

Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



**Kristopher
Zgorski on
Domesticity &
Suspense**

**Barry Award
Nominations
2019**

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TRUST ME

Domesticity & Suspense

by *Kristopher Zgorski*

History may show that we are currently living in the Golden Age of Psychological Suspense. Certainly, works like **GONE GIRL** (A-) by Gillian Flynn and **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN** (B-) by Paula Hawkins have brought this sub-genre to the forefront of crime fiction reader's minds. Works that look at crime from a psychological angle have been with us since the dawn of the genre itself. In fact, one could make an argument for the fact that Shakespeare was writing psychological crime epics long before such categorization existed. For example, both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* deal with murders that take excessive tolls on the mental stability of their lead characters. But that is a discussion for another time.



In many ways, it seems that modern psychological suspense is a reaction to or antithesis of the noir sub-genre. While the noir category is highlighted by works with macho male protagonists, more excessive violence, and a darker worldview, the version of psychological suspense we are seeing lately expand on the more traditional female-led tales that favor manipulation over violence.

If readers look at an author like Megan Abbott, they can see an evolution which shows that the trademark elements of various sub-genres continue to blur – making for a richer reading experience for fans of crime fiction. Me-

gan Abbott began her career in novels by writing fairly traditional noir plots that highlighted the female characters over the testosterone-laden works seen in that arena's classics. In works like the Edgar-Award winning **QUEENPIN** (A+) and the multi-award nominated **BURY ME DEEP** (A), Abbott turned the noir tropes on their head and allowed her female characters to reclaim the strength that was often denied them in earlier writings in that style.

After having made her mark by altering the reader's perception in these pastiche-style works, Megan then transitioned to writing novels in which the protagonists were younger girls. Often mislabeled at young adult novels, these works really are not geared for that audience. They are dark tales designed to show how the oppression of women in our modern society begins at a very young age. By watching how characters like Lizzie and Evie in **THE END OF EVERYTHING** (B) and Addy and Beth in **DARE ME** (A) navigate the unique challenges they face as young women in a threatening society, readers witness the birth of a new style that is distinctly her own and could now justifiably be labeled "Megan Abbott-esque."

Both of these writing periods in Abbott's career put a spotlight on the psychological aspects involved with the crimes, but never one to repeat herself, with her 2018 novel, **GIVE ME YOUR HAND** (A), Megan Abbott blends these two styles together and gives readers the story of a female friendship that begins in youth before transitioning into a more competitive, and arguably, more noir-like relationship later in life. It is in this work where the elements of psychological suspense really kick into high gear for Megan Abbott. In many ways,

what is happening in the minds of the characters is more important than the advancement of the main plot.

As we see with Megan Abbott's blending of noir fiction with psychological suspense, the latter sub-genre is becoming increasingly versatile to the point that it can be incorporated into any number of other styles to ratchet up the emotional impact for the reader. Let's examine just a few of the adaptations of psychological suspense we have seen in just this current publishing year:

Thrillers

By design, thrillers tend to be the most plot-focused of the crime sub-genres. Readers who enjoy that category are looking for adventurous plots that move along at a very fast clip, so the idea that one could blend in psychological elements seems like it would be anathema to the overarching desires of the genre. However, readers will find that adding the depth of psychology to such tales can raise the stakes and create deeper audience investment in the character's decisions.

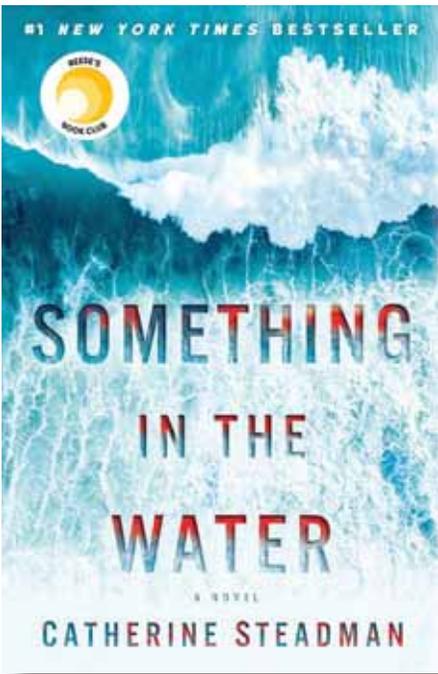
A novel like **THE REAL MICHAEL SWANN** (B) by Brian Reardon about a terrorist bombing in Grand Central

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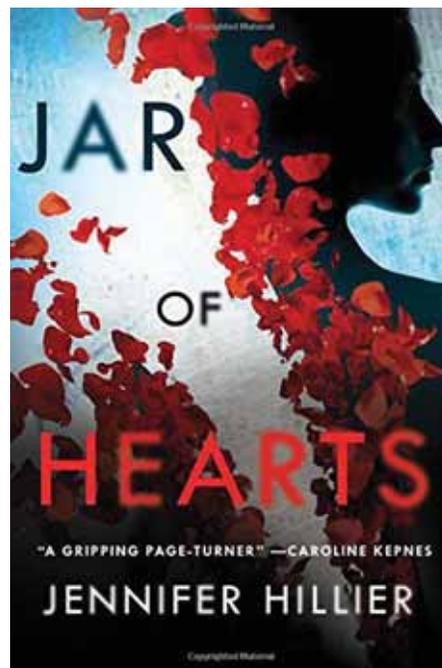
Terminal easily makes for an action-oriented reading experience, but when you throw in the complexity of a marriage in turmoil, the stakes are raised and readers become more invested in the outcome for that relationship than simply following the expected thrills provided by the genre. Similarly, Catherine McKenzie uses the backdrop of a domestic terror attack as the launching point for **THE GOOD LIAR** (B-), a novel that goes on to examine its effect on three different women. The psychology behind each of these characters' choices will have readers contemplating what they would do under similar circumstances. In her debut **SOMETHING IN THE WATER** (A), actress Catherine Steadman bursts onto the crime fiction scene with a book that places her happy couple right in the middle of a major threat. Because they are dealing with stress inducing factors – among them job concerns, trust issues, and financial woes – readers watch as their mindset deteriorates, making a bad situation even worse. On the surface, Karen Cleveland's **NEED TO KNOW** (B+), is a standard fare political thriller, but because a full fifty-percent of the novel deals with the effect this FBI agents career (and especially the current case) has on her marriage – after all, her husband is a suspected agent of espionage – the

conundrum of being forced to balancing her faith in family with her duty to country lays the groundwork for deep psychological analysis of motive.

Serial Killer Novels

Readers never seem to get tired of the various permutations of the serial killer novel. In 2018, we saw some interesting ways for those themes to be woven into what are basically psychological suspense novels.

One of my favorite reads of the year, Jennifer Hillier's **JAR OF HEARTS** (A+), lures readers in with a heroine who once dated a serial killer. Her involvement with him lands them both in jail, but upon her release, it seems that this killer may still be active. Readers get so deep into Georgina's mind that every decision and choice she agonizes over affects the reader as well. One would expect the motives of this serial killer to be psychologically sound – and indeed they are – but what is unexpected and elevates this book above other such offerings is that Hillier also explores Georgina's mental state throughout the various significant events dictating her life journey. **FIND YOU IN THE DARK** (B-) by Nathan Ripley presents family man Martin Reese secretly hunting for serial killers outside of



Lori Roy

police purview. When his actions go just a step too far he becomes the suspect in a crime and must use all of his wits to outsmart both a diabolical criminal and a determined pair of authorities. Lori Roy's Southern Gothic epic, **THE DISAPPEARING** (A), is another novel that uses the history of a serial killer as a cornerstone for a new case that alters an entire town and its citizens.

Closed Circle of Suspects

Locked Room mysteries are more often written in the puzzle style, but authors have begun to discover that suspense stories with a limited pool of suspects allow for deeper examination when using the close confines to elevate the psychological impact on their character's psyches.

In both Lori Rader-Day's **UNDER A DARK SKY** (A) and **GO TO MY GRAVE** (A) by Catriona McPherson, reunion-style vacations of childhood friends lead to excavation of criminal events from the past that have shattered the long-standing friendships. By setting their novels in unique settings, both of these authors weave the environment into the sensibility of their characters. Similarly, in Jane Harper's **FORCE OF NATURE** (A), a corporate retreat into the wilds of Australia goes awry when one of the participants fails to reach the final destination. The wilderness locale mirrors the convoluted minds of those gathered within it.

Domestic Suspense

This brings us to one of the larger categories under the psychological suspense umbrella – the domestics. Re-

lationship dynamics are often the thread that feeds the psychological suspense elements within these novels, so it only makes sense that marriages (both good and bad), parent/child power struggles, and other family-related stresses would be popular topics for authors writing in this sub-genre.

Marriages

Let's start with what is probably the most common of these themes – the often volatile and always complex dynamics within a committed relationship. Reading crime fiction would give one the sense that no marriage is completely happy and that in many ways, it is impossible to **truly** know another person. Without debating the validity of such a statement, a look at the books that fall under this area certainly prove there is much to examine in this arena. Greer Hendricks and Sarah Pekkanen scrutinized the tension between a wife and her husband's mistress in the twisty and unexpected **THE WIFE BETWEEN US** (B). Very much in the vein of one of psychological suspense's masters, Patricia Highsmith, **TANGERINE** (B) by Christine Mangan seduces readers with an intoxicating spell. The exotic Moroccan setting is just one reason for the heat between Alice; her college friend, Lucy; and Alice's husband in this stylish novel. Since marriages are often an important component in other examples of domestic suspense themes, this will always be important as a core element in this varied sub-genre category.

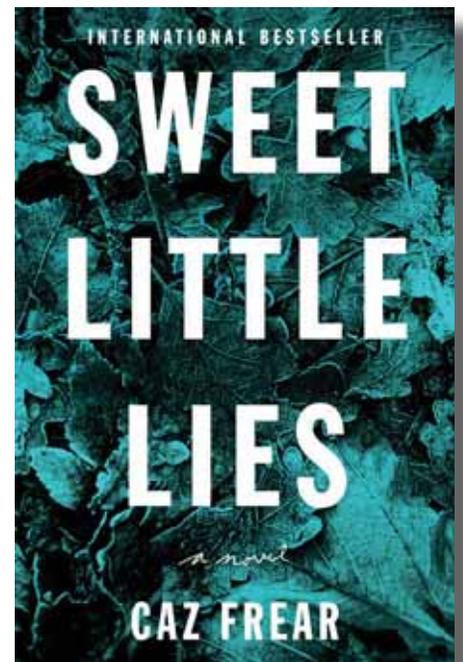
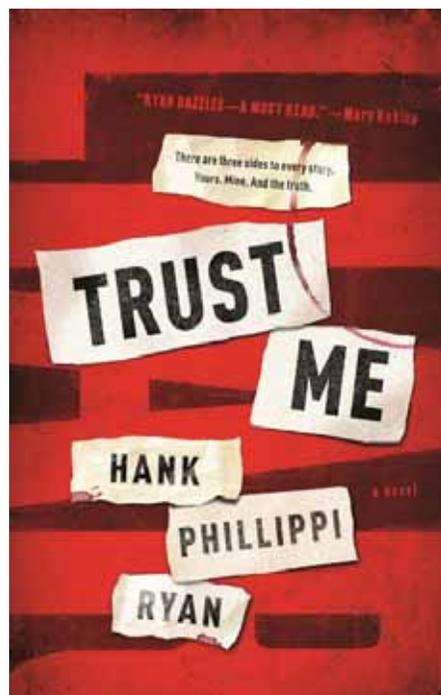
Parenting

As if parenting were not challenging enough, domestic suspense authors weave wicked tales that would make any expectant parent lose sleep. **THE PERFECT MOTHER** (A) is Aimee Molloy's debut and it is certainly a gripping tale. When a group of new mothers go out for a night on the town, one of their babies is kidnapped from his crib, sending the police off on an investigation that throws suspicion on everyone. But the novel is more than just that, it is also a

look at the profound psychological and emotional effect motherhood has on women. This is such ripe territory for exploring the ramifications of such a major life change. Similarly, when the wife in Leila Slimani's **THE PERFECT NANNY** (B) decides she wishes to return to the workforce, she and her husband have no idea that inviting a stranger into their home will change their lives forever. This slim volume packs an emotional punch with its ability to express the psychological quirks of each of the main characters.

The children don't always get off easy either. In Zoje Stage's **BABY TEETH** (B), a mother is terrorized by her seven-year-old daughter, who would much prefer to just have a daddy. When the husband and father begins to doubt the sanity of his wife, things escalate to dangerous levels.

It is no surprise that a novelist of Hank Phillippi Ryan's caliber would combine multiple aspects of this theme into one novel. In **TRUST ME** (A+), the POV character is dealing with the tragic death of her husband and child. When she is asked to write a narrative non-fiction book covering the trial of a mother accused of killing her daughter, she thinks this might help her to move on. Readers know otherwise, because this is psychological suspense, and there is no

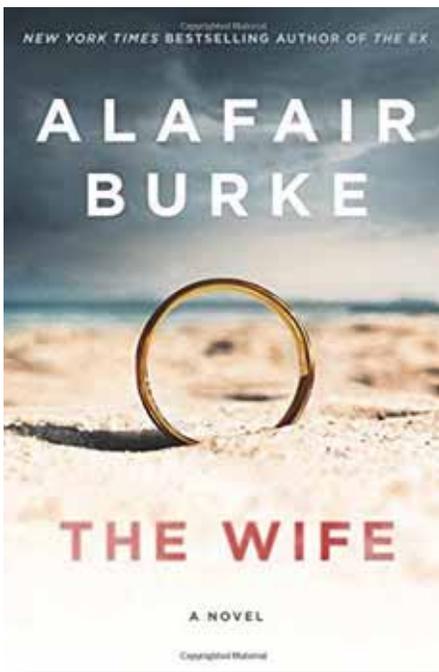


way this can go smoothly. The cat and mouse game of psychological warfare between these two women reaches epic level and readers have no idea who to believe.

In another twist on the parent/child interaction, the female detective at the core of Caz Frear's **SWEET LITTLE LIES** (A) has always suspected that her father had something to do with the disappearance of a local girl. Years later, with her now on the UK police force, that missing girl turns up – newly dead – and this throws our heroine into a psychological tailspin. Was she wrong about her father or does the current investigation only lead right back to his doorstep?

#Metoo

In a surprise to no one, readers have seen an influx of books that appear to be reacting directly to the #metoo movement. However, most of these books were in process before this issue moved into the mainstream, so it is likely that we will see even more in the coming years. Alafair Burke's **THE WIFE** (A+) is a prime example of a book that couldn't be timelier if it tried. But what she does by allowing readers to see how accusations of sexual misconduct affect one of the individuals often forgotten in such cases – the spouse of the

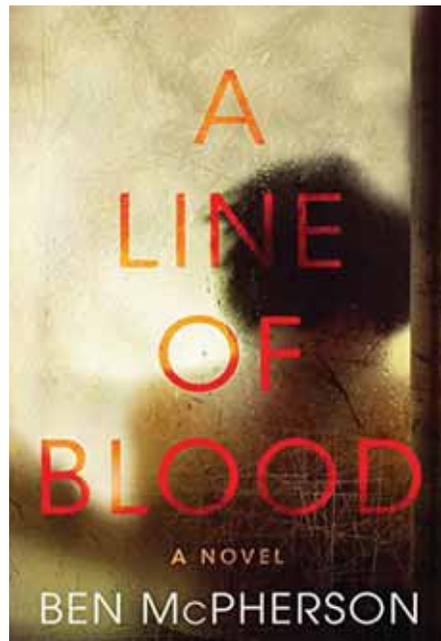


accused – is nothing short of revelatory. That she manages to avoid making it a cut and dried issue (because let's face it, it rarely is) is a testament to her talent and willingness to take serious risks in her writing. Similarly, **ANATOMY OF A SCANDAL** (C+) by Sarah Vaughn becomes even more fascinating now that we as a society have experienced the court hearings related to Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nominations and Christine Blasey Ford's accusations against him. Vaughn's novel is set in the UK parliament, but that only confirms the universal nature and proliferation of these types of situations.

Male Authors

From reading this article, it would seem that most domestic and psychological suspense authors are female and this would be true. However, more and more male writers are exploring the domestic suspense realm. An author like A. J. Finn can write an enjoyable book like **THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW** (B-) about an agoraphobic woman who suspects that not all is right in her neighbor's house. While in T. M. Logan's **LIES** (A), a husband (and mostly stay-at-home dad) discovers that his wife has been having an affair only to find that this leads to his being

accused of murder. What is interesting in these two examples is that it seems marketing chose to use initials for the author's names, likely to obfuscate the fact that they are male writers. In the case of Finn's book, where the protagonist is female, this might be a bit less surprising, but Logan's book features a male protagonist, so the choice seems odd and unnecessary. Most readers of psychological suspense are female (most readers in general, in fact), and while it is not uncommon for male readers to say they will not read female writers, the reverse situation seems much less common. In any case, these authors should not be shy about embracing their exploration of domestic suspense because clearly, based on sales, readers are willing to journey with them. My favorite example of a male author writing domestic suspense came a few years back: Ben McPherson's **A LINE OF BLOOD** (A+). Here is a novel that weaves both the marriage and parenting elements into a story that contains true surprises and offers no easy answers. Fans such as myself hope for a new novel from McPherson sooner rather than later.



