her feelings. This does slow the pace at times, and on a couple of occasions I found it to be a bit tiresome. I suspect, however, that others will be more interested in this aspect of the book than me. One for fans of the series.

THE OTHER PEOPLE

by C. B. Everett

Simon & Schuster, £18.99, April

Rating: B

THE OTHER PEOPLE by C. B.

Everett, aka Martyn Waites, is one of those books that readers are either going to love or hate. For most there will be no middle ground.

The story starts in an intriguing manner. Ten strangers wake up to find themselves in an old dark house with no way to get out. They have no recollection of how they got there. In order to escape, they have to solve the disappearance of a young woman. It seems like an impossible task, even more so with a killer stalking the halls of the house. As the body count rises, the surviving members of the group become more and more desperate. Meanwhile a seemingly omnipresent voice, called 'The Beast In The Cellar', provides a running summary of what is happening and offers amusing asides and philosophical reflections.

Pretty early on in the book it is clear that something is not quite right here; voices that no one else can hear and the lack of curiosity by the ten about how they got to the house for example, but Everett keeps the story flowing well and most readers will keenly keep on reading to find out what is going on. Popular culture aficionados will probably work it out beforehand, but others will be surprised by the outcome, which is actually very well done.

Overall, **THE OTHER PEOPLE** is quite good fun. The pacing is reasonably brisk, and the frequent cliffhangers and surprises make it easy to keep on reading. Character depth and appeal are issues, and there is one scene towards the end which will produce strong reactions.

Probably not one for the crime purist, but those who like something a little different should give it a go.

Ali Karim Reviews

Ali reviews two books that are also available in the U.S.

THE NOTE

by Alafair Burke

Knopf, \$29.00, January

Rating: A

This twisty thriller details the machinations between three middle-aged girlfriends on a weekend retreat in the Hamptons. What begins as a prank on someone who stole their parking slot, soon escalates into curious revelations of their past lives, until trust between them dissolves and murders come into focus.

Enter the three 'cancelled girls': young women who have to manage their online profiles due to perceived infamy or notoriety from their real lives. Their friendships will become tested to breaking point while vacationing in Sag Harbor - [a] May Hannover an Asian American lawyer and former District Attorney, recovering from the trauma of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and an altercation on a subway that went viral.

[b] Kelsey Ellis a blue-eyed blonde dripping with WASP white privilege, living with the trauma of a murdered husband in what was a bungled robbery or is there something in the whispers that it was a 'hit' organised by Kelsey's wealthy [and powerful] Father – a real estate magnate?

[c] The older Lauren – a mysterious African American woman who may or may not be their watcher, and who had an affair which played out in public due to her profile in the Art world.

The trio meet up on the eve of May's wedding to Josh – a clean-cut but slightly dull beau [as May's friends refer to him, when she's out of earshot]. The trio try and avoid mentioning what cemented their friendship, a Camp America vacation when May and Kelsey were in high-school, and where Lauren was a camp counsellor. The reason why they try and avoid referring to that time was the tragic death of one of their classmates, Marnie Mann who drowned after going missing in the night.

The wealthy Kelsey decided to enter the family real estate business rather than continue her studies in law following the murder of her husband, and so is funding this holiday in the Hamptons.

Though May is only staying for the weekend, while Kelsey and Lauren are continuing the vacation, with the company of Kelsey's step brother Nathan

[Nate']. May is relieved that she will miss seeing Nate as she and Kelsey's stepbrother had a relationship in the past – and now she's looking forward to spending her life with Josh as a married couple.

The holiday starts as a drunken interlude in their hectic lives until the prank that gives this novel its title ignites a fuse that triggers cracks in their friendship that reveals hidden truths that will make them question much about their lives and possible deaths.

Written initially in a playful and relaxed style, soon becomes an ominous and claustrophobic narrative that makes one question how much we really know about our friends from childhood and their families.

Alafair Burke's thriller marries menace to friendship with flair that keeps you turning the pages with increasing dread. It's great to see this writer still writing top notch thrillers after her debut in the UK many years ago.

KILL YOUR DARLINGS

by Peter Swanson

Faber & Faber, £18.99, July

Rating: A

Thom Graves is a tenured English Professor in his mid-fifties. His wife Wendy also works in academia, and

was a published poet in her youth. She considers that her husband drinks too much, has a wandering eye and worryingly has started writing a novel – a murder mystery. Wendy can tolerate his drinking and even his flings with younger women at the University – but what she cannot accept is his writing.

At a dinner party she ponders what her life would be like without him so she decides to murder him. The reason has little to do with his infidelity but all to do with Wendy's fear that her husband's writing may reveal a dark hidden secret from the early days of their marriage; a deadly confidence that forms the pact that cemented their union.

The novel then flows in a backward manner, with sequential chapters detailing their relationship and the secrets hidden from the view of others to what came [or lurked] before they married.

Swanson's writing style is beguiling in its hypnotic involvement [or participation] of the reader in the intricacies of Thom and Wendy's lives right back to their childhood – a bus journey when they were the school children Thom Graves and Wendy Eastman who shared the same birth date.

George Easter Reviews

NO MAN'S LAND

by Neil Broadfoot

Constable, £19.99, 2018

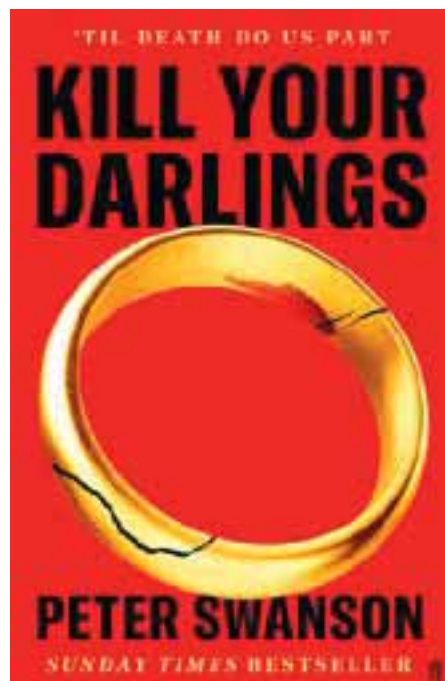
Connor Fraser #1

Rating: B+

Connor Fraser is an ex-Belfast police officer, now a close protection officer working in Stirling, Scotland.

In one of Stirling's tourist hot spots at Cowane's Hospital, a decapitated body is found by a dog walker. The body shows all the signs of a medieval sadistic savagery that horrifies all who are unfortunate enough to see it. The murder inquiry is assigned to DCI Malcolm Ford, who becomes obsessed with finding the murderer.

An ambitious freelance journalist Donna Blake is a single mother with a baby son, Andrew, living a financially precarious existence and forced to



rely on her parents for childcare. She is currently working at Valley FM radio, but she has big plans to move into TV reporting. She just needs that big story and a series of exclusives. The murders provide her with that opportunity as she mines all her contacts for that cutting edge information, but she is not prepared for the killings to come so close to her personal world.