Another author who is not afraid to take risks is Peter Swanson. Each of his books is different, but this year's **ALL THE BEAUTIFUL LIES** (B-) in which a man deals with the psycholog-

ical impact of abuse and an infatuation with his step-mother pushes all kinds of boundaries.

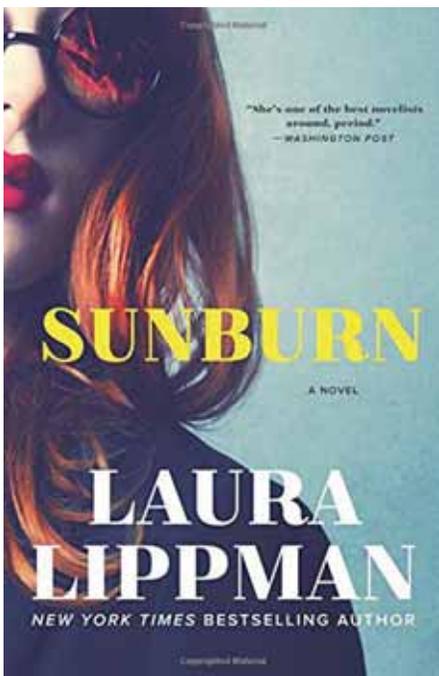
Unreliable Narrators

This article would be remiss in not mentioning the plethora of unreliable narrators in psychological suspense. Often considered a negative trope of the sub-genre, when executed successfully, it can be a very effective way to keep the reader wrong-footed throughout a book. The narrator of Alice Feeney's **SOMETIMES I LIE** (B) tells the reader on page one that she is not always honest, so anyone who puts too much stock in what she tells them in the novel had fair warning. The fact that she is in a coma for the duration of the novel only complicates matters. The psychological manipulation comes through in both the flashback sections from before the coma and a childhood diary that factors into the story.

Lisa Unger's **UNDER MY SKIN** (B+) spends much of the novel in a drug and alcohol haze which results in severe lack of sleep – such that she is unable to tell the difference between reality and the hallucinations that plague her in those moments between sleeping and wakefulness. This keeps the reader also always wondering if what is happening on the page is real or imagined.

The characters in Liz Nugent's **LYING IN WAIT** (B) do not appear to be unreliable on the surface, but readers quickly learn they are playing psychological games with each other and it is impossible to trust any of them as a result. This book and the creepy house setting contains many surprises and proves that dark tales can sometimes be even more emotionally devastating when the reader is not expecting it.

To bring the article back around to the beginning, the similarities and differences between psychological suspense and noir is the tension the propels the story for Laura Lippman's **SUNBURN** (A). Here we have two unreliable characters – a woman and man, both of whom are keeping secrets, manipulating not only each other, but also the reader as a result. This streamlined novel is one of the best from a true master of the crime



fiction genre.

It is hard to know what the future holds for psychological suspense, but at the moment, there seems to be no slow down in the sub-genre. Since originality is so often highly praised, authors are going to continue to develop new ways to explore the minds of their characters while weaving in elements and tropes from other aspects of the crime fiction world. No matter what happens, it is likely that the readers will come out the true winners.

Must Reads

If psychological suspense/domestic suspense is your cup of tea, you should read the following books. Let me know if you like them as much as I did.

UNDER A DARK SKY

by Lori Rader-Day

GO TO MY GRAVE

by Catriona McPherson

GIVE ME A HAND by Megan Abbott

SOMETHING IN THE WATER

by Catherine Steadman

JAR OF HEARTS by Jennifer Hillier

THE PERFECT MOTHER

by Aimee Malloy

TRUST ME by Hank Phillippi Ryan

SWEET LITTLE LIES by Caz Frear

THE WIFE by Alafair Burke

LIES by T. M. Logan

A LINE OF BLOOD by Ben McPherson

The 2019 Barry Award Nominations

It's Barry Award Voting Time! Please take a minute or two to vote **right now** for your choices in each category. It is not necessary to have read all candidates. You may email your votes to george@deadlypleasures.com or mail them to 1718 Ridge Point Dr., Bountiful, UT 84010. Voting is open to all readers of *Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine*. **Deadline: Friday, September, 2019**

Best Novel

NOVEMBER ROAD, Lou Berney (Morrow)

DARK SACRED NIGHT, Michael Connelly (Little, Brown)

THE SHADOW WE HIDE, Allen Eskens (Mulholland)

DEPTH OF WINTER, Craig Johnson (Viking)

LEAVE NO TRACE, Mindy Mejia (Atria)

A NECESSARY EVIL, Abir Mukherjee (Pegasus)

Best First Novel

MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER, Oyinkan Braithwaite (Doubleday)

NEED TO KNOW, Karen Cleveland (Ballantine)

DODGING AND BURNING, John Copenhaver (Pegasus)

SWEET LITTLE LIES, Caz Frear (Harper)

BEARSKIN, James A. McLaughlin (Ecco)

THE CHALK MAN, C. J. Tudor (Crown)

Best Paperback Original

A SHARP SOLITUDE, Christine Carbo (Atria)

DEAD PRETTY, David Mark (Blue Rider Press)

THE RUIN, Dervla McTiernan (Penguin)

THE HOLLOW OF FEAR, Sherry Thomas (Berkley)

RESURRECTION BAY, Emma Viskic (Pushkin Vertigo)

Best Thriller

THE TERMINAL LIST, Jack Carr (Atria)

SAFE HOUSES, Dan Fesperman (Knopf)

LONDON RULES, Mick Herron (Soho)

FOREVER AND A DAY, Anthony Horowitz (Harper)

LIGHT IT UP, Nick Petrie (Putnam)

THE KING TIDES, James Swain (Thomas & Mercer)

Thanks to the Barry Award Nominating Committee Members for all the reading they do so as to be prepared to suggest worthy nominees: Oline Cogdill, Larry Gandle, Maggie Mason, Mike Bursaw, Donus Roberts, Kristopher Zgorski, Donny Longmuir, Mike Dillman, Kris Schorer, Steele Curry, Ali Karim and Jeff Popple.

Reviewed to Death

THE RUIN

by Dervla McTiernan

(Penguin, \$16.00)



Dervla McTiernan

Jeff Popple

THE RÚIN by Dervla McTiernan (Penguin \$16.00; Sphere, £13.99). **Rating: A+** This compelling first novel by Australian-based author Dervla McTiernan is my favourite debut of 2018 so far.

Set in the Irish town of Galway, it follows the investigation by Garda detective Cormac Reilly into two crimes twenty years apart. In 1993 on his first week in the job, Reilly was called to a horrific scene of death and abuse in a crumbling country house. His investigation at the time was thwarted by his superiors and he was left with a hopeless feeling of letting two young children down. Now in 2013, Reilly has returned to Galway after a successful career in Dublin as a detective. As he tries to navigate the politics of the Galway police station, he finds himself drawn back to that earlier case when a body surfaces in the icy black waters of the River Corrib.

This is a very well written and evocative crime novel that steadily draws you into its dark plot. There are plenty of twists and turns and Reilly is an interesting and credible character. The descriptions of Galway add to the enjoyment and the unfolding of the dual investigations is well done. It is not hard to work out some of the elements of the plot, but the conclusion comes as a good surprise.

This is an impressive debut that will keep you glued to the pages until the end.

George Easter

I read **THE RÚIN** on Jeff Popple's recommendation inasmuch as I don't remember him ever giving a book an A+ rating. And boy, am I glad he did. I'm giving it an A+ also. It is the best mystery I've read in 2018 so far. It was one of those books that I just didn't want to put down and I thoroughly enjoyed the entire reading experience. I can't think of a thing to quibble about. Excellence throughout. I especially enjoyed the author's insightful prose.

In the U.S. it was published by Penguin in a trade paperback edition on July 3rd, but don't let that fool you. It is as good if not better than anything being published in hardback this year. It deserves the publicity and accolades that Karen Harper's **THE DRY** got last year. The U.S. edition contains the first chapter of the sequel, due out in 2019. I will read it the moment it lands on my doorstep.

Like the title of the Alison Krauss song, I've found a "new favorite." The U.S. edition also changed the title from **THE RÚIN**, which, in Irish, means a mystery or a secret to **THE RUIN**, which could refer to the crumbling house in which some early, essential elements of the plot occur. It works either way.

If I can get enough of you to read it, it should be a shoo-in for a Barry Award nomination and possibly the award for Best Paperback Original or Best First Novel. It is a WOW book. Reminiscent of Minette Walters **THE ICE HOUSE** and just as good, if not better. Dervla

McTiernan will undoubtedly be compared to another Irish writer, Tana French, and the comparison is valid and well deserved. **Rating: A+**

Steele Curry

Terrific debut novel by an author originally from Ireland now living in Australia. McTiernan's next book is also going to feature Cormac Reilly. Sign me up for a copy.

Christopher Brookmyre

{from A Stab in the Dark podcast entitled A Year of Crime, produced by Mark Billingham}

"Dervla McTiernan and her book **THE RUIN**, which is about a police officer in Galway. It was absolutely brilliant. Perfectly atmospheric, blending two story lines from twenty years ago. The first case the guy ever sent out to when he just joined and he thought he was being wound up by his mates and that comes back to haunt more than the events. When you read well executed crime fiction set somewhere that you haven't read about before you get a definite flavor of the area. It was really well done."

Larry Gandle

Great characters, a great setting and an initially compelling story lent great promise to this book. But the book was simply too long. The plot repeatedly went into pointless episodes which did nothing to progress the storyline. There was way too much backstory on each of



the characters to the point of being overdone. This is a 380-page book that could have been cut in half. I barely managed to finish the book and by the time I did, I was totally apathetic as to the ending.

When he initially started *Deadly Pleasures* all those years ago, George Easter had a brilliant idea. He created this column, Reviewed to Death, where all the reviewers give their opinion on a single book allowing the readers to read along and determine who they would agree with and with whom their taste in books would most align. This book is a perfect example as to why this column should exist. George loved this book. I did not. Now, you decide. Rating: C

Donus Roberts

THE RUIN is a crime novel that touches many of my preference points. First, it is very well written, and can co-exist in the literary category. There are so many crime novels that have been written that it is impossible for each to be unique. What separates the enduring from the average is the quality of prose that the author brings to the printed page.

Second, I like novels that take place over time where the characters have the opportunity to realistically grow and change. In this novel the characters are separated by the passage of twenty years, so that the opening of the novel serves as a haunting memory.

Third, I like book titles that are enigmatic. **THE RUIN**, it doesn't get any better than that. Did I say that I like Irish and Australian settings? Oh, well. Rating: A

Kris Schorer

I found **THE RUIN** to be a well-paced and intriguing crime novel. And I was grateful that the main character was not tragically flawed (gotten a bit tired of that). I did feel that there were a few coincidences that were a bit over-the-top and hard for me to believe. I also felt that the pacing slowed down a bit towards the end. But overall it was a good read and I look forward to the second book. Rating: A-

Kristopher Zgorski

At its core, **THE RUIN** is a police procedural set in Ireland across multiple decades, but unlike most crime fiction that focuses on investigative matters, Dervla McTiernan imbues this book with both the psychological astuteness of domestic suspense and the dark ambiance of a gritty noir tale. This is done to such an extent that labeling **THE RUIN** by any one of these sub-genre designations would unjustly negate the intricacy of this work.

Dervla McTiernan has crafted three complex characters, all of whom want to do right by Jack Blake: his sister Maude is holding secrets she hopes never to reveal, his wife Aisling wants answers to the most basic of questions, and the detective Cormac feels both a sense of duty to solve the modern crime and guilt over his handling of the historic case surrounding Jack's mother's death. As all three of them work independently, the threads of their revelations begin to intertwine until the reader is presented with a complete picture of what happened years ago and its long-term ramifications throughout the lives of those involved.

It is to the author's credit that she is able to weave in a sense of Ireland's challenging history into this plot without becoming pedantic. Dervla McTiernan's writing is beautifully evocative and her skill in managing the constant time-shifts and intricate plot belies the fact that this is a debut work. Fortunately for

all those that read **THE RUIN**, this is simply the first in a new series featuring Cormac Reilly. Rating: A-

Marv Lachman

There is much to admire in McTiernan's first novel, including some very believable characters and complex plotting. Its setting is Ireland, and there are plot elements, such as child abuse and abortion, that could have been torn from today's newspaper. Detective Sergeant Cormac Reilly (due to return in McTiernan's next book) is an admirable hero. He reminded me of Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch in his single-minded desire to find the truth. In summary, this is a poignant, highly readable book.

As much as I enjoyed **THE RUIN**, there are some weaknesses I have to (well, I choose to) point out. The compelling element of the plot was why a young man with everything to live for committed suicide, or was he murdered? It turns out that unfortunately coincidence played a major role in his fate. The killer in the case is identified too soon, over forty pages before the end, leading to a feeling of anti-climax. One character in the book, Emma, the love of Reilly's life, receives too little attention. There's a backstory there, but we'll have to wait for a later book to read of it.

McTiernan's writing is serviceable, weakened by her having her characters speak at least one four-letter word on almost every page. Maybe that's how the Irish police do speak, but it becomes boring, so I can do without the attempt at authenticity. Rating: B+

Michael Dillman

This book was written in a way that took me a little getting to use to. The Prologue sets up the story but you really do not understand what is really going on until much later in the book. The book jumps time between 20 years ago and the current investigation. While you are reading you may not be totally sure which situation is being investigated – the past or the present. The end of the book could disturb some but I thought it was very well thought out. This is a very good procedural and I look forward to the next one. Rating: A

Bouchercon 50

Mystery Lists

I've been tasked with coming up with two lists for the upcoming Dallas Bouchercon, where the 50th anniversary of the convention will be celebrated. One list is of the Most Influential Novels of the Bouchercon Era. The other is Great Reads of the Bouchercon Era 1969-2018. The second list started out as the Best Novels of the Bouchercon Era, but that was too high a standard and such a list would open us up for a lot of criticism ("How could you have possibly omitted my novel from that list?"). As promised, I'm printing the unfinished lists in *DP* and asking you for comment. Please e-mail me at george@deadlypleasures.com with any suggestions. Put "List Suggestions" in the subject line.

Most Influential Novels Of The Bouchercon Era

Most Influential = created a new subgenre, or a publishing phenomenon that others tried to emulate, or created some other movement in the market (**BOOKED TO DIE**, for example), or books by mega-stars of the genre. The range of settings and plots of the mystery/crime/thriller novel was greatly expanded during the last 50 years because of the novels on the list below:

(In chronological order by date of publication)

THE GODFATHER

by Mario Puzo (1969)

THE BLESSING WAY

by Tony Hillerman (1970)

THE HOT ROCK

by Donald E. Westlake (1970)

THE NEW CENTURIONS

by Joseph Wambaugh (1970)

THE GODWOLF MANUSCRIPT

by Robert B. Parker (1973)

THE SEVEN-PER-CENT SOLUTION

by Nicholas Meyer (1974)

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

by Mary Higgins Clark (1975)

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

by Jack Higgins (1975)

EYE OF THE NEEDLE

by Ken Follett (1976)

RAISE THE TITANIC!

by Clive Cussler (1976)

COMA

by Robin Cook (1977)

A MORBID TASTE OF BONES

by Ellis Peters (1977)

THE LAST GOOD KISS

by James Crumley (1979)

GORKY PARK

by Martin Cruz Smith (1981)

A IS FOR ALIBI

by Sue Grafton (1982)

INDEMNITY ONLY

by Sara Paretsky (1982)

LA BRAVA

by Elmore Leonard (1983)

THE HUNT FOR THE RED
OCTOBER by Tom Clancy (1984)

PRESUMED INNOCENT

by Scott Turow (1986)

THE CAT WHO SAW RED
by Lillian Jackson Braun (1986)

THE BLACK DAHLIA
by James Ellroy (1987)

SILENCE OF THE LAMBS
by Thomas Harris (1988)

CATERING TO NOBODY
by Diane Mott Davidson (1990)

THE DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS
by Walter Mosley (1990)

POSTMORTEM
by Patricia Cornwell (1990)

THE FIRM
by John Grisham (1991)

BOOKED TO DIE
by John Dunning (1992)

THE BLACK ECHO
by Michael Connelly (1992)

ALONG CAME A SPIDER
by James Patterson (1993)

ONE FOR THE MONEY
by Janet Evanovich (1994)

KILLING FLOOR
by Lee Child (1997)

THE DA VINCI CODE
by Dan Brown (2003)

TWILIGHT
by Stephenie Meyer (2005)

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON
TATTOO
by Stieg Larsson (2008)

GONE GIRL
by Gillian Flynn (2012)

Have I left any influential title off
that should be on?

Great Reads from the Bouchercon Era 1969-2019

Here are some of the challenges in creating such a list as this. Take a popular author such as Michael Connelly. Which is his best book? Opinions differ. So the approach I have taken is to list the first book of a famous author, especially if it is the first book in a series.

There are certain areas of mystery fiction that I know nothing about such as romantic suspense, paranormal mystery and young adult mystery. In such areas I asked advise of readers who are very familiar with those sub-genre's.