Then another body is found in Stirling – this time with a message for Connor, a message from his time battling the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland.

The story lines of these three protagonists eventually merge as each seeks to find what has caused these murders.

The author builds his narrative to heightened suspense that results in a surprising and satisfactory ending. This is the first novel produced by Neil Broadfoot and the first I've read. There are six more in the series and three more in a Doug McGregor series. I will be reading more of them in the future.

THE HIDDEN HAND

by Stella Rimington
Bloombury, £16.99, January
Manon Tyler #2

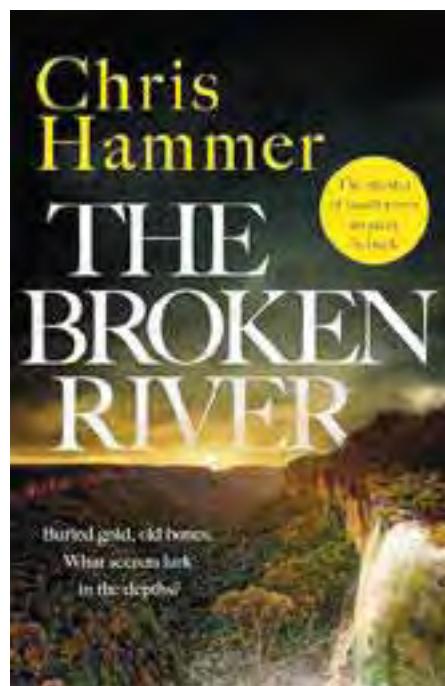
Rating: B+

This novel feeds into our present paranoia about Chinese infiltration of our sources of power and tech innovation.

Le Min is a student whose education is financed by the Chinese government. She is doing valuable research into the use of AI (artificial intelligence) to make “deep fakes.” She is quite happy with her studies and research at Harvard University, when she is ordered by her Chinese minder to withdraw and go to Oxford University to take up similar research. She's not happy about this, but has no real choice in the matter. This move does not go unnoticed by the CIA who shares its intel with MI5 in England. Manon Tyler, an MI5 agent, is sent to Oxford in an undercover role to see if Le Min's actions are on the up and up.

What Manon finds is a hotbed of Chinese spying, aided by a sinophile former master of the college.

The story is quite straightforward for an espionage novel, with few surprises and everything resolving itself as one would expect. **THE HIDDEN HAND** is not quite as sharp as the author's Liz Carlyle series, but that might be because the author is approaching 90 years of age and it is reported that this may be Dame Rimington's last novel.



THE BROKEN RIVER

by Chris Hammer
Wildfire, £20.00, January
Nell Buchanan #4

Rating: A

The body of Wolfgang Burnside, a wealthy entrepreneur, is found on the riverbank in The Valley, a remote community in the hills of New South Wales. Detective Senior Nell Buchanan and her partner DS Ivan Lucic are assigned the murder investigation. And so begins a deep dive into the family dynamics of those involved and the history of the Valley. During the investigation many secrets are unearthed, including some very close and personal to Nell Buchanan.

The intricate story line is intelligently plotted with complex layers that include many flashbacks in time. This is police procedure at its best.

I've become a big fan of this series which is published in Australia and the U.K. Copies can be purchased at a reasonable price from Blackwells in England.

THE SHADOW

by Ajay Chowdhury
Harvill Secker, £16.99, March
Kamil Rahman #5

Rating: B

Detective Kamil Rahman has temporarily put plans to resign from the police force and form a private detective agency with his friend Anjoli on hold in order to help an old friend, Darius Mehta, to solve the murder of an associate. Mehta is a very wealthy owner of one of India's largest construction companies and has specifically asked Kamil's boss to send him to India to help the local police with their investigation.

So off to Mumbai go Kamil and Anjoli to solve the murder of British engineer, Peter Bell, whose body was found pierced with many arrows. Other bodies follow.

Mehta also asks Kamil to look into his family curse. His father and grandfather both died horrible deaths on their 47th birthday, believed by some to be a result of being cursed for past sins that date back to the 1947 riots following Indian Independence Day. Darius Mehta's 47th birthday is just days away.

I've really enjoyed this series to this point, but I felt that the author stretches credulity a bit too far with this one. I just didn't buy the family curse plot line. I look forward to a return to excellence with the next in the series.

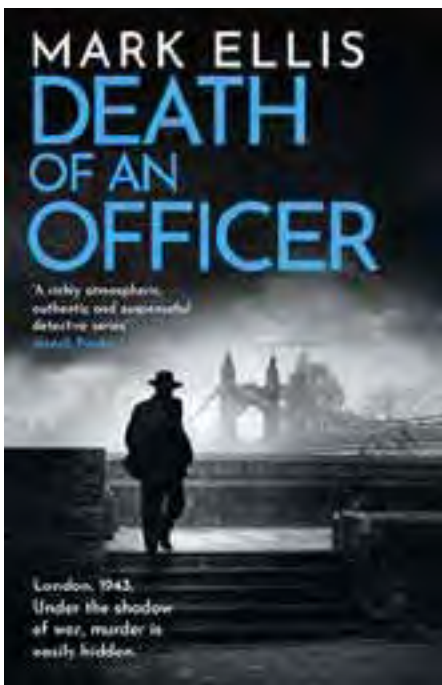
DEATH OF AN OFFICER

by Mark Ellis
Headline Accent, £10.99, May
DCI Frank Merlin #6

Rating: A-

This is an historical mystery with a capital H and a detailed, old-fashioned police procedural with a capital P (no cell phones, advanced forensics nor computers).

The setting in 1943 London where we



find DCI Frank Merlin assigned the case of a murdered doctor. Quickly on its heels comes the murder case involving an American officer. The investigations proceed with a few hiccups. Sometimes witnesses aren't available to be interviewed. Other times, there is little or no evidence to provide clues. And interrupting everything is a threat to a member of Merlin's family.

There are a lot of character names to keep track of, but not too many for my old brain to manage. Merlin and his crew eventually uncover a nexus that connects both of these crimes.

This is the second of this series that I have read and I especially admire the author's attention to detail and his depiction of life in WWII London and its environs.

I had the added pleasure of meeting the author for the first time at last year's Bouchercon. I wish him continued success.

Craig Sisterson Reviews

INNOCENT GUILT

by Remi Kone

Quercus Publishing, £16.99, May

Rating: B+

British-Nigerian storyteller Remi Kone opens her account with a bang,

like the crack of a bat hitting bone, in this engrossing debut tale. Sparked by a blood-soaked office worker tottering down the road, past DI Leah Hutch and DS Benjamin Randle, and into a South London police station, *INNOCENT GUILT* raises many questions about the court of public opinion, and the nature of good and evil.

The woman refuses to speak, and the blood on her clothes and the baseball bat she dragged behind her, are not hers. Meanwhile aging tabloid journlit Odie Reid gets a tip-off that leads her to a man battered to death in a nearby park. Is the near-catatonic woman a murderer? Why was he killed?

Kone, an Emmy Award-nominated TV producer for British crime dramas like *Spooks* and *Killing Eve*, crafts a fascinating story that delved into dark corners of the human psyche and forces both Hutch and Reid to confront what they've believed about their own pasts.

How much do we fool ourselves, to protect ourselves?

Patchy in places, but overall a good addition to the genre and hopefully just the beginning for Kone.

THE GOOD FATHER

by Liam McIlvanney

Bonnier Books, £16.99, June

Rating: A+

It is a seemingly ordinary August day that fractures the lives of Gordon and Sarah Rutherford.

Late summer on the west coast of Scotland; their seven-year-old Rory enjoying the beach outside the family home with their dog Bonnie. Then Bonnie comes home alone. Gordon and Sarah wander the beach. No sign of Rory. The police are called. Questions. More extensive searches.

More questions. Hours pass. Days. Months.

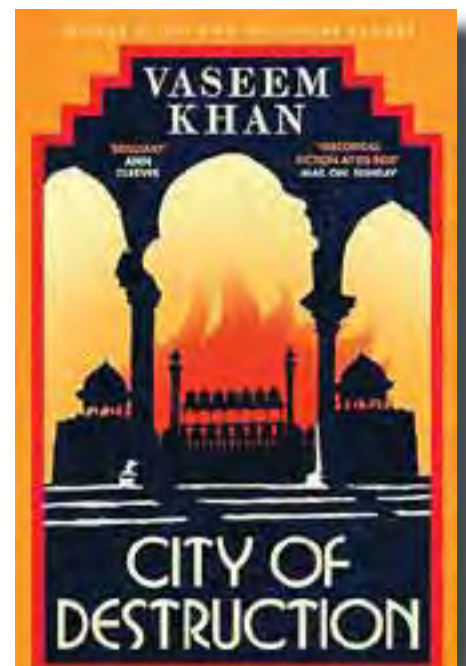
Award-winning novelist Liam McIlvanney, born and raised in western Scotland but for the past decade-plus a professor at the University of Otago in New Zealand, may be a self-confessed 'slow motion crime writer' who doesn't produce the book-a-year of many peers, but *THE GOOD FATHER* demon-

strates once more why his tales are always well worth the wait.

What could be worse than your child disappearing? A seemingly ordinary day, something Rory had often done, playing near the house with their dog. A safe community in their small town, he'd always returned home. Until he didn't. Guilt. Fear. Whispers and gossip. How do your neighbours see you now; how do you see yourselves?

McIlvanney takes parental fears and delivers gut-punch storytelling; he is a great writer alongside being a great storyteller. The sentences sing, as Gordon and Sarah's happy lives are eroded away day by day. It's the hope that kills, as they. What could be worse than your child disappearing?

THE GOOD FATHER is a quietly terrifying tale that upturns expectations without relying on pyrotechnics, and from an author who's already collected major crime writing awards in both hemispheres, may somehow be his very best work yet.



CITY OF DESTRUCTION

by Vaseem Khan

Hodder, \$26.99, March

Rating: A

British-Indian author Vaseem Khan's wonderful 'Malabar House' historical

mystery series, centred on Persis Wadia, India's first female police detective, keeps going from strength with this intriguing fifth outing where Persis is caught up in politics and spycraft.

Despite preventing the assassination of her country's controversial defence minister at a political rally in Bombay, by killing 'the lone gunman', Persis is soon sidelined from the deeper investigation into possible co-conspirators. Was it an act of war by new post-Raj neighbours Pakistan, treachery from within Indian politics, or something personal?

While Britain's M16 security service also gets involved, Persis is given a less high-profile case: the burned body of an unidentified foreigner discovered on one of Bombay's beaches.

Khan, the first crime writer of colour to ever Chair the famed Crime Writers' Association in the United Kingdom, brilliantly soaks readers in his early 1950s setting, as India's nascent democracy is finding its feet after throwing off the yoke of British colonialism.

CITY OF DESTRUCTION is a page-turner full of political and personal intrigues, as Persis tries to solve two puzzling cases while dealing with her colleague and friend-or-more, Scotland Yard criminalist Archie Blackfinch fighting for his life in hospital, and her country seemingly on the brink of war.

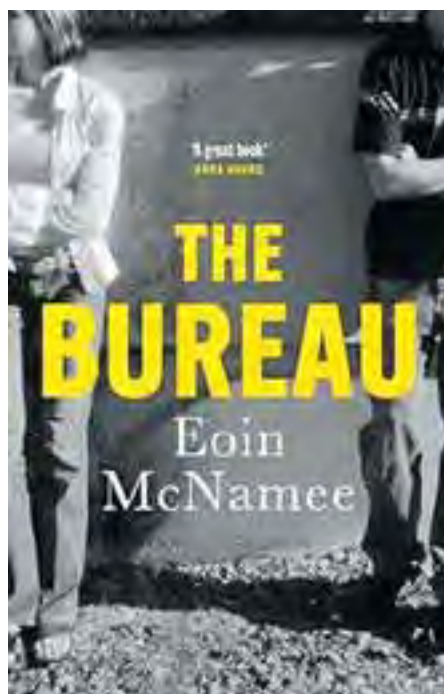
A very, very good read in a very good series.

THE BUREAU

by Eoin McNamee
riverrun, £18.99, March
Rating: A+

The Troubles. Two words with huge weight, distilling decades of violence in Northern Ireland that cost thousands of lives and cast a shadow over millions.

For the longest time, most publishers treated the Troubles like the third rail, even long after McNamee's pioneering, profound 1994 debut **RESURRECTION MAN**, a novel based on the real-life Shankill Butchers, an infamous loyalist gang that terrorised Belfast from the mid-1970s.



Or his incredible, Booker-listed 'Blue' trilogy that was drip-fed to readers between 2001 and 2014.

In **THE BUREAU**, McNamee blends elegant staccato prose, striking characters (including real-life figures) and a vivid sense of time and place to soak readers in the lawlessness of the Irish borderlands during the waning years of the Troubles. Brendan the disbarred lawyer running a money laundering Bureau de Change. Paddy the gangster. Fuel smugglers. Cops and judges on the take. Paramilitaries and sudden death. Lorraine the vivacious mistress who may be the most dangerous of them all.

Whether you view McNamee as a literary author exploring violence or a crime writer of top-shelf style and prose, **THE BUREAU** is a bleak, brilliant masterpiece.

MURDER ON LINE ONE

by Jeremy Vine
HarperCollins, £20.00, April
Rating: B

From Scandi Crime to Outback Noir, and a recent Japanese crime translation mini-boom – all welcome trends exposing more readers to previously underappreciated areas of the crime fiction landscape – book publishing loves jumping on a bandwagon following a big hit.