I paid more attention to award winners when authors went on to have successful careers.

The closer I got to the present time, the more difficult it was to choose titles because recent books and new authors haven't passed the test of time.

This list can be as long as we want it to be, but an addition of 20-25 more titles should make it a reasonable size. I haven't annotated all the awards the books have won yet.

The temptation will be to add obscure favorites. Resist it. I'm aiming for titles that have a wide following.

It is said that mystery readers love lists. If that is true, you should really like this one. For me it's a trip down memory lane. For a new reader to the genre, it is a guarantee of great reading for years to come.

Your suggestions are welcome.

1969

THE GODFATHER by Mario Puzo

1970

THE HOT ROCK

by Donald E. Westlake

THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE

by George V. Higgins

THE NEW CENTURIONS

by Joseph Wambaugh

FADEOUT by Joseph Hansen

THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN by
Per Wahloo & Maj Sjowall – Edgar
Winner

1971

THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

by Frederick Forsyth – Edgar Winner
THE STEAM PIG by James McClure –
CWA Gold Dagger Winner

1972

FIRST BLOOD by David Morrell

SADIE WHEN SHE DIED

by Ed McBain

DEATH WISH by Brian Garfield

THE EIGER SANCTION

by Trevanian

1973

THE GODWOLF MANUSCRIPT

by Robert B. Parker

DANCE HALL OF THE DEAD

by Tony Hillerman – Edgar Winner

THE FIRST DEADLY SIN

by Lawrence Sanders

1974

MARATHON MAN

by William Goldman

THE SEVEN-PER-CENT SOLUTION

by Nicholas Meyer – CWA Gold
Dagger Winner

TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY

by John le Carre'

FLETCH by Gregory McDonald –

Edgar 1st Novel Winner

SPY STORY by Len Deighton

THE TEARS OF AUTUMN

by Charles McCarry

SIX DAYS OF THE CONDOR

by James Grady

1975

CROCODILE ON THE SANDBANK

by Elizabeth Peters

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

by Jack Higgins

A THREE-PIPE PROBLEM

by Julian Symons

SNEAKY PEOPLE by Thomas Berger

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

by Mary Higgins Clark

THE WRONG CASE

by James Crumley

1976

THE BLUE HAMMER

by Ross MacDonald

**DANGEROUS DAVIES: THE LAST
DETECTIVE** by Leslie Thomas

THE NIGHT OF THE TWELFTH

by Michael Gilbert

RAISE THE TITANIC!

by Clive Cussler

THE JUDAS PAIR by Jonathan Gash –
CWA 1st Novel Winner

1977

BURGLARS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS

by Lawrence Block

TRUE CONFESSIONS

by John Gregory Dunne

CHARLIE M by Brian Freemantle

THE JUDAS PAIR by Jonathan Gash

LAILAW by William McIlvanney –
CWA Silver Dagger Winner

COMA by Robin Cook

A MORBID TASTE OF BONES

by Ellis Peters

EDWIN OF THE IRON SHOES

by Marcia Muller

A JUDGEMENT IN STONE

by Ruth Rendell

SHADOW OF A BROKEN MAN

by George C. Chesbro

1978

EYE OF THE NEEDLE by Ken Follett –
Edgar Winner

REST YOU MERRY

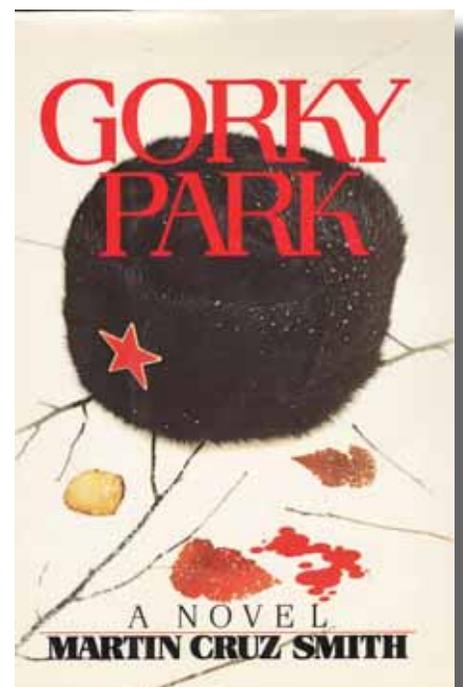
by Charlotte MacLeod

RUMPOLE OF THE BAILEY

by John Mortimer

WAXWORK by Peter Lovesey – CWA
Silver Dagger Winner

1979



THE CATER STREET HANGMAN

by Anne Perry

THE GREEN RIPPER

by John D. MacDonald

1980

THE MASTER SNIPER

by Stephen Hunter

THE BOURNE IDENTITY

by Robert Ludlum

THE MURDER OF THE

MAHARAJAH by H.R.F. Keating –

CWA Gold Dagger Winner

WHIP HAND by Dick Francis – Edgar

Winner, CWA Gold Dagger Winner

1981

CHIEFS by Stuart Woods –

Edgar 1st Novel Winner

THE DEAD OF JERICHO

by Colin Dexter –

CWA Silver Dagger Winner

GORKY PARK by Martin Cruz Smith

– CWA Gold Dagger Winner

THUS WAS ADONIS MURDERED

by Sarah Caudwell

THE MAN WITH A LOAD OF MIS-

CHIEF by Martha Grimes

1982

AN UNSUITABLE JOB FOR A

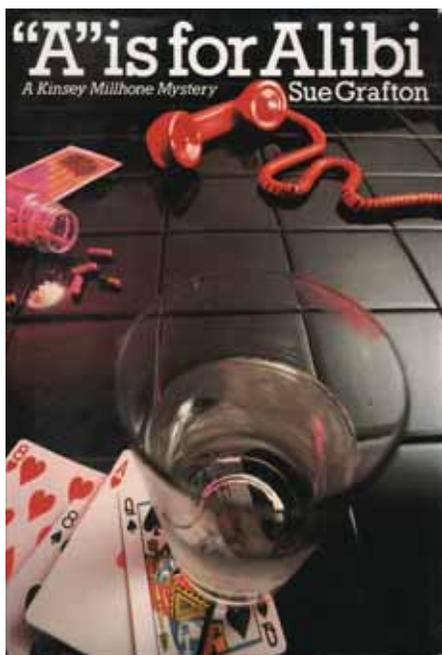
WOMAN by P.D. James

A IS FOR ALIBI by Sue Grafton

INDEMNITY ONLY by Sara Paretsky

PRIZZI'S HONOR by Richard Condon

THE FALSE INSPECTOR DEW



by Peter Lovesey –

CWA Gold Dagger Winner

THE BUTCHER'S BOY by Thomas

Perry – Edgar 1st Novel Winner

1983

THE NAME OF THE ROSE

by Umberto Eco

SHADOW TRADE by Alan Furst

LA BRAVA by Elmore Leonard –

Edgar Winner

UNCIVIL SEASONS

by Michael Malone

TRUE DETECTIVE

by Max Allen Collins

1984

BRIARPATCH by Ross Thomas –

Edgar Winner

THE HUNT FOR THE RED

OCTOBER by Tom Clancy

FROST AT CHRISTMAS

by R. D. Wingfield

1985

LAGUNA HEAT by T. Jefferson Parker

THE SUSPECT by L.R. Wright –

Edgar Winner

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS

by Jonathan Kellerman – Edgar 1st

Novel Winner, Anthony 1st Winner

FLOOD by Andrew Vachss

1986

PRESUMED INNOCENT

by Scott Turow –

CWA Silver Dagger Winner

THE CAT WHO SAW RED

by Lilian Jackson Braun

A DARK-ADAPTED EYE

by Barbara Vine (Ruth Rendell) –

Edgar Winner

RITUAL BATH by Faye Kellerman –

Macavity Winner (1st)

1987

DEATH ON DEMAND

by Carolyn Hart

THE BLACK DAHLIA by James Ellroy

THE MONKEY'S RAINCOAT

by Robert Crais – Anthony PBO

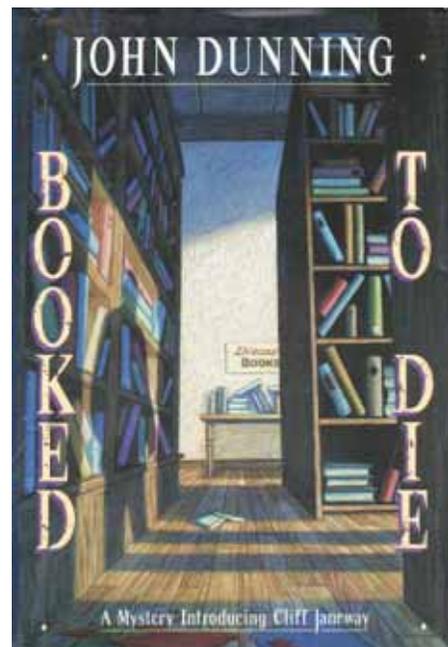
Winner, Macavity Winner

THE NEON RAIN by James Lee Burke

WHAT BLOODY MAN IS THAT?