Recently, in the UK in particular, this has also sadly seen a swathe of 'TV celebrity' crime novels looking to ape Richard Osman's lightning-in-a-bottle sales success during the COVID pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, those other celebrity results have been far more mixed, with many disappointing yet highly pushed celebrity releases, and even behind-the-scenes testimony about ghost-writers, in some cases. Far more have crashed and burned than soared, despite the publisher appetite.

Into that breach now steps BBC presenter and former *Strictly Come Dancing* contestant Jeremy Vine. While **MURDER ON LINE ONE** is his first crime novel, it's his sixth book, after two comic novels in the 1990s and a couple of memoirs in the 2010s, and as a journalist Vine brings some storytelling chops.

A solid British mystery that's smoothly written, **MURDER ON LINE ONE** sees late-night talk radio host Edward Temmis reeling from unspeakable tragedy in the coastal Devonshire town of Sidmouth.

Adrift after losing his job, having made a mess of things at his radio station, he's enticed to investigate the death of one of his devoted listeners in a suspicious fire, teaming with the woman's granddaughter Stevie, who has Tourette's, and local estate agent and one-time fling Kim.

It's an unlikely and smile-inducing investigative trio, and there's a charm and light touch to Vine's writing which masks some deeper reflections on grief and how to cope with life's tragedies.

Smoothly written with several engaging characters, **MURDER ON LINE ONE** is, for me, one of the better post-Osman celebrity crime novels to come out. It should appeal to cosy and classic mystery fans, despite never reaching the heights of many richer examples of the genre available on overflowing library and bookseller shelves.

Decent, rather than drop-everything to read; still, I'd read more mysteries from Vine in future.

An Interview with Tim Sullivan

Tim Sullivan is a crime writer, screenwriter and director living in North London who has worked on major feature films such as the fourth *Shrek*, *Flushed Away*, *Letters to Juliet*, *Jack and Sarah*, and TV series *Cold Feet*. Ahead of the publication of **THE BOOKSELLER**, Tim's seventh novel in an acclaimed series featuring neurodiverse sleuth DS Cross, he sat down for a quick interview with **Craig Sистерson**.

What were the origins of your series detective, DS Cross – where did he come from and what made you want to write about him for more than one book?

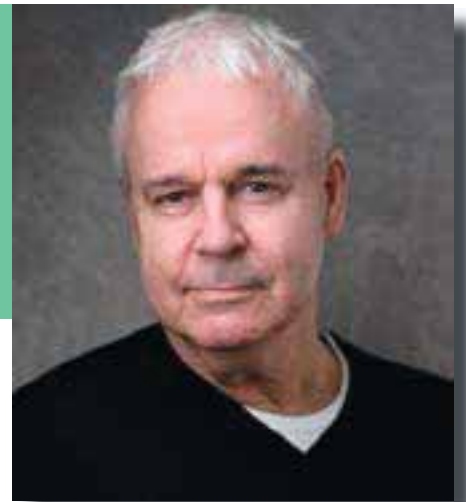
Tim Sullivan: I've always had a long-standing interest in autism, and particularly the part of the autism spectrum we used to call Asperger's (or 'high functioning autism'). That idea of some-

one in the workplace where it wasn't sort of so obvious they were autistic, and the way people interacted and treated them. It seemed to me that to apply those traits I'd researched into a detective was going to create a great character.

In a way, DS Cross fits into a sort-of tradition of detectives on the spectrum. Poe's Auguste Dupin I think you would say was on the spectrum. Sherlock Holmes. Probably Poirot. And Cross's condition is his gift in that he's fascinated by the routine and the mundane in a way that not everyone is, and it's that attention to detail that helps him solve crimes in the way that he does.

You have an extensive background in film and television – in terms of storytelling, what translated well to novel writing, and what were some things you had to learn anew?

Tim: I think the two things that translated well are a sense of setting, and dialogue. Because TV and film is a visual medium, you're often describing in a script the things you want to see on the screen. So you've got to be visual. You've got to give the crew an idea of where you've set something. And dialogue, it's all dialogue, so dialogue is my bread and butter – the same for playwrights. What I did find with the first and second books was I had to move away from being episodic in the narrative structure. Books have a different rhythm, and if you're used to writing in 40-minute or one hour chunks for television, for example, it can infect your writing as a novelist. So I had to learn pacing, which I did learn in a sense by observing what I'd written, and what's gone before, and what works.



What can you tell us about your new DS Cross thriller, *THE BOOKSELLER*?

Tim: All the books in my series are titles after the occupation of the victim, and so I've probably committed a professional own goal here by killing a bookseller! I tend to never know who the killer is when I start writing, I just write about a world that fascinates me. And the world of bookselling, of rare and antiquated books, as well as the modern book industry, fascinated me. I thought it was also sort of unlikely – why would someone kill a bookseller? So it's really interesting when you look into that world, from late Victorian times up until now, and how things have changed. Before TV and the internet, books were real cultural currency. There was this thing called the ring where booksellers would go around the UK to auctions, and agree not to bid against each other, buy a book cheap and go to a hotel and do their own private auction. So that was all fascinating to me, and is in the book.

The DS Cross Series

THE DENTIST (2020)
THE CYCLIST (2020)
THE PATIENT (2022)
THE POLITICIAN (2022)
THE MONK (2023)
THE TEACHER (2023)
THE BOOKSELLER (2025)
THE TAILOR (2026)





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THE CWA GOLD DAGGER



DV Bishop
A Divine Fury



Bonnie Burke-Patel
I Died at Fallow Hall



Ben Creed
Man of Bones



RJ Ellory
The Bell Tower



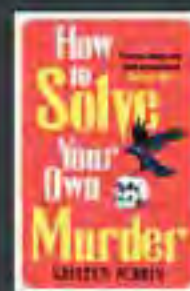
Tana French
The Hunter



Attica Locke
Guide Me Home



Anna Mazzola
Book of Secrets



Kristen Perrin
How to Solve Your Own Murder



Tracy Sierra
Nightwatching



Marie Tierney
Deadly Animals



Harriet F Townson
D is for Death



Bridget Walsh
The Innocents



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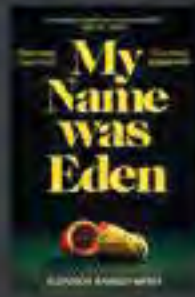
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THE ILP JOHN CREASEY FIRST NOVEL DAGGER



Jack Anderson
The Grief Doctor



Eleanor
Barker-White
My Name Was Eden



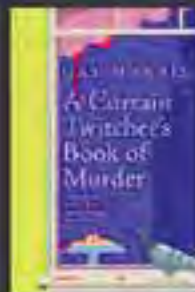
Jessica Bull
*Miss Austen
Investigates*



Justine Champine
Knife River



Anders Lustgarten
Three Burials



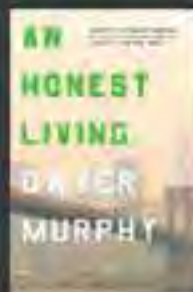
Gay Marris
*A Curtain Twitcher's
Book of Murder*



Katy Massey
All Us Sinners



Alice McIlroy
The Glass Woman



Dwyer Murphy
An Honest Living



Marie Tierney
Deadly Animals



Claire Wilson
Five by Five



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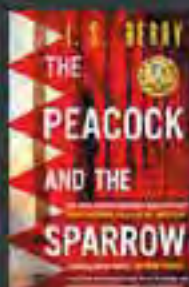
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THE IAN FLEMING STEEL DAGGER



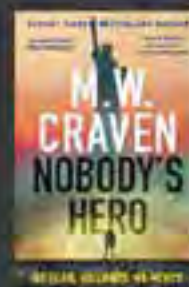
Lou Berney
Dark Ride



IS Berry
*The Peacock and
the Sparrow*



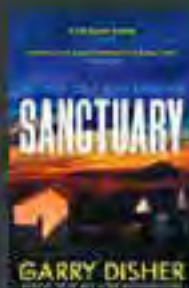
Chris Brookmyre
The Cracked Mirror



MW Craven
Nobody's Hero



Blake Crouch
Run



Garry Disher
Sanctuary



Dervla McTiernan
*What Happened
to Nina?*



Liz Moore
*The God of the
Woods*



Abir Mukherjee
Hunted



Stuart Neville
Blood Like Mine



Chris Whitaker
*All the Colours
of the Dark*



Don Winslow
City in Ruins



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THE HISTORICAL DAGGER

SPONSORED IN HONOUR OF DR. MARILYN LIVINGSTONE (1959-2023)



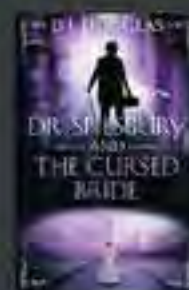
DV Bishop
A Divine Fury



Rory Clements
Munich Wolf



Emily Critchley
The Undoing of Violet Claybourne



DL Douglas
Dr Spilsbury and the Cursed Bride



Douglas Jackson
Blood Roses



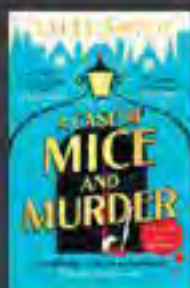
Chris Lloyd
Banquet of Beggars



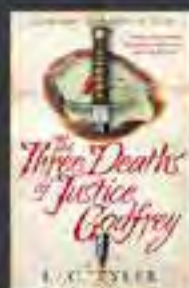
Anna Mazzola
The Book of Secrets



Lizzie Pook
Maude Horton's Glorious Revenge



Sally Smith
A Case of Mice and Murder




LC Tyler
The Three Deaths of Justice Godfrey



AJ West
The Betrayal of Thomas True

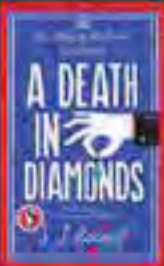






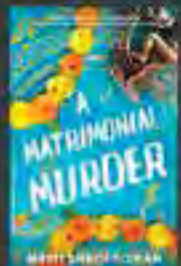






Clare Whitfield
Poor Girls


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THE CWA WHODUNIT DAGGER

 <p>SJ Bennett <i>A Death in Diamonds</i></p>	 <p>Andreina Cordani <i>Murder at the Christmas Emporium</i></p>	 <p>Tess Gerritsen <i>The Spy Coast</i></p>	 <p>Lisa Hall <i>The Case of the Singer and the Showgirl</i></p>
 <p>Ellery Lloyd <i>The Final Act of Juliette Willoughby</i></p>	 <p>Laura Marshall <i>A Good Place to Hide a Body</i></p>	 <p>Nita Prose <i>The Mystery Guest</i></p>	 <p>Meeti Shroff-Shah <i>A Matrimonial Murder</i></p>
 <p>Sally Smith <i>A Case of Mice and Murder</i></p>	 <p>Tom Spencer <i>The Mystery of the Crooked Man</i></p>	 <p>Benjamin Stevenson <i>Everyone On This Train is a Suspect</i></p>	 <p>Jamie West <i>Murder at the Matinee</i></p>

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LONGLIST

THE DAGGER FOR CRIME FICTION IN TRANSLATION
SPONSORED IN HONOUR OF DOLORES JAKUBOWSKI

 <p>Claire Berest <i>Artifice</i> tr. Sophie Lewis</p>	 <p>Carlo Fruttero & Franco Lucentini <i>The Lover of No Fixed Abode</i> tr. Gregory Dowling</p>	 <p>Anne Mette Hancock <i>Ruthless</i> tr. Tara Chase</p>	 <p>Kotaro Isaka <i>Hotel Lucky Seven</i> tr. Brian Bergstrom</p>
 <p>Andrey Kurkov <i>The Silver Bone</i> tr. Boris Dralyuk</p>	 <p>Hervé Le Corre <i>Dogs and Wolves</i> tr. Howard Curtis</p>	 <p>Pierre Lemaitre <i>Going to the Dogs</i> tr. Frank Wynne</p>	 <p>Patricia Melo <i>The Simple Art of Killing a Woman</i> tr. Sophie Lewis</p>
 <p>Akira Otani <i>The Night of Baba Yaga</i> tr. Sam Bett</p>	 <p>Satu Rämö <i>The Clues in the Fjord</i> tr. Kristian London</p>	 <p>Asako Yuzuki <i>Butter</i> tr. Polly Barton</p>	 <p>Alia Trabucco Zerán <i>Clean</i> tr. Sophie Hughes</p>



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Sharon Bolton
The Neighbour's Secret