by Simon Brett

OLD BONES by Aaron Elkins –



Edgar Winner

1988

SILENCE OF THE LAMBS by Thomas

Harris – Anthony Winner

A GREAT DELIVERANCE

by Elizabeth George – Anthony Winner,

Agatha Winner

COLD IN JULY by Joe R. Lansdale

SHACKLES by Bill Pronzini

THE EIGHT by Katherine Neville

A COLD RED SUNRISE

by Stuart M. Kaminsky –

Edgar Winner

THE CHARM SCHOOL

by Nelson DeMille

1989

HALLOWED MURDER by Ellen Hart

DEAD IRISH by John Lescroart

THE SILVER PIGS by Lindsey Davis

MARCH VIOLETS by Philip Kerr

RULES OF PREY by John Sandford

HOUSE OF CARDS by Michael Dobbs

THE WENCH IS DEAD

by Colin Dexter –

CWA Gold Dagger Winner

LONELY HEARTS by John Harvey

1990

CATERING TO NOBODY

by Diane Mott Davidson

POSTMORTEM by Patricia Cornwell –

Edgar 1st Novel Winner, CWA 1st Novel

Winner, Anthony Winner, Macavity

Winner

THE DEVIL IN THE BLUE DRESS

by Walter Mosley – CWA 1st Novel
Winner, Shamus 1st Winner

L. A. CONFIDENTIAL by James Ellroy

1991

FACELESS KILLERS

by Henning Mankell

THE FIRM by John Grisham

ROMAN BLOOD by Steven Saylor

A DANCE AT THE SLAUGHTER-

HOUSE by Lawrence Sanders –

Edgar Winner

THE LAST DETECTIVE

by Peter Lovesey –

Anthony Award Winner

HEARTSHOT by Steven F. Havill

ORCHESTRATED DEATH

by Cynthia Harrod-Eagles

STOLEN AWAY by Max Allan Col-

lins – Shamus Winner

1992

BOOKED TO DIE by John Dunning –

Nero Wolfe Award Winner

FATHERLAND by Robert Harris

THE SECRET HISTORY

by Donna Tartt

THE BLACK ECHO

by Michael Connelly –

Edgar 1st Novel Winner

THE BOOTLEGGERS' DAUGHTER

by Margaret Maron – Edgar Winner,

Anthony Winner, Macavity Winner,

Agatha Winner

THE ICE HOUSE by Minette Walters

– CWA 1st Novel Winner

1993

EVERYWHERE THAT MARY WENT

by Lisa Scottoline

POINT OF IMPACT

by Stephen Hunter

TRACK OF THE CAT

by Nevada Barr – Agatha 1st Winner,

Anthony 1st Winner

ALONG CAME A SPIDER

by James Patterson

THE SCULPTRESS by Minette Walters

– Edgar Winner, Macavity Winner

SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW

by Peter Hoeg

A SHARE IN DEATH

by Deborah Crombie

1994

THE ALIENIST by Caleb Carr

THE BEEKEEPER'S APPRENTICE

by Laurie R. King

ONE FOR THE MONEY

by Janet Evanovich

MALLORY'S ORACLE

by Carol O'Connell

1995

BREAKHEART HILL

by Thomas H. Cook

THE EAGLE CATCHER

by Margaret Coel

THE MERMAIDS SINGING

by Val McDermid

1996

TEST OF WILLS by Charles Todd

ABSOLUTE POWER

by David Baldacci

TULAROSA by Michael McGarrity

1997

KILLING FLOOR by Lee Child

BLACK AND BLUE by Ian Rankin

TRIAL OF PASSION

by William Deverell

THE BONE COLLECTOR

by Jeffrey Deaver

A CERTAIN JUSTICE by P.D. James

AN INSTANCE OF THE

FINGERPOST by Iain Pears

DEJA DEAD by Kathy Reichs

1998

THE NO.1 LADIES' DETECTIVE

AGENCY by Alexander McCall Smith

GONE, BABY GONE

by Dennis Lehane

ON BEULAH HEIGHT

by Reginald Hill

IRON LAKE by William Kent Krueger

GARNETHILL by Denise Mina

1999

IN A DRY SEASON by Peter Robinson

PLACE OF EXECUTION

by Val McDermid

RIVER OF DARKNESS

by Rennie Airth

EVERY DEAD THING

by John Connolly

MURDER WITH PEACOCKS

by Donna Andrews

2000

FORTY WORDS FOR SORROW

by Giles Blunt

THE BOTTOMS by Joe R. Lansdale --

Edgar Winner

THE KILL ARTIST by Daniel Silva

BIRDMAN by Mo Hayder

BLACK DOG by Stephen Booth

2001

THE GUARDS by Ken Bruen

DEAD UNTIL DARK

by Charlaine Harris

THE COMPANY by Robert Littell

MYSTIC RIVER by Dennis Lehane

TELL NO ONE by Harlan Coben

OPEN SEASON by C. J. Box

DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD

by Reginald Hill

GRIFT SENSE by James Swain

BLINDSIGHTED by Karin Slaughter

2002

IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER

by Julia Spencer-Fleming

THE BUSINESS OF DYING

by Simon Kernick

RAIN FALL by Barry Eisler

2003

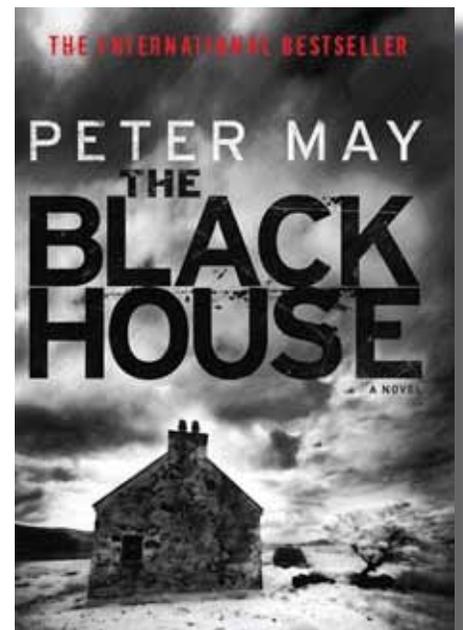
MONKEEWRENCH by P.J. Tracy

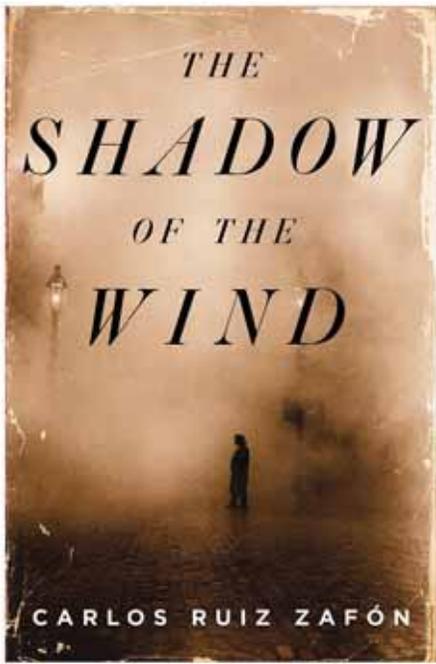
THE DA VINCI CODE

by Dan Brown

MAISIE DOBBS

by Jacqueline Winspear





DISSOLUTION by C. J. Sansom

2004

THE SHADOW OF THE WIND

by Carlos Ruiz Zafón

THE COLD DISH by Craig Johnson

DARKLY DREAMING DEXTER

by Jeff Lindsay

2005

DIE A LITTLE by Megan Abbott

POWER OF THE DOG

by Don Winslow

THE BROKEN SHORE by Peter Tem-

ple – CWA Gold Dagger Winner

STILL LIFE by Louise Penny

SILENCE OF THE GRAVE

by Arnaldur Indridason

THE DEVIL'S STAR by Jo Nesbø

TWILIGHT by Stephenie Meyer

THE LINCOLN LAWYER

by Michael Connelly

RED LEAVES

by Thomas H. Cook -- Barry Winner

2006

RAVEN BLACK by Ann Cleeves

IN THE WOODS by Tana French

BILLY BOYLE by James R. Benn

THE TEMPLAR LEGACY

by Steve Berry

THE NIGHT GARDENER

by George Pelecanos

2007

NO TIME FOR GOODBYE

by Linwood Barclay

WHAT THE DEAD KNOW

by Laura Lippman

2008

A BEAUTIFUL PLACE TO DIE

by Malla Nunn

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON

TATTOO by Stieg Larsson

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DUMMY

by R. L. Stine

BLEEDING HEART SQUARE

by Andrew Taylor

2009

THE GRAY MAN by Mark Greaney

CHILD 44 by Tom Rob Smith

SWORN TO SILENCE

by Linda Castillo

THE SWEETNESS AT THE BOTTOM

OF THE PIE by Alan Bradley

2010

THIRTEEN HOURS by Deon Meyer

SLOW HORSES by Mick Herron

WINTER'S BONE by Daniel Woodrell

THE LAST CHILD by John Hart

THE HUNGER GAMES

by Suzanne Collins

POWER DOWN by Ben Coes

THE POACHER'S SON by Paul Doiron

2011

THE LOCK ARTIST by Steve Hamilton

THE BLACKHOUSE by Peter May --

Barry Award Winner

BEFORE I GO TO SLEEP

by S. J. Watson

LETHAL by Sandra Brown

THE KEEPER OF LOST CAUSES

by Jussi Adler Olsen

2012

GONE GIRL by Gillian Flynn

THE WILD BEASTS OF WUHAN

by Ian Hamilton

DARK WINTER by David Mark

2013

SUSPECT by Robert Crais

SHE'S LEAVING HOME

by William Shaw

ORDINARY GRACE

by William Kent Krueger --

Barry Award Winner

THE CUCKOO'S CALLING

by Robert Galbraith

2014

THE LIFE WE BURY by Allen Eskens

LIFE OR DEATH

by Michael Robotham

MR. MERCEDES by Stephen King --

Edgar Award Winner

2015

THE CARTEL by Don Winslow

THE SYMPATHIZER

by Viet Thanh Nguyen

ALL THE OLD KNIVES

by Olen Steinhauer

2016

A RISING MAN by Abir Mukherjee

GIRL ON A TRAIN by Paula Hawkins

THE DRIFTER by Nick Petrie

MISSING, PRESUMED

by Susie Steiner

2017

SHE RIDES SHOTGUN

by Jordan Harper

THE DRY by Jane Harper

THE MARSH KING'S DAUGHTER

by Karen Dionne

BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD

by Attica Locke

2018

NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney

As a reviewer, it's my job to at least make a scratch at describing the plot of the novel, but as a fellow novelist, I balk at giving more than a few bare details. (In my opinion, the flap copy gives away far too much — when you know everything that's going to happen in the first 140 pages or so, somebody went overboard.) A good novel, especially one that fits, however uncomfortably, into the mystery genre, is like an expensive Swiss watch. My job is to admire it, not overwind it. — Stephen King

Obscurity Was NOT The Plan

by George H. Madison

Clarence Budington Kelland (1881-1964) once described himself as “the best second rate writer in America”. He was not alone in his evaluation. Each month during the 1920’s, 30’s and 40’s, it was virtually impossible not to find one of his serialized short stories in the omnipresent magazines of the day. He sold more than one million dollars’ worth of short stories and articles to the *Saturday Evening Post* alone. Kelland was an economic engine to corporate owners whose readers breathlessly awaited each month’s installment. He penned 60 novels, many of them mysteries; 200 short stories and inspired 30 movies. He was the literary idol of the young John O’Hara. In 1995, author Harlan Ellison was reflecting on literary legacies and prophetically remarked – “In this time when cultural illiteracy is at its peak.....if Clarence Budington Kelland can’t make it, how the hell am I going to make it!”

Who was Kelland? Born in Portland, Michigan, he enjoyed a joyful Tom Sawyer-like boyhood. He later described it

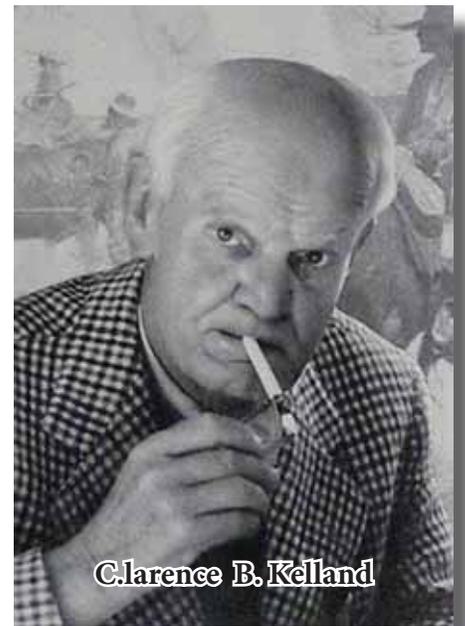
I GET UP IN THE
MORNING, TORTURE
A TYPEWRITER UNTIL
IT SCREAMS, THEN
STOP.

Clarence Budington Kelland
QUOTED.COM American Writer

as “the happiest and fullest days of my life”. At the age of 10, his family moved to Detroit to offer him “a more nourishing environment”. He must have been quite precocious because after only two years of high school, he entered Detroit Law School, earning his degree in 1902. It was a slightly different path than the one I recall traveling several decades later.

In true Horatio Alger style he became wealthy, although not as a practicing attorney. His success in commerce created an economic independence that permitted him, as it did for Rex Stout, to write full time. He traveled extensively and married well. By mid-career, he was recognized by most critics as prominent, but his writing was also considered by some to be somewhat superficial; “merely a contriver of fast moving entertaining fiction.” Since when is it a bad thing to possess a consummate ability to entertain?

Kelland was always a wit, and his prominence insured his presence within New York City’s literary elite. The prestigious Dutch Treat Club (est. 1905) is still existent. It is an exclusive enclave for creative artists, meeting each Tuesday at noon where its members, at times numbering over 300, upstage each other, eat and then split the bill (hence its name). Kelland served as its president from 1927-1941). While serving as its toastmaster, he once rose to speak at meals end. “Gentlemen”, he began, “the obvious duty of a toast master is to be so infernally dull, that the succeeding speakers will appear to be brilliant by contrast.....However”, he continued brandishing a list of the speakers, “I’ve



Clarence B. Kelland

looked over the list, and I don’t believe I can do it.” His fellow members roared with laughter at the vintage Kelland drollery.

In 1937, he relocated from the east coast to Phoenix, Arizona, where he settled and continued to write until his death at 82 years in 1964. He became active in state and national Republican politics, preceding Barry Goldwater as Arizona’s voice of right wing Republicanism. That, however, did not prevent him from being a curmudgeon, attacking both parties on the issues when he felt it was warranted. He spent a lifetime being outspoken and was occasionally cantankerous, as well.

Kelland authored more than 20 mysteries, although they are exceedingly difficult to identify and find. I’ve read and enjoyed 13 of them and firmly hold him to be a most adept storyteller. His plots are deceptively simple and straight forward, but they always contain a puzzle and a few surprises en route to the denouement. Be aware that his corpus reflects a dedication to American life as seen from his early 20th century vantage point, one that includes the heartfelt belief that virtue must emerge victorious and that evil will be vanquished. Character and integrity mattered.

Protagonists are predictably outstanding and unusual humans. The leading men are virile, intelligent, ethical and competent. The women are

equal to their male counterparts and, therefore, more memorable especially given the era in which Kelland wrote. They are independent and never depicted as helpless damsels in distress. Kelland was a progressive conservative.

The supporting cast always includes a full complement of quirky eccentrics. They employ breezy, nimble dialogue to grin by, resulting in delightful banter and an enjoyable reading experience. The cast is companionable, as well as being improbable.

An excursion into Kelland's mysteries may motivate a few healthy souls to seek out his uncomplicated but rewarding books. What follows is a brief outline of a few of them.

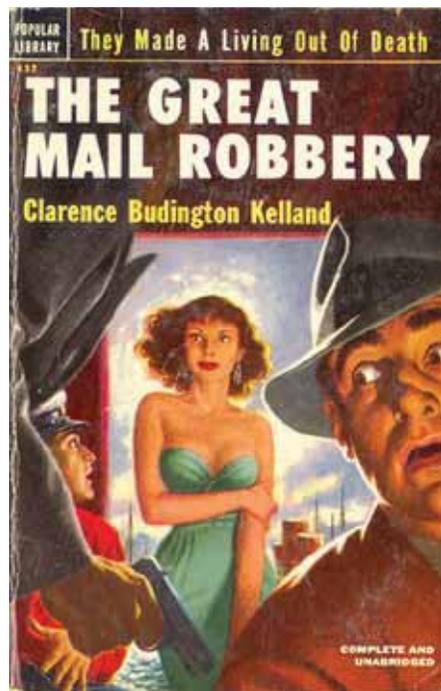
SKIN DEEP (1939) involves murder and blackmail at a beauty spa, only slightly interfering with a pre-ordained love affair. **SILVER SPOON** (1941) in which a rich, seemingly useless young man born with a silver spoon in his mouth becomes independent and solves a night club murder. Of course, he also falls in love with a superior women. **ARCHIBALD THE GREAT** (1942) features an eccentric genius and his protector as they solve crimes, while both find their mates.

HEART ON HIS SLEEVE (1943) is a novel of attempted sabotage combatted by a lovely woman and a young naval officer, both of whom maintain their sense of humor throughout their perilous adventure. **ALIAS JANE SMITH** (1944) Who is she? Fun and crime once again mingle. **LAND OF THE TORREONES** (1945) Same plot. This time the setting is in the southwest.

DOUBLE TREASURE (1946) Involves the search for pirate treasure on what was then a bucolic beach front community on the north shore of Suffolk County on Long Island, New York. The plot is somewhat more complex than normal.

THE KEY MAN (1952) Involves murder in the milieu of early TV studios, in the then sophisticated New York City, amidst a set of wealthy ice cold martini sippers. **DEATH KEEPS A SECRET** (1953) Murder and intrigue in a top secret research center.

THE GREAT MAIL ROBBERY



(1950) Murder and fraud in New York City's U.S. Post Office which is described as being "a miracle of efficiency, swiftness and accuracy". Given the current dismal state of the U.S. Postal Service, this one is a hoot. **MURDER MAKES AN ENTRANCE** (1954) Was my introduction to Kelland three years ago. It features enigmatic characters in a Hollywood whodunit. My obsession with him soon followed. **THE CASE OF THE NAMELESS CORPSE** (1956) Murder in the Canadian oil fields, with the detection complicated by three females.

All are recommended. Now, try to find them. Unless your library is in a time warp, don't even bother to check for Kelland. The existence of his books in libraries is somewhat akin to a flying emu.

It's ironic that since I view most things through the lens of the old Hollywood studios, Kelland's two enduring characters are not featured in mysteries. Instead, they are Longfellow Deeds, from the classic *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), played by Gary Cooper and Scattergood Baines, from a six-film series (1941-1943), featuring Guy Kibbee as the busy body hardware store owner. Neither character is much to my liking.

My favorite film, however, is a mad-cap mystery *for Beauty's Sake* (1941), adapted from the aforementioned **SKIN DEEP**. This trim – 61 minute – "B" film has a high entertainment value. Deadpan Ned Sparks; he of the dour disposition, the ever-present cigar and the W.C. Fields vocal delivery, steals the show as PR expert, Jonathan B. Smart. Comedienne Joan Davis is very amusing as his accidental assistant. Casting for the romantic leads is somewhat less fortunate. Marjorie Weaver is fine as the perky and smart Dime Pringle in love with the dense Bertram Erasmus Dillsome, played by Ted North who, sadly, cannot help being Ted North. His performance is apropos of a George S. Kaufman critique of an actor – "his acting was wooden, and I mean that as an insult to furniture". Nevertheless, sit back and enjoy the movie for its high zaniness quotient. Kelland's writing defines an American ethos, one from another era. It was a gentler day, one founded in tradition of stability and strong American values. He evokes in me a nostalgic longing. I can readily imagine myself lying on a hillock, day-dreaming happy thoughts while reading a Kelland mystery.



Maigret...Encore!

by Nancy - Stephanie Stone^{Nan-}

Unquestionably Georges Simenon was the most influential writer of French crime fiction in the 20th Century. Simenon was born in Liège, Belgium on February 13, 1903. He moved to Paris in 1922 to pursue a writing career and his Inspector Maigret stories began regularly appearing by the early 1930s. The 1930s were Simenon's decade: his books were popular and he travelled widely. As a café habitué, he was regarded as a glamorous intellectual with an erotic life featured in glossy magazines. It all changed, however, with the war. Initially, he remained in the Vendée (north) to help Belgian refugees but his dealings with the Germans were both questionable and profitable. At the war's end, he moved to Canada and later to the United States to escape charges of collaboration. Popular taste in crime fiction was also shifting away from Simenon towards authors such as Leo Malet and Claude Aveline, both resistance heroes. A decade later he briefly returned to France but eventually settled in Switzerland. He died in Lausanne on September

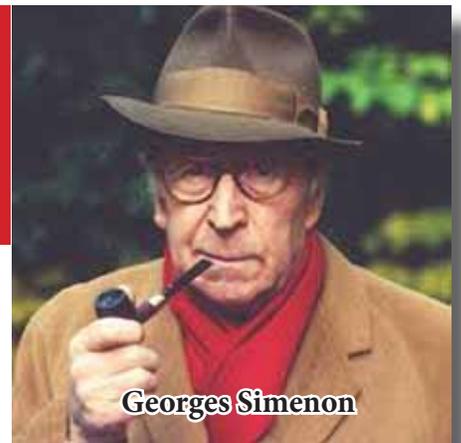
4, 1989 at age 86.

In more than forty-years, Simenon wrote at least five hundred novels (under various names) and innumerable short stories. Between 1931 and 1972, seventy-five of those novels and twenty-six short stories featured Inspector Jules Maigret of the Quai des Orfèvres. Initially, Simenon regarded the Maigret stories as a bridge to acceptance of his other writings (*les romans durs*) and planned to stop after 20 books. But the popularity of the series (and its financial rewards) ensured its continuation through Simenon's life. Like it or not, Maigret became his signature character.

Recently, Penguin began updating the Maigret series, replacing the older translations with contemporary ones with eye catching photographic covers. They have committed to publishing the series. So where to begin this feast from golden age French crime fiction?

A good introduction or reintroduction to Inspector Maigret is **MAIGRET'S MEMOIRS**, translated by Howard Curtis (Penguin, 2016, \$12). In 1927 or 1928 Maigret is called into his boss' office to meet a young novelist, George Sim (a name often used by Simenon). Sim follows Maigret about for a few days. Several months later a pulp police story appeared with Maigret as the protagonist, followed by the first of many successful Maigret novels. Sim also explains his choice of locales, supporting characters and plots and the evolution of Maigret and his fellow officers. **MAIGRET'S MEMOIRS**, written in 1951 when Simenon was more or less in exile, is a swansong to Paris of the 1930s and 1940s as well as backdrop for the series.

Originally written in 1932, **LIBERTY BAR**, translated by David Watson (Penguin, 2015, \$11), is a typical Maigret set on the Riviera. He is sent to investigate the death of Australian William

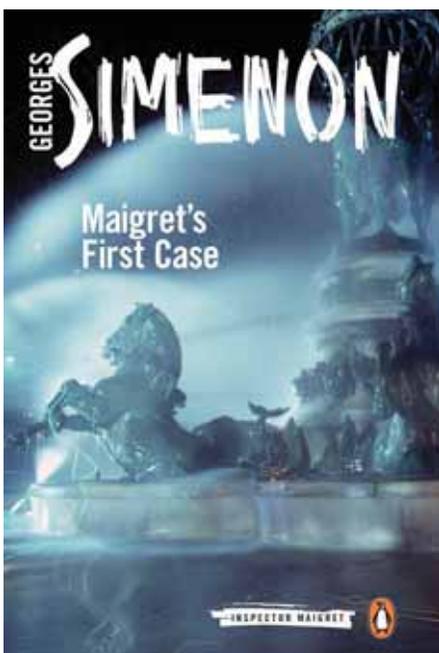


Georges Simenon

Brown, rumored to have been a secret agent in WWI. Maigret suspects greed rather than foreign intrigue is behind his death. Two eccentric women were apprehended fleeing from his rundown villa in Antibes with valises filled with cash and bonds. After establishing their innocence, he reconstructs Brown's life away from Antibes and ends up at the tawdry Liberty Bar in Cannes. Almost as odd as the Antibes ladies, Brown's lady friends in Cannes aren't as innocent.

1930s Paris provides the background for **MAIGRET**, translated by Ros Schwartz (Penguin, 2015, \$11) and written in 1934. Maigret's nephew, Philippe, bungles a stakeout. He panics and picks up the murder weapon. He then rushes off in the middle of the night to get help from his uncle, who is recently retired and living in the country. Maigret realizes it's a gang killing and, if Philippe hadn't become involved, the police would have ignored it. With Philippe under arrest, Maigret gets help from his old colleagues at the Quai des Orfèvres in solving the murder. With its retired protagonist, **MAIGRET**, was intended by Simenon to be a harbinger of the series' end.