NJ Cracknell
The Perfect Couple



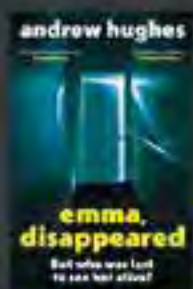
Clara Dillon
The Playdate



Caz Frear
Five Bad Deeds



Kellye Garrett
Missing White Woman



Andrew Hughes
Emma, Disappeared



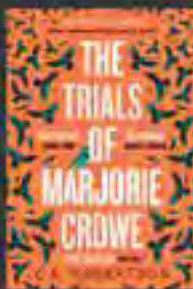
Amanda Jennings
Beautiful People



John Marrs
The Stranger In Her House



Hannah Richell
The Search Party



CS Robertson
The Trials Of Marjorie Crowe



Tracy Sierra
Nightwatching



Catherine Steadman
Look In The Mirror

Sneak Previews

Upcoming Mysteries



May, 2025

- 6 John Connolly, **THE CHILDREN OF EVE** (Charlie Parker)
- 6 Mike Maden, Clive Cussler's **GHOST SOLDIER** (Oregon Files)
- 6 Jeffrey Deaver, **SOUTH OF NOWHERE** (Colter Shaw)
- 6 Paul Vidich, **THE POET'S GAME**
- 6 Ashley Flowers & Alex Kiester, **THE MISSING HALF**
- 6 Leonie Swann, **BIG BAD WOOL** (Sheep Detective)
- 6 Alex Finlay, **PARENTS WEEKEND**
- 6 Sue Hincenbergs, **THE RETIREMENT PLAN**
- 6 Alison Goodman, **THE LADIES ROAD GUIDE TO UTTER RUIN** (Ill-Mannered Ladies)
- 6 Freida McFadden, **THE TENANT**
- 13 Anthony Horowitz, **MARBLE HALL MURDERS** (Susan Ryland)
- 13 Michelle Gagnon, **SLAYING YOU** (Amber Jamison)
- 13 Carl Hiaasen, **FEVER BEACH**
- 13 Jack Du Brul, Clive Cussler's **THE IRON STORM** (Isaac Bell)
- 13 Lisa Martin, **THE ONLY ONES WHO KNOW**
- 13 K. A. Merson, **THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIRDS**
- 13 Gary Phillips, **ASH DARK AS NIGHT** (Harry Ingram)
- 13 Paul Doiron, **SKIN AND BONES** (Bowditch short stories)
- 13 Brendan Slocumb, **DARK MAESTRO**
- 13 Alex North, **THE MAN MADE OF SMOKE**
- 13 Nev March, **THE SILVERSMITH'S PUZZLE** (Jim & Diana)
- 13 John Lawton, **SMOKE AND EMBERS** (Troy)
- 13 Rachel Howzell Hall, **FOG AND FURY**
- 20 Michael Connelly, **NIGHTSHADE** (Detective Stilwell)
- 20 Cara Hunter, **MAKING A KILLING** (DI Fawley)
- 20 Jenny Morris, **AN ETHICAL GUIDE**

TO MURDER

- 20 Susan Juby, **CONTEMPLATION OF A CRIME**
- 20 Tori Eldridge, **KAUA'I STORM**
- 20 Gareth Rubin, **HOLMES & MORIARTY**
- 20 Sarah Pinborough, **WE LIVE HERE NOW**
- 20 M. P. Woodward, **Tom Clancy's LINE OF DEMARCATION** (Jack Ryan, Jr.)
- 20 Brian Freeman, **Robert Ludlum's THE BOURNE SHADOW**
- 20 Chris Pavone, **THE DOORMAN**
- 20 Ammar Merchant, **THE PALACE OF SINNERS AND SAINTS**
- 20 Jaclyn Goldis, **THE SAFARI**
- 20 Stephen King, **NEVER FLINCH** (Holly Gibney)
- 20 James Comey, **FDR DRIVE** (Nora Carleton)
- 22 A. A. Dhand, **THE CHEMIST** – U.K. only
- 27 Brett Battles, **Stuart Woods' GOLDEN HOUR** (Teddy Fay)
- 27 Robert Dugoni, **A DEAD DRAW** (Tracy Crosswhite)
- 27 Nora Roberts, **HIDDEN NATURE** (Sloan Cooper)
- 27 Jack Ford, **BEYOND THIS PLACE OF WRATH AND TEARS** (Lee Carson)
- 27 Steven Konkoly, **A HIRED KILL**
- 27 Craig Johnson, **RETURN TO SENDER** (Longmire)
- 27 Freya Sampson, **THE BUSYBODY BOOK CLUB**
- 27 Stacey Abrams, **CODED JUSTICE** (Avery Keene)
- 27 John Gilstrap, **BURNED BRIDGES**
- 27 Oliver Potzsch, **THE GRAVE-DIGGER'S ALMANAC** (Leopold von Herzfeldt)
- 28 Simon Toyne, **THE BLACK HIGHWAY** (Laughton Rees)

June, 2025

- 2 James Patterson & Bill Clinton, **THE FIRST GENTLEMAN**

- 2 Luke Jennings, **KILLING EVE: RESURRECTION**
- 3 Denise Mina, **THE GOOD LIAR**
- 3 Ashley Weaver, **ONE FINAL TURN** (Electra McDonnell)
- 3 Julie Clark, **THE GHOSTWRITER**
- 3 James Lee Burke, **DON'T FORGET ME, LITTLE BESSIE** (Holland)
- 3 Brett Battles, **Stuart Woods FINDERS KEEPERS** (Stone Barrington)
- 3 Mailan Doquang, **CEYLON SAPPHIRES** (Rune Sarasin)
- 3 M. J. Robotham, **MRS. SPY**
- 3 Steve Cavanagh, **FIFTY FIFTY**
- 3 Preston & Child, **BADLANDS**
- 3 David Mark, **DON'T SAY A WORD** (Sal Delaney)
- 5 Robert Bryndza, **CHASING SHADOWS** (Erika Foster)
- 10 S. A. Cosby, **KING OF ASHES**
- 10 Jack Carr, **CRY HAVOC** (Standalone)
- 10 Martin Walker, **AN ENEMY IN THE VILLAGE** (Bruno)
- 10 Chris Chibnall, **DEATH AT THE WHITE HART**
- 10 Peter Swanson, **KILL YOUR DARLINGS**
- 10 Camilla Sten, **THE BACHELORETTE PARTY**
- 10 Karen Dukess, **WELCOME TO MURDER WEEK**
- 10 Nilima Rao, **A SHIPWRECK IN FIJI** (Sgt. Akal Singh)
- 10 Malika Older, **THE POTENCY OF UNGOVERNABLE IMPULSES** (Mossa & Pleiti)
- 10 Riley Sager, **WITH A VENGEANCE**
- 10 Janelle Brown, **WHAT KIND OF PARADISE**
- 10 Laurie R. King, **KNAVE OF DIAMONDS** (Mary Russell)
- 10 Jonathan Whitelaw, **THE GARDEN CLUB MURDERS**
- 17 Ryan Steck, **GONE DARK** (Matthew Redd)
- 17 Laura Lippman, **MURDER TAKES A VACATION**
- 17 Michael Robotham, **THE WHITE CROW**
- 17 Gillian French, **SHAW CONNOLLY LIVES TO TELL**
- 17 Liv Constantine, **DON'T OPEN YOUR EYES**
- 17 Claudia Gray, **THE RUSHWORTH FAMILY PLOT** (Darcy/Tilney)
- 17 Vi Keeland, **SOMEONE KNOWS**
- 19 Rob Rinder, **THE PROTEST** (Adam Green) – U.K.
- 24 Megan Abbott, **EL DORADO DRIVE**
- 24 David Housewright, **THEM BONES**

(Mac McKenzie)

- 24 Simon Toyne, **THE BLACK HIGHWAY** (Laughton Rees)
 24 Dwyer Murphy, **THE HOUSE ON BUZZARDS BAY**
 24 Rob Hart, **THE MEDUSA PROTOCOL** (Assassins Anonymous)
 24 Julia Seales, **A TERRIBLY NASTY BUSINESS** (Beatrice Steele)
 24 Lisa Jewell, **DON'T LET HIM IN**
 24 David Putnam, **IMOGENE'S GRAND FIASCO**