Although Maigret felt most comfortable in France, he did sometimes venture beyond its borders. In **MAIGRET IN NEW YORK**, translated by Linda Coverdale (Penguin, 2016, \$12) and written in 1947, young Jean Maura asks Maigret to accompany him to New York as he's concerned for the safety of his wealthy, businessman father. Upon arriving by ship, young Maura disap-



pears, leaving Maigret to find his way to the St. Regis Hotel where he's rebuffed by John Maura and his secretary, Joseph MacGill. Puzzled by this behavior and Jean's disappearance, Maigret contacts his friend, Special Agent O'Brien of the FBI, who provides background on Maura's early life as an immigrant in the Bronx. It seems his past has caught up with him. **MAIGRET IN NEW YORK** was written while Simenon was living in the United States and offers a different perspective on the American immigrant experience.

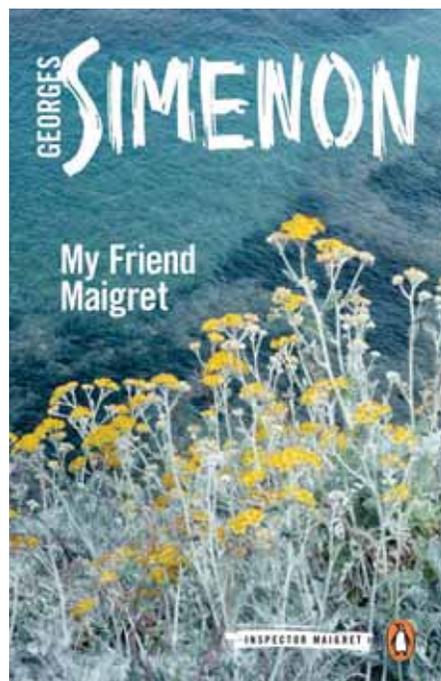
MAIGRET GETS ANGRY, translated by Ros Schwartz (Penguin, 2015, \$12) and written in 1947, is both a mystery and a glimpse into the French prewar society. Bernadette Amorelle, a determined old lady, disrupts Maigret's retirement in Meung-sur-Loire, to persuade him to come to Orsenne to investigate her granddaughter, Monita's suicide. Soon Maigret is enmeshed in the family affairs of Ernest Malik, who he had known and disliked since their days at lycée. The family's opulent life style makes him uncomfortable. He senses all isn't well even before Ernest tries to buy him off. Using the "retired" Inspector, **MAIGRET GETS ANGRY** was yet another of Simenon's tries to move the series toward its conclusion.

Maigret is still at the Quai des Orfèvres in **MAIGRET'S DEAD MAN**, translated by David Coward (Penguin, 2016, \$12) and written in 1948. He receives a series of telephone calls from a man claiming someone is going to kill him. And then, they do. Maigret eventually identifies the victim as Albert Rochain, the owner of a small café. He decides to reopen the café with two police officers posing as the proprietors to see if the killers might become curious and come in. His hunch is correct as a gang member appears and a deadly chase ensues. The fleeing man is shot by one of the gang rather than captured. Maigret realizes that he's not facing the usual Paris criminals but a vicious gang of stateless thugs. As the violence escalates, he would rather let their leader escape than have his men killed. Postwar Paris provides very different and unwelcome challenges for Inspector

Maigret.

MY FRIEND MAIGRET, translated by Shaun Whiteside (Penguin, 2016, \$12.) and written in 1949, finds Maigret mentoring Mr. Pyke from Scotland Yard. A low-level criminal, Marcellini, who claimed friendship with Maigret, has been murdered on Porquerolles, an island off Toulon. Both men are sent to the island to find Marcellini's killer. They encounter the island's eccentric residents and expatriates as well as a few minor criminals. Maigret suspects Marcellini discovered some illegal dealings and wanted a share. To uncover the killer, he must discover who had the most to lose among the island's lost souls.

MAIGRET AT THE CORONER'S, translated by Linda Coverdale (Penguin, 2016, \$12) and written 1949 when Simenon was living in the United States and set in Arizona. While touring the U.S. and studying American law enforcement, Maigret finds himself at a coroner's inquest in Tucson. Bessie Mitchell, a 17-year old girl, died after spending a drunken evening with five men from a nearby airbase. She wandered off into the desert and was hit by a train. The inquest must determine who last saw her alive and was her death accidental. It's a humdrum plot. What's more interesting is Maigret's feeling to-



ward postwar America with its excess of material goods and health of its people that contrasted with war ravaged France with its food shortages, health problems and lack of material goods. Simenon flashes an unexpected dislike of American innocence in a country that really remained untouched by war.

Simenon was never comfortable with female characters and nowhere is this more evident than in **MADAME MAIGRET'S FRIEND** translated by Howard Curtis (Penguin, 2016, \$12) and written in 1950. In most stories, Mme. Maigret makes a cameo appearance when her husband comes home from the office for lunch. But in **MADAME MAIGRET'S FRIEND**, she conducts her own investigation. To calm her nerves before a series of dental appointments, Mme. Maigret sat on a park bench and encountered a young woman in a fashionable white hat and her two-year old son. One morning, she asks Mme. Maigret to briefly watch the boy and disappears for over an hour. She returns in a taxi, grabs her son, and drives away. Using the hat as a point of reference, Mme. Maigret tries to discover the woman's identity. At the same time, Maigret receives questionable information that an elderly Belgian bookbinder burned a body in his furnace. Much to Maigret's surprise, two teeth are discovered in the furnace. In a most convoluted way, the two investigations merge but the culprits meet different fates.

The underside of Montmartre is the setting for **MAIGRET AT PICTATT'S**, translated by William Hobson (Penguin, 2016, \$12) and written in 1951. Arlette, who worked at Picratt's, overheard two

men talking about murdering a countess and stealing her jewels. Although she was quite drunk after an evening's work, she contacts the police. But they dismissed her story and sent her home where she was murdered. Maigret suspects someone from Arlette's past was responsible for her death. But then, a countess is killed, confirming her story.

An almost benign relationship between the police and the Paris underworld is reflected in **MAIGRET AND THE TALL WOMAN** translated by David Watson (Penguin, 2016, \$13) and written in 1951. An elderly prostitute, whom Maigret arrested 15 years earlier, asks to see him. Her husband, Albert, a safecracker, discovered a body during a robbery, panicked and fled from Paris. Maigret locates the house but its owners, M. Serre and his mother, deny any problems. In fact, he is rudely ushered away. In leaving, Maigret notices a rear windowpane recently repaired. He learns that M. Serre's wealthy wife, Maria, has recently returned to Amsterdam. But he suspects she's dead.

MAIGRET AND THE MAN ON THE BENCH translated by David Watson (Penguin, 2017, \$13) and written in 1953 is a story of family crime. Louis Thouret's body is discovered in an alley off Boulevard Saint Martin. He was killed with a knife but not robbed. When Maigret speaks with his widow, she's most disturbed over his brown shoes and red tie—neither of which she had ever seen. Although Thouret lost his job three years earlier and spent his time sitting on park benches, he was never short for money. His daughter Monique and her boyfriend discovered his other life and blackmailed him but were not his killers.

American crime and violence comes to Paris in **MAIGRET, LOGNON AND THE GANGSTERS**, translated by William Hobson (Penguin, 2017, \$13) and written in 1954. During a stake-out, Inspector Lognon observes a body thrown from a moving car. Before he can call it in, a second car collects the body. Rather than immediately informing Maigret, Lognon tries to solve the mystery of the missing body,



resulting in the gangsters' threat to his wife. Realizing that the gangsters were American, Maigret calls a friend at the FBI to learn their identity. He's told by retired Mafiosi that it's an American affair. But after one of his officers is seriously wounded, Maigret can no longer stand aside.

MAIGRET TAKES A ROOM, translated by Shaun Whiteside, (Penguin, 2016, \$13) and was written in 1960. One of Maigret's inspectors is shot during a boardinghouse stake-out. Maigret discovers the suspect hidden under the landlady's bed but is convinced that he wasn't the shooter. He decides to take a room in Mme. Clément's boardinghouse to better understand the neighborhood and its residents. He suspects the shooting was related to an old case and a misunderstanding.

Taken together, these Inspector Maigret stories mostly stand the test of time. Maigret is revealed as someone who tries to understand rather than judge the situation. He's also the leader of a group of police officers and puts the lives of his men before catching criminals. No matter the story's supposed time, the setting is usually prewar France (before his exile). Simenon's Maigret stories, written in a spare style that was admired by Ernest Hemingway, average about 160 pages and can easily be read on a flight to France or even on the Eurostar. *C'est pas mal.*

George Easter's Top Reads of 2018

THE RUIN by Dervla McTiernan
DARK SACRED NIGHT
 by Michael Connelly
RESURRECTION BAY
 by Emma Viskic
PERSONS UNKNOWN
 by Susie Steiner
CITY OF SINNERS
 by A. A. Dhand
NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney

Really Good Honorable Mentions

SNAP by Belinda Bauer
SPLINTER IN THE BLOOD by Ashley Dyer (Margaret Murphy)
BROKEN GROUND
 by Val McDermid
WRONG LIGHT by Matt Coyle
THE SHADOWS WE HIDE
 by Allen Eskens
A NECESSARY EVIL
 by Abir Mukherjee
CLOSER THAN YOU KNOW
 by Brad Parks
SALT LANE by William Shaw
SWEET LITTLE LIES by Caz Frear
DEAD PRETTY by David Mark

Favorite Thrillers

AGENT IN PLACE
 by Mark Greaney
HOUSE WITNESS
 by Mike Lawson
THE KREMLIN'S CANDIDATE
 by Jason Matthews
LIGHT IT UP by Nick Petrie
THE BOMBMAKER
 by Thomas Perry
THE FOX by Frederick Forsyth
THE KING TIDES by James Swain
THE FRACTURED by Brett Battles



Editor's Message



Big Changes for DP. IMPORTANT TO READ. Most successful magazines are kept alive by selling advertising, something I have long been determined to avoid. Join that with mounting frustration with the printing and mailing processes I have to go through with each issue, and my age of 74 (lifting heavy mail bags is becoming burdensome) and I've come to the conclusion that changes have to be made in order to keep *Deadly Pleasures* viable. A price hike alone will not suffice, although it will be an effective band-aid for the next little while. My goal is to keep producing *DP* as long as my health (which is pretty good at present) holds up.

I have made the decision to print this issue and three more issues, through Issue 88. Issue 89 will be digital only. I will produce it and subsequent issues as pdf files and will send the link to download it from the website (deadlypleasures.com) to those subscribers who pay for the digital subscription (**\$10 for 4 issues for both foreign and domestic subscriptions**) and provide me with a good e-mail address. I understand that this will cause some consternation for those of you who don't own computers or don't have access to computers (although everyone has access to a computer through local libraries or through those owned by friends and relatives). If you have issues owed past Issue 88, I will convert remaining subscription amounts to the digital rate for those who want to continue or refund owed amounts to those who do not wish to continue with the digital-only version of *DP*.

Advantages

1. No printing and mailing costs. Proposed cost of subscription \$2.50/per issue. No more dealing with the printer and post office will be heaven for me. That alone will speed up production by 2-3 weeks and I would be able to get the issues out more on time. I would like to

generate enough income to at least cover expenses – which will be much lower without printing and mailing costs. I figure I'll need around 300 subscribers to break even, which shouldn't be too difficult – I hope. Profit motive has never been a major factor in my publishing of *Deadly Pleasures* (thank goodness!).

2. Delivery is instantaneous – no wait on the post office to deliver (or lose it).

3. All photos and illustrations in magazine can be in color unless a black and white one is the only option. Layout will be a little simpler because I won't have to bump up resolution of every photo in the magazine to reach printer-quality levels. I can just use the 72 dpi color graphics from the internet and they should look just fine.

4. Each issue will be searchable. If you want to know if there is a Peter Lovesey mention in the issue you can search and instantly go to that section.

5. Each issue can be sent to every publicist (not just publicity departments) more authors, booksellers, etc. Much easier to send out free issue samples to gain more readers.

6. Not limited to any set number of pages (84 pages at present). The "jigsaw puzzle" of layout will be a lot simpler.

7. The pdf version of *DP* looks great on tablets, such as my iPad. One should be able to adjust the size of type to fit your preferred reading size.

Disadvantages

1. No print magazine to hold in hand unless one prints out the pdf file on a printer. I'll check into costs, but most copy centers have a cheap rate for black/white copies of about 5 or 6 cents. So you can take the pdf file to a copy center on a thumb drive and print off the issue for \$5.00 to \$6.00. If you have a laser printer at home, you can print it off at a much lower cost. If you try to print an issue on an ink jet printer, you will find the cost to be very high because you will

use up a lot of expensive ink printing off 84 pages. Not recommended. I'll have to see what it costs to print out in color at a copy center.

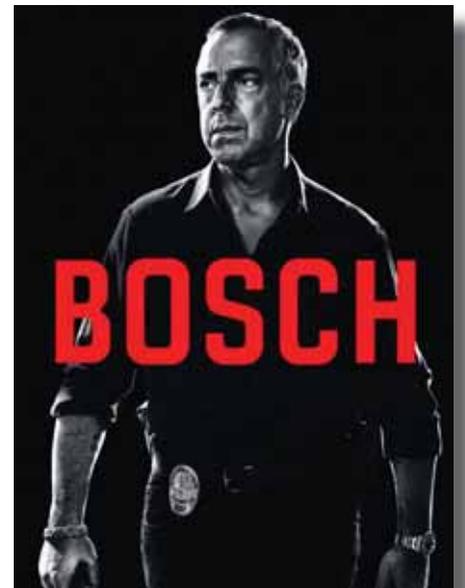
2. Unavailable to people who don't have a computer or won't go to the trouble to access a public one.

3. Not as pleasant to read on a computer screen as on a tablet screen or print version.

I plan to convert this issue that you have in your hand (#85) into a color pdf issue which I will send by an e-mailed link to any subscriber who e-mails a request to me at george@deadlypleasures.com. Put "PDF Request" in the subject line. You can experiment and give me feedback as to how well that works (I'll print the best responses in the next issue), so that when I get to Issue 89 I'll have all the wrinkles worked out. This will be very helpful to me.

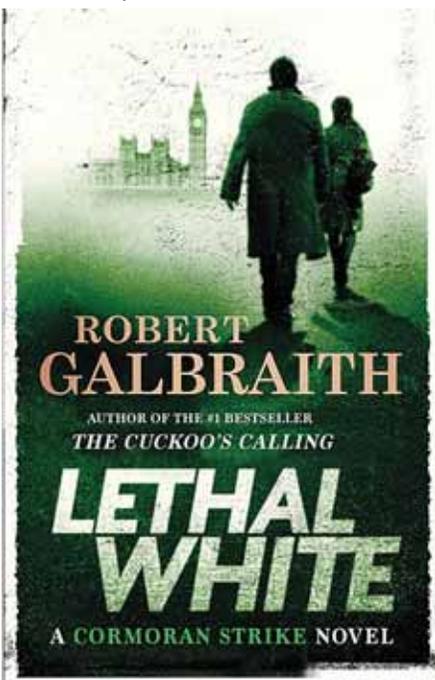
I hope that you will work with me on this. I realize that it will be a disruption, but it shouldn't be a major one for most of you. Long live *Deadly Pleasures!*

Binge-Reading. With the advent of streaming and dvr's the term "binge watching" has become quite popular. It refers to the practice of watching multiple episodes of the same tv or movie series over a short period of time. If watching two or three hour-long episodes of a series on consecutive nights constitutes "binge-watching," then I confess to having done that with



the *Bosch* series on Amazon Prime, the *Wanted* series and the *Bodyguard* series, both on Netflix. But it's been many years since I binge-read a series within a short period of time. The major reason for that is the pretty constant flow of good books arriving each week on my doorstep. I find myself reading 6 to 8 books at a time. And sometimes a good book I have been reading gets put aside because a better book has just come into my possession. That has been my practice for the last couple of decades so there aren't large blocks of time to devote to a series of unread books. If I missed reading a book that has since become popular and well respected in mystery fiction circles it has always been difficult for me to go back and read it.

But in early December I decided to do just that. Robert Galbraith's (J. K. Rowling's) *LETHAL WHITE* arrived and I realized that I was getting further and further behind in this series, which now constitutes four novels. So I decided to read the first in the series, *THE CUCKOO'S CALLING*, which turned out to be a wonderful experience. I immediately picked up the second, then the third and finally the fourth – a total of 2050 pages. During this binge-reading, which took about three weeks, I didn't read anything else. One big plus was that all details of the book were fresh in my mind and I didn't have to



go back and re-read anything, as I do sometimes with series that I read one year at a time – as new books in a series are released. Although the mysteries were satisfyingly complex and puzzling, it was the back story of the main characters, Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott that kept me turning the pages.

So my New Year's resolution is to every once in awhile go on a binge-reading exercise. Next up is the Mick Herron's *Slough House* series. I'll keep you posted. (I can hear Larry Gandle groaning – he is not a fan of Mick Herron, except for one of his books.)