July, 2025

- 1 Harini Nagendra, **INTO THE LEOPARD'S DEN** (Kaveri & Ramu)
 1 Brad Thor, **EDGE OF HONOR** (Scot Harvath)
 1 Martha Grimes, **THE RED QUEEN** (Richard Jury)
 1 David Rosenfelt, **DOGGED PURSUIT** (Andy Carpenter)
 1 Anna Fitzgerald Healy, **ETIQUETTE FOR LOVERS AND KILLERS**
 1 Michael Robotham, **THE WHITE CROW** (Philomena McCarthy)
 1 Camilla Trinchieri, **MURDER IN PITIGLIANO** (Tuscan Mystery)
 1 Jennifer Hillier, **FREAK**
 1 Terry Shames **DEEP DIVE**
 1 Barbara Hambly, **MURDER IN THE TREMBLING LANDS** (Benjamin January)
 1 Amy McCulloch, **RUNNER 13**
 3 William Shaw, **THE RED SHORE** (DS Eden Driscoll) U.K.
 8 Martin Cruz Smith, **HOTEL UKRAINE** (Arkady Renko)



- 8 Mark Billingham, **WHAT THE NIGHT**

BRINGS (Tom Thorne)

- 8 Elly Griffiths, **THE FROZEN PEOPLE**
 8 Bruce Borgos, **THE BLUE HORSE** (Porter Beck)
 8 Vaseem Khan, **THE GIRL IN CELL A SUITE 11**
 8 Ruth Ware, **THE WOMAN IN SUITE 11**
 8 Anna Barrington, **THE SPECTACLE**
 8 Clemence Michallon, **OUR LAST RESORT**
 8 Kelly Gardiner, Sharmini Kumar, **MISS CAROLINE BIGLEY, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR**
 8 Lex Noteboom, **THE MAN WITH A THOUSAND FACES**
 8 Liza Tully, **THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE AND HER JUST OKAY ASSISTANT**
 8 Linda Castillo, **RAGE** (Kate Burkholder)
 8 Simon Gervais, **THE ELIAS ENIGMA**
 8 David Putnam, **THE OBSESSIONS OF HARVEY USHER**
 15 Daniel Silva, **AN INSIDE JOB** (Gabriel Allon)
 15 Michael Bennett, **CARVED IN BLOOD** (Hana Westerman)
 15 Lisa Scottoline, **THE UNRAVELING OF JULIA**
 15 Jamie Day, **THE LAKE ESCAPE**
 15 Tom Mead, **THE HOUSE AT DEVIL'S NECK** (Joseph Spector)
 15 Delia Pitts, **DEATH OF AN EX** (Vandy Myrick)
 15 Lauren Wilson, **THE GOLDENS**
 15 Mike Phillips, **THE DANCING FACE**
 15 Carol Goodman, **WRITERS AND LIARS**
 15 Sara Ochs, **THIS STAYS BETWEEN US**
 15 Spencer Quinn, **MRS. PLANSKY GOES ROGUE**
 17 Jake Needham, **GOODBYE, MR. BOOGIE** (Inspector Tay)
 22 Dan Fesperman, **PARIAH**
 22 Stuart MacBride, **THIS HOUSE OF BURNING BONES** (Logan McRae)
 22 Lindsey Davis, **THERE WILL BE BODIES** (Flavia Albia)
 22 Alex Pavesi, **INK RIBBON RED**
 22 Joe Pan, **FLORIDA PALMS**
 22 Paul Bradley Carr, **THE CONFESSIONS**
 22 Christina Dotson, **LOVE YOU TO DEATH**
 22 Ryan Pote, **BLOOD AND TREASURE**
 22 David Gordon, **BEHIND SUNSET**
 22 Steve Berry, **THE LIST**
 29 Marc Cameron, **DEAD LINE** (Arlliss Cutter)

- 29 Sandra Jackson-Opoku, **SAVVY SUMMERS AND THE SWEET POTATO CRIMES**
 29 Shari Lapena, **SHE DIDN'T SEE IT COMING**
 29 Emma Rosenblum, **MEAN MOMS**
 29 Megan Miranda, **YOU BELONG HERE**
 29 Charlie Donlea, **GUESS AGAIN**
 29 Brian Freeman, **THE BOURNE ESCAPE**
 29 Carolyn Marie Wilkins, **MURDER AT THE WHAM BAM CLUB**
 29 Denise Mina, **THE GOOD LIAR**

August, 2025

- 5 Eli Cranor, **MISSISSIPPI BLUE 42** (FBI Special Agent Rae Johnson)
 5 Claire Douglas, **THE WRONG SISTER**
 5 Ulf Kvensler, **MY FATHER'S HOUSE**
 5 Donna Andrews, **FOR DUCK'S SAKE** (Meg Langslow)
 5 Kathy Reichs, **EVIL BONES** (Temperance Brennan)
 5 Sarah Stewart Taylor, **HUNTER'S HEART RIDGE** (Bethany, Vermont)
 5 Laura Shepherd-Robinson, **THE ART OF THE LIE**
 5 Jessa Maxwell, **DEAD OF SUMMER**
 5 Steve Cavanagh, **THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE** (Eddie Flynn)
 5 Scott Carson, **DEPARTURE 37**
 5 Alexis Soloski, **FLASHOUT**
 12 Lisa Gardner, **KISS HER GOODBYE** (Frankie Elkin)
 12 Karin Slaughter, **WE ARE ALL GUILTY HERE**
 12 Philip Miller, **THE DIARY OF LIES** (Shona Sandison)
 12 Tanya Scott, **STILLWATER**
 12 Joanna Schaffhausen, **GONE IN THE NIGHT** (Annalisa Vega)
 12 Samantha Downing, **TOO OLD FOR THIS**
 12 Jo Morey, **LIME JUICE MONEY**
 12 Jennifer Ashley, **A SILENCE IN BEL GRAVE SQUARE** (Kat Holloway)
 14 M. W. Craven, **THE FINAL VOW** (Poe & Tilly) – U.K.
 19 Joe R. Lansdale, **HATCHET GIRLS** (Hap & Leonard)
 19 Melissa Pace, **THE ONCE AND FUTURE ME**
 19 Jo Nichols, **THE MARIGOLD COTTAGES MURDER COLLECTIVE**
 19 Hannah Richell, **ONE DARK NIGHT**
 19 Andrew Taylor, **A SCHOOLING IN MURDER**
 26 Katherine Faulkner, **THE BREAK-IN**

- 26 Christopher Reich, **THE TOURISTS**
(Mac Decker)
- 26 D. V. Bishop, **CARNIVAL OF LIES**
(Cesare Aldo)
- 26 Stacy Willingham, **FORGET ME NOT**
- 26 Amanda Chapman, **MRS. CHRISTIE
AT THE MYSTERY GUILD LIBRARY**