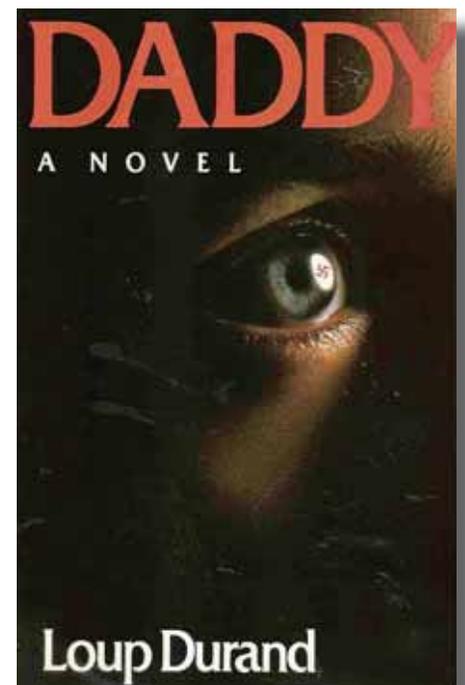
Jane Langton R.I.P. It is with profound sadness we announce the passing of Jane Langton, a 2017 Grand Master, on December 22, 2018 at age 96. In a writing career that spanned over four decades, Jane Langton had not only written multiple mystery series, but also illustrated them. Her first children's book, *THE MAJESTY OF GRACE*, was published by Harper in 1961. The first book of her Hall Family Chronicles series, *THE DIAMOND IN THE WINDOW*, was nominated for the Edgar for Best Juvenile. *THE FLEDGLING*, fourth in the series, was a Newberry Honor Book. Langton had written 18 books in the Homer (and Mary) Kelly series, published between 1964 and 2005. The fifth in the series, *EMILY DICKINSON IS DEAD*, was an Edgar nominee and received a Nero Wolfe Award. I treasure my signed Jane Langton books, that she not only signed, but added beautiful ink drawings appropriate to the plot and/or settings of the books.

Recommendation From Mike Ripley. In *DP* 84, Mike Ripley stated, "At a panel on vintage thrillers, Lee Child recommended a favourite novel I had

not read and even chastised me for not including it in my award-winning (have I mentioned that?) readers' history *KISS KISS BANG BANG* though suggesting this might be because the author was not British. He wasn't, he was French, and I've now tracked down a copy of *DADDY* and I must thank Lee for the recommendation. It's a cracker.

Loup Durand (1933-1995) only wrote three or four thrillers and *DADDY*, which appeared in English in 1988, was his greatest success. It is a fast-moving manhunt story – or to be more accurate, a boy hunt, as the hero is a highly intelligent 11-year-old who carries in his prodigious brain the secret whereabouts of bank accounts worth zillions, which are greedily sought by the Nazi hierarchy. The poor lad is chased across Vichy France in 1942, helped at first by some ruthlessly efficient Spanish bodyguards and then by an American who might just be the boy's estranged father.

It is a stunning thriller, crammed with 'tradecraft' on how to avoid or fool the Vichy police, the Gestapo, the SS and a wonderfully twisted Nazi academic, who hunt our young hero across France almost like 'beaters' pushing gamebirds towards the waiting guns. There is stone-cold shocking violence and some genuine cliff-hanging moments and would, I thought, make a breathless television series, only to



discover that it had, with plot changes, under the title *Entrusted*, some time after the author's death, though I do not believe it has ever been shown in the UK.

I can understand why Lee was so impressed with *DADDY* thirty years ago and I can attest that it still holds up as an impressive thriller today."

Well, I was impressed enough about a recommendation by Lee Child and Mike Ripley to seek out a copy of *DADDY* and read it. While I didn't quite think it was a "cracker," it did keep my interest all the way through and found it worthy of recommendation. Thanks Lee and Mike.



Supersaturating the Market. The strength of a mystery subgenre waxes and wains with perceived market demands. Now is the day of the domestic suspense/psychological suspense (hence the cover article of this issue). The market is being inundated (as am I) with new and relatively unknown authors who write in this subgenre. There are some very talented writers producing this kind of fiction, but also some not so good. I like to read one every once in a while – but not as a steady diet. That's why I rely on an expert on the subject who has good critical taste like Kristopher Zgorski to point me towards the gems (hence, the sterling cover article of this issue). But there will be a point

when readers will cry, "Basta, enough!" and then those types of titles will shrink back to normal levels. One of the really, really great things about the world of mystery/crime/thriller fiction is its diversity. When you get tired of reading a certain type of mystery, you have an almost infinite choice of alternatives, quite different from that which you have just finished reading.

Over the last few years, the market has been flooded with mass market paperback cozies, but of late there has been a big cutback from publishers such as Berkley and Kensington. I have a hard time now coming up with a decent list of cozy paperbacks to recommend. It's just the market adjusting.

Best Mysteries of the Year. Starting on page 67, I have added a number of "Best" lists for your perusal. I'm amazed at the diversity of opinion (of course, we are not all reading the same books). But it points out what a challenge it is to come up each year with the Barry Award nominations. Our nominating committees do a fabulous job, but it is very subjective and depends on what we have read. We on the committee communicate a few times during the year about really good books we have read -- to give opportunity for others on the committee to also read the same books. But we always seem to miss at least one title a year. Last year it was *BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD* by Attica Locke (it just missed the cutoff on the committee's final vote). This year there seems to be almost universal acclaim for *SUNBURN* by Laura Lippman. It was on our Barry Award longlist, but narrowly missed the cut. (I can't feel too bad for Laura Lippman who has won two Barry Awards in the past.) It's not a perfect system, but it is one that I find very satisfying.

Some of the lists above referenced are heavily populated by the now

very popular psychological suspense/ domestic suspense. Is anyone reading anything else? Peter Robinson's latest, *CARELESS LOVE*, arrived on my doorstep this morning. I remember thinking as I opened the package, "Hurray, a traditional mystery!" And I dove right in.

All in all, I think that 2018 was a wonderful year for mystery fiction. There was more to be excited about than in 2017. Onward and upward to 2019!

Next Issue of DP. I am always looking for new trends in mystery fiction to write cover articles about. The latest noticeable trend is a major uptick in recent Australian crime fiction. Some are calling it Bush Noir. It started with the phenomenal success of Karen Harpers' *THE DRY* in 2017 (Barry Award for Best First Novel). In 2018 it was Dervla McTiernan's *THE RUIN* and Emma Viskic's *RESURRECTION BAY* (both Barry Award nominations). And in 2019 there is a lot of buzz about *SCRUBLANDS* by Chris Hammer and Jane Harper's third novel, *THE LOST MAN*. Also of note is another 2019 first novel, *THE NOWHERE CHILD* by Christian White and Dervla McTiernan's second novel, *THE MENTOR*.

Then we'll take a look at some favorite veterans such as Michael Robotham (*THE OTHER WIFE*) and Barry Maitland (*THE PROMISED LAND*).

DP's Australian correspondent Jeff Pople will be helping with the article. After corresponding with him for many years, I'm excited that I'll finally get to meet Jeff at this year's Bouchercon in Dallas, which he is planning to attend.



Assistant Editor's Message



While reading **ROBICHEAUX** by James Lee Burke, I have to keep reminding myself that books in this genre should not be judged by their literary merits about 95% of the time. The prose that this man creates can be truly breathtaking. So often I have to stop and reread passages just to admire his supreme talent at depicting the Louisiana bayou locales. In writing style, almost no crime writer can come close to him. However, in the crime fiction genre, astounding prose is simply not enough. I have read many of this author's books. They are very similar and, at times, difficult to tell apart. They are slow character-driven narratives. As one of his publishers said to me once, "He writes the same book over and over again but does it beautifully." I haven't read one of his books in years but it was a good trip for me to go back to New Iberia.

As a contrast, let's look at his daughter, Alafair Burke. I first met Alafair before her first book came out. She did not want the association with her father but, since she wrote under her real name, it could not be avoided. What is amazing about her is that she did not merely hang onto her father's coattails. She went to law school and became a successful lawyer before she decided to write. Her style is completely unlike her father's. In fact, she bristles when people try to compare her to him because she wants to be considered on her own merits. Alafair is not a stylist -- she is a storyteller. She wants to entertain you -- not dazzle you. As a result, she is just as successful as him and very possibly even more so.

I think it is clear that, in the crime fiction world, storytelling wins out over style anytime. Readers want to be entertained more than anything. Hence, books that are termed 'cozies' get high ratings in this magazine by

other reviewers but have little to no literary merit. It simply doesn't matter. In fact, browsing in an independent bookstore this weekend, I overheard the owner recommending a particular crime fiction book to a customer. She added that she did not like the latest Robocheaux book, **NEW IBERIA BLUES** finding it too slow going. This just confirmed what I have been saying.

The Edgar Award nominations will be announced in the next week or so. I remember how excited George and I would be to examine the list many years ago. There was confirmation that what we picked as favorites was also highly regarded by the Edgar committees. Also in the mix was the fact that the occasional surprise book would be a small press book and worth collecting. Personally, I am not as excited any longer. As we have demonstrated last year, the selection of the Barry list is more inclusive of a wider group of readers and the books, as a group, are better. (In my opinion, of course)

Also, I would add that the MWA was recently involved in a major controversy in which they initially named Linda Fairstein a Grandmaster but rescinded the award when Attica Locke said she was 'almost single-handedly responsible for the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five' (for allegedly raping and severely beating a female jogger). Linda Fairstein told Attica Locke to "learn your facts" adding "Your anger and comments are misdirected." This has angered a lot of MWA members, some of whom would resign from the organization if they were not so tied into the publishing world. Personally, I blame the MWA for being so sloppy in vetting their honorary recipients. This is bad on all sides.

Edgar Award Nominations 2019

Best Novel

THE LIAR'S GIRL
by Catherine Ryan Howard
HOUSE WITNESS by Mike Lawson
A GAMBLER'S JURY
by Victor Methos
DOWN THE RIVER UNTO THE SEA by Walter Mosley
ONLY TO SLEEP
by Lawrence Osborne
A TREACHEROUS CURSE
by Deanna Raybourn

Best First Novel by an American Author

A KNIFE IN THE FOG
by Bradley Harper
THE CAPTIVES
by Debra Jo Immergut
THE LAST EQUATION OF ISAAC SEVERY by Nova Jacobs
BEARSKIN
by James A. McLaughlin
WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING
by Delia Owens

Best Paperback Original

IF I DIE TONIGHT
by Alison Gaylin
HIROSHIMA BOY
by Naomi Hirahara
UNDER A DARK SKY
by Lori Rader-Day
THE PERFECT NANNY
by Leila Slimani
UNDER MY SKIN by Lisa Unger



Letters



Jeffrey Siger, Greece

What a terrific issue! And not because of your and Steele's kind mention of my **AN AEGEAN APRIL**, but for all the great things written about so many wonderful new and emerging authors. I had the fun of moderating a panel with Abir Mukherjee and he's just a great guy. Then there's Lou Berney, and his truly breakout novel, **NOVEMBER ROAD**. We actually did our debut tours together and I could not be happier than I am for him.

I think it's safe to say that your subscription increase is more than worth it.

Steele Curry, Calgary, Canada

As usual, the latest edition of *DP* is packed with relevant information for fans of mysteries and thrillers. You should have checked with some friends regarding the increase in *DP*'s subscription price before you made your final decision. As Warren Buffet has always said, pricing decisions should not be made in isolation by the people running the business as they always error on the low side. All things considered, I believe that the annual subscription price should be \$30 U.S. Even at that price, it's a steal!

Trevor Ferguson aka John Farrow, Canada

[This is an e-mail that Steele Curry forwarded to me. Apparently he pointed Canadian author John Farrow in the direction of a new publisher. It contains insights that may be of interest to you.] Hi, Steele, I owe you a great debt. Today I agreed to terms with Severn House. I'm not certain but I think "La crème de la crime" imprint is reserved for British authors only, but in any case we've agreed to publish the next two Cinq-Mars novels with Severn House. The terms are not great, to say the least, but

it keeps me in the game and I can work from there to try to gain some recognition for what I do. **BALL PARK** is the next novel, and it will be published in the U.K. in July, and in Canada and the U.S. (they insist on both sides of the Atlantic, and indeed, the bulk of their sales is in the U.S.) in October. Thank you. This was probably my last option. In the modern era, publishers and agents solely look at the sales of your last book and decide on that basis. Severn House, though, makes a point of taking on writers who have had a decent track record but have stumbled at the box office, and I'm glad that they do. It allows me another couple of kick at the can, and I'll be doing so with **BALL PARK** and the next book, **ROAR BACK**, and I love them both. so we'll see. So thank you, very very very much.

Jerrold Elkin, Monterey, California

I continue to find *Deadly Pleasures* an invaluable resource for surfacing authors unfamiliar to me. Thus, a few issues ago Larry offered a short probatory assessment of Steven Saylor. In the intervening months I read all fourteen novels in the Roma Sub Rosa series, with considerable pleasure.

Nevertheless, in the hundreds of mysteries/thrillers – interspersed with science fiction and fantasy novels – I have enjoyed over the years, only a few remain imprinted indelibly in my memory, illustrated by **MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN**, with its intriguing – and occasionally hilarious – chief protagonist suffering from Tourette Syndrome and **THE ATHENIAN MURDERS**, an outstanding multi-layered historical mystery. If memory holds, both won the Gold Dagger award. [Jerrold mildly complained of my mixing up two letters to the editor in the last issue, one being his. I blame my cat who walks across my

keyboard 20-30 times a day. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.]

Ben Petrone, Associate Director of Publicity for Viking, New York City

I'm happy to share the news that Starz acquired from Fremantle the eight-episode drama series *Dublin Murders*, adapted from Tana French's novels **IN THE WOODS** and **THE LIKENESS**. Killian Scott (C.B. Strike) and Sarah Greene (Penny Dreadful) lead the cast as detectives Rob Reilly and Cassie Maddox. Production is underway in Belfast and Dublin.

William Kent Krueger

My greatest joy in the coming year will be the release in the fall of **THIS TENDER LAND**, my companion novel to **ORDINARY GRACE**. I've been at work on it for three years, and I'm deeply in love with it. It takes place in southern Minnesota in the summer of 1932, well into the Great Depression. It's the story of four orphans running from the law because they've committed a heinous crime—but for the right reason. A manhunt has been launched to capture them, so they can't take to the roads. They're afraid to ride the rails, as everyone was doing in the Depression, because the railroads were patrolled by private police called bulls who had a reputation for incredible cruelty. So they take to the rivers instead. They canoe a river called the Gilead to the Minnesota River, canoe the Minnesota to the Mississippi, and their intent is to canoe the Mississippi all the way to Saint Louis, where they believe they have family and will be safe. I have always wanted to write an updated version of *Huckleberry Finn*. This is my *Huckleberry Finn*.

I'll leave you with a bit of the prologue to **THIS TENDER LAND**:

The tale I'm going to tell is of a summer long ago. Of killing and kidnapping and children pursued by demons of a thousand names. There will be courage in this story and cowardice. There will be

love and betrayal. And, of course, there will be hope. In the end, isn't that what every good story is about?

Don Longmuir, Scene of the Crime Books, Canada

[Donny started a string of posts on the 4MA interactive blog with this post about the current high cost of books. Thought you might find it interesting.]

This has been bothering me all day. I went to the David Baldacci event at the Buffalo / Erie County Library for his newest book **LONG ROAD TO MERCY**. Awesome event. David was as usual very charming. The price of the book in US dollars is \$29.00 in Canadian \$38.00.

Maybe I'm getting old. Or I've been out of the new book game for too long but it was a shocker.

Publishing companies are always complaining "We can't sell hardcover books." And I know how it works-- the less you sell, the higher the price goes to cover the printing of the copies you do print.

But!

Also the higher the price goes, the less people are going to buy a hardcover book. I have for a long time thought that it isn't a majority of people who wish to own a kindle, it's the publishers that are forcing us towards that direction so that they can cut out the printing end of the business, just like they have cut out the editor end of it.

I know there are people who love their kindles for various reasons. Eye sight. Cost. Storage. But there are plenty of us who still love hardcovers. And \$30 or \$40 for a hardcover cancels out a lot of us.

Larry Chavis responds: I own a Kindle and use it very frequently, but, truth to tell, I still would prefer a paper book, hardcover first then paperback, instead. I use my Kindle for two primary reasons, and the first is what Don has written here: "real" books are so expensive (the other has to do with the prospect of moving into a backyard tent, as space in the house dwindles). I enjoy my Kindle, like the variable font sizes, and love the idea of having dozens—hundreds—of books with me in my

pocket, but I still love holding a book, smelling the print, turning the pages. But my income is rapidly falling behind the rising cost of books. And, I do use the library, increasingly, but I still like to collect and shelve my own.

Maryann Miller responds: Don, I agree with you that books are often being priced out of the range of a lot of budgets. And the Kindle prices are too high, also. \$10 to \$15 for an electronic book is also a budget breaker.

Charlotte (? last name) responds: I agree the cost of a Kindle e-book is way over priced. They should drop the price on them. I have a price limit on buying ebooks. I try to use the library as much as possible. My house is full of book shelves and books. I am having a hard time placing books in my house. Kindle does help saving room for very special bought books.

Another **Maryann Miller** response: I started reading on the Kindle for many of the reasons you cited, then had to turn to audio books primarily for the past three years. You are right about book lovers. We all started loving the heft of a paper book, the feel of the pages, and the delight of the different fonts and layouts. That is something so special that we don't get with e-books or audio, although e-books are improving the eye-appeal of the book.