September, 2025

- 1 James Patterson & Duane Swierczynski,
BILLION DOLLAR RANSOM
- 2 William Kent Krueger, **APOSTLE'S
COVE** (Cork O'Connor)
- 2 Graham Hurley, **KANE** (Spoils of War)
– U.K.
- 2 Frederick Forsyth & Tony Kent,
REVENGE OF ODESSA
- 2 Ken Jaworowski, **WHAT ABOUT THE
BODIES**
- 9 Mick Herron, **CLOWN TOWN** (Slow
Horses)



- 9 Lou Berney, **CROOKS**
- 9 Dan Brown, **THE SECRETS OF
SECRETS** (Robert Langdon)
- 9 Robert Galbraith, **THE HALL
MARKED MAN** (Cormoran Strike)
- 9 Ragnar Jonasson, **THE MYSTERIOUS
CASE OF THE MISSING CRIME
WRITER**
- 9 P. J. Tracy, **THE DEEPEST CUT**
(Monkeewrench)
- 9 Hank Phillippi Ryan, **ALL THIS
COULD BE YOURS**
- 9 K. J. White, **SEVEN REASONS TO
MURDER YOUR DINNER GUESTS**
- 9 Clive Cussler & Jack du Brul, **THE
IRON STORM** (Isaac Bell)
- 9 Jack Anderson, **THE RETURN OF
MORIARTY**
- 9 J. Todd Scott, **SCAR THE SKY**

- 9 Jeffrey Deaver & Isabella Maldonado,
THE GRAVE ARTIST (Sanchez &
Heron)
- 16 Robert Thorogood, **MURDER ON THE
MARLOW BELLE** (Marlow Murder
Club)
- 16 Clare Mackintosh, **OTHER PEOPLE'S
HOUSES**
- 16 Zoe Rankin, **THE VANISHING
PLACE**
- 16 Peter James, **ONE OF US IS DEAD**
(Roy Grace)
- 16 Walter Mosley, **GRAY DAWN** (Easy
Rawlins)
- 16 Mark Edwards, **THE WASP TRAP**
- 16 Mindy Mejia, **THE WHISPER PLACE**
(Celina Investigations)
- 23 James R. Benn, **A BITTER WIND**
(Billy Boyle)
- 23 Janice Hallett, **THE KILLER
QUESTION**
- 23 Cate Holahan, **THE KIDNAPPING OF
ALICE INGOLD**
- 23 Elizabeth George, **A SLOWLY DYING
CAUSE** (Lynley/Havers)
- 23 Julia Kelly, **A DARK AND DEADLY
JOURNEY** (Evelyn Redfern)
- 23 Blake Crouch, **FAMOUS**
- 25 John Banville, **VENETIAN VESPER**
(Standalone)
- 30 Richard Osman, **THE IMPOSSIBLE
FORTUNE** (Thursday Murder Club)
- 30 Robin Burcell, **Clive Cussler's THE
SERPENT EYE** (Fargo)
- 30 Ann Cleeves, **THE KILLING STONES**
(Jimmy Perez)
- 30 Sherry Thomas, **THE LIBRARIANS**

October, 2025

- 7 Val McDermid, **SILENT BONES**
(Karen Pirie)
- 7 Chevy Stevens, **THE HITCHHIKERS**
- 7 Patricia Cornwell, **SHARP FORCE**
(Scarpetta)
- 7 Bella Mackie, **WHAT A WAY TO GO**
- 7 Jennifer Fawcett, **KEEP THIS FOR ME**
- 14 Lee Goldberg, **FALLEN STAR** (Eve
Ronin)
- 14 Margaret Mizushima, **DYING CRY**
(Timber Creek K-9)
- 14 Hisashi Kashiwai, **THE KAMOGAWA
FOOD DETECTIVES: MENU OF
HAPPINESS**
- 14 David Rosenfelt, **AND TO ALL A
GOOD BITE** (Andy Carpenter)
- 14 Tom Ryan, **WE HAD A HUNCH**
- 14 Donna Andrews, **FIVE GOLDEN
WINGS** (Meg Langslow)

- 14 Nic Stone, **BOOM TOWN**
- 14 Stephen Hunter, **THE GUN MAN
JACKSON SWAGGER**
- 21 Michael Connelly, **THE PROVING
GROUND** (Lincoln Lawyer)
- 21 Olivia Black, **DEATH AT THE DOOR**
(Ruby & Cordelia)
- 21 Charles Todd, **A CHRISTMAS
WITNESS**
- 25 Charles Cumming, **ICARUS 17**
(Box 88)
- 25 Tim Sullivan, **THE DENTIST** (George
Cross)
- 28 Louise Penny, **THE BLACK WOLF**
(Gamache)
- 28 Janet Evanovich, **THE KING'S
RANSOM** (Gabriela Rose)
- 28 Nelson DeMille & Alex DeMille, **THE
TIN MEN** (Scott Brodie)

November, 2025

- 4 Charles Finch, **THE HIDDEN CITY**
(Charles Lenox)
- 4 C. M. Ewan, **STRANGERS IN THE
CAR**
- 4 Con Lehane, **THE RED SCARE
MURDERS**
- 4 Alissa Lee, **WITH FRIENDS LIKE
THESE**
- 11 T. Jefferson Parker, **WILD INSTINCT**
- 11 S. J. Bennett, **THE QUEEN WHO
CAME IN FROM THE COLD**
- 11 Laura Griffin, **INNOCENCE ROAD**
- 18 Steve Unszenyi, **BLOOD OATH**
(Alexandra Martel)
- 18 Julia Spencer Fleming, **AT MIDNIGHT
COMES THE CRY** (Clare Fergusson)
- 18 Jennifer Hillier, **CREEP**
- 18 Daniel Hurst, **THE DOCTOR'S WIFE**
- 25 Connor Sullivan, **RED FALCON** (Brian
Rhyme)
- 25 Marisa Kashino, **BEST OFFER WINS**

December, 2025

- 2 Robert Gold, **ELEVEN LIARS** (Ben
Harper)
- 2 Christopher Carlsson, **THE LIVING
AND THE DEAD**
- 2 Kit Frick, **FRIENDS AND LIARS**
- 2 Stuart Woods & Brett Battles, **BLOWN
AWAY** (Teddy Fay)
- 8 Ace Atkins, **EVERYBODY WANTS
TO RULE THE WORLD**
- 9 Arnaldur Indridason, **THE QUIET
MOTHER** (Detective Konrad)
- 9 Robin Cook, **SPASM**

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Editor/Publisher
George A. Easter
george@deadlypleasures.com

Associate Editor
Larry Gandle
LGandle@aol.com

Contributors
Mary Mason
Jeff Popple
Mike Ripley
Ted Hertel, Jr.
Ali Karim
Kevin Burton Smith
Meredith Anthony
Robin Agnew
Hank Wagner
Craig Sisterson



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Make checks (U.S. funds only)
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Deadly Pleasures and send to
George Easter -- DP
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Bountiful, UT 84010
PayPal payment is also accepted
at george@deadlypleasures.com