Wally (? Last name) responds: I agree with everything you said, Don, especially the high price of hardbacks. It appears the nature of book pricing has entered into the Kohl's pricing arena. The two largest sellers of books (to my knowledge), Amazon and Barnes & Noble, give big discounts on the hardbacks. The idea is, by selling large quantities at 30-50% off, they make enough money through volume. But I doubt individual booksellers could make much by giving such large discounts, taking them out of the game. The larger price tag allows more potential profit for the big discounters so I suspect the costs will continue to rise.

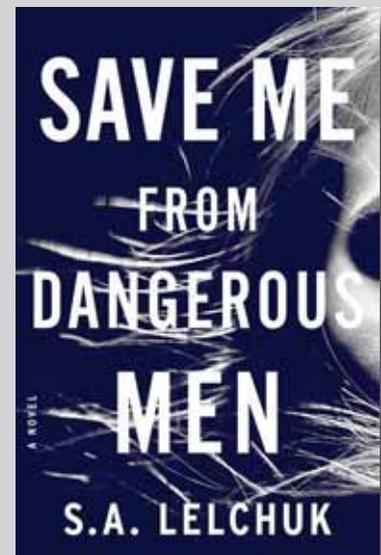
I still buy books, more than I should. I get some at Half Price Books in Ft. Wayne, some from Better World Books but most from B&N and Amazon. We don't seem to have any individual new

book sellers in the area. I get audio books from the library due to cost. I enjoy having books and being able to refer to them if I care to. I found a local store that sells used books at half price. They give you credit for books that you give them to lower the price even more. I gave them 294 books a few months back so I have credit. My only problems with them is that they are months behind on alphabetizing new to them books and put them out and their system of deciding what price to charge seems to depend on reading tea leaves, leaving me with no idea of what price I will pay for a book using my 'credit'. I'm actually reasonably intelligent but have little knowledge of astrological signs and arcane scrolls from long lost tombs that it seems are at the center of pricing

Next

Reviewed to

Death Title



SAVE ME FROM DANGEROUS MEN by S. A. Lelchuk (Flatiron Books, \$27.99, March, 2019)

DP Calendar



LEFT COAST CRIME 2019

Whale of a Crime

Vancouver, Canada
March 28-31, 2019

American Guest of Honor: C. J. Box

Canadian Guest of Honor: Maureen Jennings

Lifetime Achievement: Sue Grafton

Fan Guests of Honor: Don & Jen Longmuir

Toastmaster: Cathy Ace

Website: www.leftcoastcrime.org/2019



MALICE DOMESTIC 31

Bethesda, Maryland
May 3-May 5 2019

Guests of Honor:
Donna Andrews
Chris Grabenstein

Lifetime Achievement: Parnell Hall

Fan GOH: P. J. Coldren

Malice Remembers: Sue Feder
Website: malicedomestic.org

CRIMEFEST 2019

Bristol, U.K.
May 9-12, 2019

Guests of Honor
To Be Announced

Website: www.crimefest.com

THRILLERFEST XIII

July 9-13, 2019

Grand Hyatt, New York City

ThrillerMaster 2018: John Sandford

Silver Bullet Recipient 2018:

Harlan Coben

Website: thrillerfest.com

THEAKSTONS OLD PECULIER CRIME WRITING FESTIVAL

July 18-21, 2019

Harrogate, U.K.

Guests of Honor: To Be Announced

Website: <https://harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/crime/>

BOUCHERCON 2019

50th Anniversary Convention

Denim, Diamonds & Death

October, 31- November 3, 2019

Dallas, Texas

American Guest of Honor:

Hank Phillippi Ryan

Distinguished Contribution to Genre:

James Patterson

International Guest of Honor:

Anthony Horowitz

Lifetime Achievement:

Peter Lovesey

Local Guest of Honor:

Deborah Crombie

Toastmaster: Harry Hunsicker

Fan Guest of Honor:

McKenna Jordan

Website: <http://bouchercon2019.com/>



BOUCHERCON 2020
Where Murder is a Capitol Crime
October 15-18, 2020
Sacramento, California
Guests of Honor
Scott Turov
Walter Mosley
Anne Perry
Cara Black
Fan GOH: Janet Rudolph
Toastmaster: Catriona McPherson
Website: bouchercon2020.org



BOUCHERCON 2021

August 26-29, 2021

New Orleans, Louisiana

Guests of Honor

Steve Berry

Craig Johnson

Charles & Caroline Todd

Sandra Brown

Linda Fairstein

More details to follow

It will be in the same hotel and put on by the same committee of fans who put on the last convention in New Orleans so expect a similar good time.

Come Join the Fun!

It's About Crime by Marv Lachman



The Short Stop

The year 2018 was a good, if not great, one in the short story. There was **BIBLIOMYSTERIES, Volume 2**, edited by Otto Penzler (Pegasus, \$26.95), though because the stories were first published before 2018, I could not include any in my list below. Two of the stories from **TEN YEAR STRETCH: Celebrating a Decade of Crime Fiction at Crimefest**, edited by Martin Edwards and Lee Child (Poisoned Pen Press, \$15.95, 2018) are included.

An interesting anthology in 2018 was **BLOOD WORK**, edited by Rick Ollerman. It was published to honor the late Gary Shulze who once owned the Once Upon a Crime book store in Minneapolis. Published by Down & Out Books, its proceeds go to the Memorial Blood Centers in St. Paul Minnesota, where Gary was treated. Most stories refer to books, bookstores, or tubas. (Shulze loved books, owned a book store, and sometimes played a tuba.) Occasionally, trying to insert one of these items into a mystery plot becomes awkward. Of the thirty stories, my favorites were Gary R. Bush's "I'm With It: A Love Story" and William Kent Krueger's "Just Another Cold Case."

Lachman's Favorite Short Stories of 2018

One story stood out among those I read this year, and it is no surprise that it is by a writer who has been an outstanding short story writer for over three decades. The writer is Brendan DuBois, and his story was "The Wildest One" from September-October **AHMM**.

The other five stories that I would nominate, were there still a Barry Award for the short story and were I still nominating, are as follows, in alphabetical order, by author:

Simon Brett- "The Last Locked Room: (TEN YEAR STRETCH)

David Dean- "Sofee" (March-April **EQMM**)

Dayle A. Dermatis- "Bothering with Details" (May-June **AHMM**)

Kate Ellis- "Crime Scene" (TEN YEAR STRETCH)

John Latigua- "The Cuban Prisoner" (September-October **EQMM**). This story would be my selection for the Shamus as Best Private Eye story of the year.

Five other stories too good to be neglected, are in my Best Eleven list, namely:

John M. Floyd- "Scavenger Hunt" (Jan.-Feb. **AHMM**)

Marvin Kaye- "Post No Bulls" (July-Aug. **EQMM**). (There are two other series of Nero Wolfe pastiches around, but this story is the best I've read.)

R.T. Raichev- "A Chronicle of Death Foretold" (May-June **EQMM**)

Kristine Kathryn Rusch- "The Wedding Ring" (Mar.-Apr. **EQMM**)

Marilyn Todd- "First Dates Are Always the Tricky Ones" (Sept.-Oct. **EQMM**)

Novels Recently Read

I've read the first fifteen books by Michael Connelly, and that has only brought me up to **THE CLOSERS** (2005). Obviously, he writes faster than I can read. He remains one of my favorite authors. **THE CLOSERS** is one of his best books, combining a well-plotted detective story with observations of race, politics, political correctness, and homelessness. This is excellent regional writing that captures many aspects of Los Angeles. Harry Bosch has returned to the LAPD from retirement and, as the title indicates, he is assigned to solving what used to be called "cold cases," this one the murder of a high school girl almost twenty years before. Its only fault is that a key clue would have been better presented as a photo than as a written description. This is a fictional police procedural that reads as grippingly as the very best true crime.

I selected Robert B. Parker's **FAMILY HONOR** (1999) as my airplane and hotel reading for Bouchercon in Florida, and that's not intended as a criticism of it. I've always found Parker to be fast, easy reading. It served its purpose. This is the book that introduces Parker's second Boston private detective, Sunny Randall, who as first person narrator sounds much like Spenser, though she is female. Her first case, about a teenager who has run away from home, is reminiscent of many cases of runaways in the late 1960s and 1970s: Randall is hired by the parents to find her, but once again a Parker private eye does not obey the client's wishes. The telling is crisp, except for a lot of padding regarding Sunny's dog. There is also good regional writing, especially about Boston traffic.

Less readers think I've given up on the "old stuff," let me strongly recommend Miles Burton's **THE SECRET OF HIGH ELDERSHAM** (1931). Burton is another pseudonym of Major Cecil John Charles Street, and it is every bit as good as the best work Street penned under his more famous pen name John Rhode. A popular bar keeper in East Anglia has been murdered, and Inspector Young of Scotland Yard is assigned the case. Bur-

ton's usual detective Desmond Merrion comes in to help his friend Young. This is a case involving witchcraft; there is even a coven. Unusual for its time, it has a well-described (albeit discreetly) orgy. There is more sex and action than anything I read under Street's pseudonyms. Detection is not the book's strong point; it is an exciting thriller, one that remains very readable 85+ years after it was written..

THE APRIL RAINERS (1989) is the first book I've read by Anthea Fraser (not to be confused with Antonia Fraser), and it's a good one. The title comes from the British folk song "Green Grow the Rushes-O." There are many subtly-drawn, complex characters; enough that a list of them at the beginning of the book would have been useful. Fraser is especially good at describing suburban middle class life in England. It reminded me of the controversy when P.D. James was accused of snobbery because she implied that only the middle class was educated enough to make the moral choices that translate into good crime fiction. I think that both James and Anthea Fraser feel that mysteries in which the crimes are committed by people who normally don't commit them are more interesting. Especially good is Anthea's depiction of the problems of a female composer in a male world of music. The resolution of the crime disappoints with a hard-to-accept motive and a convenient confession.

Once enormously popular in books, radio, and television, Frances and Richard Lockridge are virtually forgotten today. I've read all 26 of the Mr. and Mrs. North books, and I now try to find time to read those about their other series characters and their non-series books, which are invariably thrillers. Their **THE TANGLED CORD** (1957) gets off to a suspenseful start as Ann Dillard of Westchester County is to meet her fiancé Clark Benson in Manhattan when mysterious circumstances send him into hiding and her searching all over the city to find him. There's been a murder but the most mysterious aspect is wondering why Clark has fled. Though two of the Lockeridges series detectives, Bill Weigand and Nathan

Shapiro, figure prominently, this is more of a thriller than a detective story. The writing and the people are sophisticated, as they are throughout the Lockridge canon, though I'm not sure I can explain why. A Supreme Court judge once said he couldn't define pornography, but he knew it when he saw it. I feel the same about sophistication.

Books About the Mystery

Suddenly, Martin Edwards is in all the rooms. Everywhere in mystery fiction. I see in him a combination of Anthony Boucher and Frederick Dannay. His 2015 book on the Golden Age and the Detection Club won almost all of the awards for critical/biographical works. He is President of the Detection Club and Chair of the Crime Writers Association. He's a regular at most mystery conventions and often a panelist. He's a novelist with two good series plus stand-alones, and he also writes short stories. He's a busy editor, including a good collection that celebrated the tenth years of CrimeFest, the Bristol, England, convention.

I've belatedly caught up with his **THE STORY OF CLASSIC CRIME IN 100 BOOKS** (Poisoned Pen Press trade paperback, 2017, \$15.95), and I am pleased not to have missed it. This is a book to be compared to Howard Haycraft's **MURDER FOR PLEASURE** (1941). Showing impeccable taste in the books he selects, Edwards has captured the first half of the twentieth century and the books that are considered the key works of the Golden Age, whatever years you date it from. He starts with Conan Doyle's **HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES** in 1902 and concludes with Julian Symons enthralling and experimental **THE 31ST OF FEBRUARY** (1950). In between, every major British writer (and a few Americans) are discussed. Each book is analyzed as to plot and its role in the author's career and its place in the history of the detective story.

One of the more impressive things about Edwards' work is his avoidance of "spoilers." He proves a point I've long

advocated: a good critic can analyze a book without giving away the plot, the ending, and any surprises.

It is a pleasure to see, among his hundred, some of the books I have put on my own "Best" lists. So wide is the range of his reading that he has included at least ten authors of whom I've never even heard and many more books I've not read yet.

Doom with a View

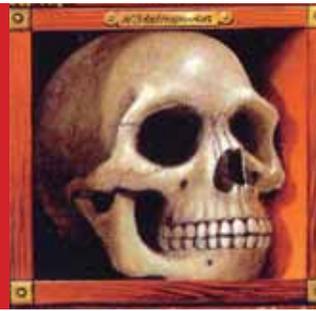


Another term I have trouble defining, though I frequently watch and write about it, is "Film Noir." One of the best movies in this genre is *Criss Cross* (1949) which, like many noir films, has a voice over narration. In this case a strangely passive (as he was in *The Killers*) Burt Lancaster, sets the tone for the movie, saying, "It was in the cards, and there was no way of stopping it." That's a noir sentence if I've ever heard one.

Lancaster has an affair with Yvonne DeCarlo, raising the ire of the other member of this triangle, Dan Duruya -- as a gangster who involves Lancaster in a robbery. The film is helped greatly by the direction of Robert Siodmak, one of the best directors of noir, and the background music by Miklos Rozsa, a great composer for crime films.

The DP List

2018



Titles listed garnered starred reviews in the four library journals (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist* and *Library Journal*) and a glowing review in *Deadly Pleasures* as indicated. These books are the best of the best for 2018. For the sake of space, I have deleted plot summaries of books that have appeared on this list in previous 2018 issues. See a little taste of 2019 at the end of the end of the column.

Best Novels

****GIVE ME YOUR HAND** by Megan Abbott (Little, Brown, \$27.00). **Kirkus, PW & BL**

****GREEN SUN** by Kent Anderson (Mulholland, \$27.00). **.BL & PW**

****SNAP** by Belinda Bauer (Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00). **.BL, LJ & DP**

****NOVEMBER ROAD** by Lou Berney (Morrow, \$26.99). **. PW, LJ, BL, DP & Kirkus**

****LONELY WITNESS** by William Boyle (Pegasus, \$26.00). **.BL & PW**

****GRAVE'S A FINE AND PRIVATE PLACE** by Alan Bradley (Delacorte, \$26.00). **.LJ & PW**

****THE PLEA** by Steve Cavanagh (Flatiron, \$26.99). **. LJ & PW**

****DARK SACRED NIGHT** by Michael Connelly (Little, Brown, \$29.00). **. DP**

****DON'T EAT ME** by Colin Cotterill (Soho Crime, \$27.00). **BL & PW**

****STAY HIDDEN** by Paul Doiron (Minotaur, \$26.99). **PW & BL**

****SPLINTER IN THE BLOOD** by Ashley Dyer (Morrow, \$27.00). **LJ, PW & DP**

****THE SHADOWS WE HIDE** by Allen Eskens (Mulholland, \$27.00). Sequel to **THE LIFE WE BURY**. **PW &**

DP

****WOMAN IN THE WINDOW** by A. J. Finn (Morrow, \$26.99). **LJ & BL**

****THE WITCH ELM** by Tana French (Viking, \$28.00). Toby is a happy-go-lucky charmer who's dodged a scrape at work and is celebrating with friends when the night takes a turn that will change his life - he surprises two burglars who beat him and leave him for dead. Struggling to recover from his injuries, beginning to understand that he might never be the same man again, he takes refuge at his family's ancestral home to care for his dying uncle Hugo. Then a skull is found in the trunk of an elm tree in the garden - and as detectives close in, Toby is forced to face the possibility that his past may not be what he has always believed. **BL, LJ & PW**

****PUNISHMENT SHE DESERVES** by Elizabeth George (Viking, \$28.00). **BL & PW**

****THE BOUNCER** by David Gordon (Mysterious Press, \$26.00). **BL & PW**

****SAINT OF WOLVES AND BUTCHERS** by Alex Grecian (Putnam, \$27.00). **BL & LJ**

****DARK ANGEL** by Elly Griffiths (Houghton Mifflin, \$27.00). **BL & LJ**

****FORCE OF NATURE**, Jane Harper (Flatiron, \$25.99). **BL & DP**

****WHY KILL THE INNOCENT** by C. S. Harris (Berkley, \$26.00).

****CITY OF INK** by Elsa Hart (Minotaur, \$25.99). **BL, Kirkus & PW**

****BODY & SOUL** by John Harvey (Pegasus, \$25.95). When his estranged daughter Katherine suddenly appears on his doorstep, Elder knows that something is badly wrong. The breakdown of her relationship with a controversial artist has sent her into a self-destructive tailspin which culminates in murder. And as Elder struggles to protect

Katherine and prove her innocence, the terrors of the past threaten them both once more. **BL & LJ**

****THE WORD IS MURDER** by Anthony Horowitz (\$27.99). **PW, BL & Kirkus**

****MOOD INDIGO** by Ed Ifkovic (Poisoned Pen Press, \$26.95). **SBL & PW**

****THE DARKNESS** by Ragnar Jonasson (Minotaur, \$27.99). The body of a young Russian woman washes up on an Icelandic shore. After a cursory investigation, the death is declared a suicide and the case is quietly closed. Over a year later Detective Inspector Hulda Hermannsdóttir of the Reykjavík police is forced into early retirement at 64. She dreads the loneliness, and the memories of her dark past that threaten to come back to haunt her. But before she leaves she is given two weeks to solve a single cold case of her choice. She knows which one: the Russian woman whose hope for asylum ended on the dark, cold shore of an unfamiliar country. **BL, PW & DP**

****BONE ON BONE** by Julia Keller (Minotaur, \$26.99). After a three-year prison sentence, Bell Elkins is back in Acker's Gap. And she finds herself in the white-hot center of a complicated and deadly case -- even as she comes to terms with one last, devastating secret of her own. **BL, LJ & PW**

****THE SANDMAN** by Lars Kepler (Knopf, \$27.95). **PW, BL & DP**

****GREEKS BEARING GIFTS** by Philip Kerr (Putnam, \$27.00). **Kirkus & LJ**

****A DANGEROUS CROSSING** by Ausma Zehanat Khan (Minotaur, \$26.00). **BL & PW**

****WHISPERS OF THE DEAD** by Spencer Kope (Minotaur, \$26.99). **LJ & DP**

****HOW IT HAPPENED** by Michael Koryta (Little, Brown, \$27.00). **PW, LJ, Kirkus & DP**

****FERAL DETECTIVE** by Jonathan Lethem (Ecco, \$26.99). Phoebe Siegler first meets Charles Heist in a shabby trailer on the eastern edge of Los Angeles. She's looking for her friend's missing daughter, Arabella, and hires Heist to help. Reluctantly, he agrees to help. The unlikely pair navigate the enclaves of

desert-dwelling vagabonds and find that Arabella is in serious trouble—caught in the middle of a violent standoff that only Heist, mysteriously, can end. **BL & Kirkus**

****SUNBURN** by Laura Lippman (Morrow, \$26.99). **Kirkus, PW, BL, LJ & DP**

****TWO GIRLS DOWN** by Louisa Luna (Doubleday, \$25.95). **BL & PW**

****THE WIDOWS OF MALABAR HILL** by Sujata Massey (Soho, \$26.95). **PW, LJ & BL**

****HANDFUL OF ASHES** by Rob McCarthy (Pegasus, \$26.00). **BL & PW**

****BROKEN GROUND** by Val McDermid (Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00). Six feet under in a Highland peat bog lies Alice Somerville's inheritance, buried by her grandfather at the end of World War II. But when Alice finally uncovers it, she finds an unwanted surprise—a body with a bullet hole between the eyes. **BL & DP**

****GO TO MY GRAVE** by Catriona McPherson (Minotaur, \$26.99). Donna Weaver has put everything she has into restoring The Breakers, an old bed and breakfast on a remote stretch of beach in Galloway. Now it sits waiting—freshly painted, richly furnished, filled with flowers—for the first guests to arrive. But Donna's guests, a contentious group of estranged cousins, soon realize that they've been here before, years ago. Decades have passed, but that night still haunts them: a sixteenth birthday party that started with peach schnapps and ended with a girl walking into the sea. **Kirkus & LJ**

****LEAVE NO TRACE** by Mindy Mejia (Atria, \$26.00). **Kirkus & BL**

****AMERICAN BY DAY** by Derek B. Miller (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$26.00). **PW, LJ & BL**

****DOWN THE RIVER UNDER THE SEA** by Walter Mosley (Mulholland, \$27.00). **JBL & PW**

****A NECESSARY EVIL** by Abir Mukherjee (Pegasus, \$25.95). **PW, BL, LJ & DP**

****SWIFT VENGEANCE** by T. Jefferson Parker (Putnam, \$27.00). **LJ & PW**

****CLOSER THAN YOU KNOW** by Brad Parks (Dutton, \$26.00). **Kirkus,**

LJ & DP

****THE MAN WHO CAME UP-TOWN** by George Pelecanos (Mulholland, \$27.00). Michael Hudson spends the long days in prison devouring books given to him by the prison's librarian, a young woman named Anna who develops a soft spot for her best student. Anna keeps passing Michael books until one day he disappears, suddenly released after a private detective manipulated a witness in Michael's trial. Outside, Michael encounters a Washington, D.C. that has changed a lot during his time locked up. Once shady storefronts are now trendy beer gardens and flower shops. But what hasn't changed is the hard choice between the temptation of crime and doing what's right. **BL, LJ & PW**

****KINGDOM OF THE BLIND** by Louise Penny (Minotaur, \$28.99). When a peculiar letter arrives inviting Armand Gamache to an abandoned farmhouse, the former head of the Sûreté du Québec discovers that a complete stranger has named him one of the executors of her will. Still on suspension, and frankly curious, Gamache accepts and soon learns that the other two executors are Myrna Landers, the bookseller from Three Pines, and a young builder.

None of them had ever met the elderly woman. The will is so odd and includes bequests that are so wildly unlikely that Gamache and the others

suspect the woman must have been delusional. But what if, Gamache begins to ask himself, she was perfectly sane?

BL & LJ

****TREACHEROUS CURSE** by Deanna Raybourn (Berkley, \$26.00). **BL & LJ**

****THRONE OF CAESAR** by Steven Saylor (Minotaur, \$27.99). **PW & DP**

****SALT LANE** by William Shaw (Mulholland, \$27.00). **PW & DP**

****BARBED WIRE HEART** by Tess Sharpe (Grand Central, \$26.00). **BL, Kirkus & PW**

****AEGEAN APRIL** by Jeff Siger (Poisoned Pen Press, \$26.95). **LJ & DP**

****THE LEGACY** by Yrsa Sigurdardottir (Minotaur, \$25.99). **T PW & BL**

****PERSONS UNKNOWN** by Susie Steiner (Random House, \$27.00). **Kirkus, BL, PW, LJ & DP**

****HER BEAUTIFUL MONSTER** by Adi Tantimedh (Atria, \$26.99). **LJ & PW**

****THE BLOOD** by E. S. Thomson (Pegasus, \$25.95). Summoned to the riverside by the desperate, scribbled note of an old friend, Jem Flockhart and Will Quartermain find themselves onboard the seamen's floating hospital, an old hulk known only as The Blood, where prejudice, ambition, and murder seethe beneath a veneer of medical respectability. On shore, a young woman, a known prostitute, is found drowned in a derelict boatyard. A man leaps to his death into the Thames, driven mad by poison and fear. The events are linked, but how? **BL & PW**

****AN ELDERLY LADY IS UP TO NO GOOD** by Helene Tursten (Soho Crime, \$12.99). Not a novel, but reads like one. Maud is an irascible 88-year-old Swedish woman with no family, no friends, and... no qualms about a little murder. **BL, PW & DP**

****DEATH OF MRS. WESTAWAY** by Ruth Ware (Gallery, \$27.00). On a day that begins like any other, Hal receives a mysterious letter bequeathing her a substantial inheritance. She realizes very quickly that the letter was sent to the wrong person—but also that the cold-reading skills she's honed as a tarot card reader might help her claim the money. Soon, Hal finds herself at the



Louise Penny

funeral of the deceased...where it dawns on her that there is something very, very wrong about this strange situation and the inheritance at the center of it. **BL, Kirkus, PW**

****GRIST MILL ROAD** by Christopher J. Yates (Picador, \$26.00). **BL, Kirkus & PW**

****LABYRINTH OF SPIRITS** by Carlos Ruiz Zafon (Harper, \$37.50). Nine-year-old Alicia lost her parents during the Spanish Civil War when the Nacionales (the fascists) savagely bombed Barcelona in 1938. Twenty years later, she still carries the emotional and physical scars of that violent and terrifying time. Weary of her work as an investigator for Spain's secret police in Madrid, a job she has held for more than a decade, the twenty-nine-year old plans to move on. At the insistence of her boss, Leandro Montalvo, she remains to solve one last case: the mysterious disappearance of Spain's Minister of Culture. **Kirkus, LJ & PW**

First Mystery Novels

****MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER** by Oyinkan Braithwaite (Doubleday, \$22.95). Korede is bitter. How could she not be? Her sister, Ayoola, is many things: the favorite child, the beautiful one, possibly sociopathic. And now Ayoola's third boyfriend in a row is dead. Korede has long been in love with a kind, handsome doctor at the hospital where she works. She dreams of the day when he will realize that she's exactly what he needs. But when he asks Korede for Ayoola's phone number, loyalties become fuzzy. **PW & DP**

****SPY OF VENICE** by Benet Brandreth (Pegasus, \$26.00). **BL & PW**

****NEED TO KNOW** by Karen Cleveland (Ballantine, \$26.00). **BL, LJ & DP**

****DODGING AND BURNING** by John Copenhaver (Pegasus, \$25.95). **LJ & PW**

****DEATH COMES IN THROUGH THE KITCHEN** by Teresa Dovalpage (Soho, \$25.95). **PW & DP**

****SWEET LITTLE LIES** by Caz Frear (Harper, \$26.99). **Kirkus, PW &**

DP

****THE LAST EQUATION OF ISAAC SEVERY** by Nova Jacobs (Touchstone, \$25.00). Just days after mathematician and fa**BL & PW**

****STAR OF THE NORTH** by D. B. John (Crown, \$27.00). **BL, LJ & PW**

****SIRENS** by Joseph Knox (Crown, \$27.00). **BL & DP**

****BEARSKIN** by James A. McLaughlin (Ecco, \$26.99). **Kirkus, PW & DP**

****HEARTS OF THE MISSING** by Carol Potenza (Minotaur, \$26.99). When a young woman linked to a list of missing Fire-Sky tribal members commits suicide, Pueblo Police Sergeant Nicky Matthews is assigned to the case. As the investigation unfolds, she uncovers a threat that strikes at the very heart of what it means to be a Fire-Sky Native: victims chosen and murdered because of their genetic makeup. But these deaths are not just about a life taken. In a vengeful twist, the killer ensures the spirits of those targeted will wander forever, lost to their family, their People, and their ancestors. When those closest to Nicky are put in jeopardy, she must be willing to sacrifice everything?her career, her life, even her soul?to save the people she is sworn to protect. **LJ & PW**

****THE CHALK MAN** by C. J. Tudor (Crown, \$27.00). In 1986, **DP**

****THE 7-1/2 DEATHS OF EVELYN HARDCASTLE** by Stuart Turton (Sourcebooks, \$25.99). There are three rules of Blackheath House: 1. Evelyn Hardcastle will be murdered at 11:00 p.m. 2. There are eight days, and eight witnesses for you to inhabit; 3. We will only let you escape once you tell us the name of the killer. Understood? Then let's begin... Evelyn Hardcastle will die. She will die every day until Aiden Bishop can identify her killer and break the cycle. But every time the day begins again, Aiden wakes up in the body of a different guest. Some of his hosts are helpful, and others only operate on a need to know basis. **BL & LJ**

Paperback Originals

****A SHARP SOLITUDE** by Christine Carbo (Atria, \$16.00). **DP**

****A KNIFE IN THE FOG** by Bradley Harper (Seventh St., \$15.95). **LJ & DP**

****MURDER AT THE GRAND RAJ PALACE** by Vaseem Khan (Redhook, \$16.00). **BL & PW**

****THE GOOD SON** by You-Jeong Jeong (Penguin, \$16.00). **PW**

****DEATH OF A RAINMAKER** by Laurie Loewenstein (Kaylie Jones Books, \$16.95). The Depression and a 240-day-long dry spell drive the desperate townspeople of Vermillion, OK, to hire a rainmaker, but he's murdered, leaving sheriff Temple Jennings to investigate. **LJ & PW**

****HOLMES ENTANGLED** by Gordon McAlpine (Seventh Street, \$15.95). **BL & PW**

****SLAUGHTER PARK** by Barry Maitland (Text, \$16.00). **BL & DP**

****DEAD PRETTY** by David Mark (Blue Rider Press, \$16.00). **PW & DP**

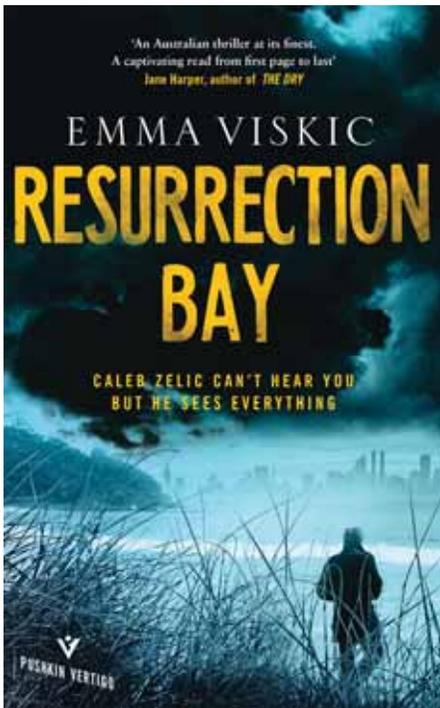
****THE RUIN** by Dervla McTiernan (Penguin, \$16.00). **PW, LJ & DP**

****COUNCIL OF TWELVE** by Oliver Potzsch (Mariner, \$18.00). **PW**

****WALKING THE BONES** by Randall Silvis (Sourcebooks, \$15.99). **PW**

****THE HOLLOW OF FEAR** by Sherry Thomas (Berkley, \$15.00). Under the cover of "Sherlock Holmes, consulting detective," Charlotte Holmes puts her extraordinary powers of deduction to good use. Moriarty's shadow looms large. First, Charlotte's half brother disappears. Then, Lady Ingram, the estranged wife of Charlotte's close friend Lord Ingram, turns up dead on his estate. And all signs point to Lord Ingram as the murderer. With Scotland Yard closing in, Charlotte goes under disguise to seek out the truth. But uncovering the truth could mean getting too close to Lord Ingram--and a number of malevolent forces. **Kirkus & LJ**

****RESURRECTION BAY** by Emma Viskic (Pushkin Vertigo, \$18.95). Caleb Zelic's childhood friend has been brutally murdered - fingers broken, throat slit - at his home in Melbourne. Tortured by guilt, Caleb vows to track down the killer. But he's profoundly deaf; missed words and misread lips can lead to



confusion, and trouble. **PW & DP** Also shortlisted for Gold Dagger and won Ned Kelly Award.

****AND FIRE CAME DOWN** by Emma Viskic (Pushkin Vertigo, \$14.95). When a young woman is killed after pleading for Caleb's help in sign language, Caleb is determined to find out who she was. And the trail leads straight to his hometown, Resurrection Bay. The town is on bushfire alert and simmering with racial tensions. As he delves deeper, Caleb uncovers secrets that could threaten his life and any chance of reuniting with Kat. Driven by his demons, he pushes on. **PW & DP**

****MISS BLAINE'S PREFECT AND THE GOLDEN SAMOVAR** by Olga Wojtas (Felony & Mayhem, \$14.95). Never underestimate a librarian. Comfortably padded and in her middle years, Shona McMonagle may look bookish and harmless, but her education at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls has left her with a deadly expertise in everything from martial arts to quantum physics. Her skills, her deceptively mild appearance, and her passionate loyalty make Shona the perfect recruit for a new and interesting project: Time-travel to Tzarist Russia, prevent a gross miscarriage of romance, and – in any spare time – see to it that only the right people

get murdered. **Kirkus, LJ & PW**

Thrillers

****THE TERMINAL LIST** by Jack Carr (Atria, \$26.00). **DP**

****BLOODY SUNDAY** by Ben Coes (St. Martin's, \$28.00). Dewey Andreas, still reeling from recent revelations about his own past, is ready to retire from the CIA. But he's the only available agent with the skills to carry out the CIA's plan to stop North Korea. The plan is to inject a singular designer poison into the head of the North Korean military and in exchange for the nuclear plans, provide him with the one existing dose of the antidote. But it goes awry when Dewey manages to inject a small amount of the poison into himself. Now, to survive, Dewey must get into North Korea and access the antidote. **PW & DP**

****THE DARK CLOUDS SHINING** by David Downing (Soho, \$28.00). **BL & PW**

****SAFE HOUSES** by Dan Fesperman (Knopf, \$26.95). West Berlin, 1979. Helen Abell oversees the CIA's network of safe houses, rare havens for field agents and case officers amidst the dangerous milieu of a city in the grips of the Cold War. Helen's world is upended when, during her routine inspection of an agency property, she overhears a meeting between two people unfamiliar to her speaking a coded language that hints at shadowy realities far beyond her comprehension. Before the day is out, she witnesses a second unauthorized encounter, one that will place her in the sight lines of the most ruthless and powerful man at the agency. Her attempts to expose the dark truths about what she has witnessed will bring about repercussions. **BL & Kirkus**

****RED WAR** by Vince Flynn & Kyle Mills (Atria, \$28.99). When Russian president Maxim Krupin discovers that he has inoperable brain cancer, he's determined to cling to power. His first task is to kill or imprison any of his countrymen who can threaten him. Soon, though, his illness becomes serious enough to require a more dramatic

diversion—war with the West. Upon learning of Krupin's condition, CIA director Irene Kennedy understands that the US is facing an opponent who has nothing to lose. The only way to avoid a confrontation that could leave millions dead is to send Mitch Rapp to Russia under impossibly dangerous orders. **PW & BL**

****THE FOX** by Frederick Forsyth (Putnam, \$28.00). Former chief of the British Secret Intelligence Service Adrian Weston is awoken in the middle of the night by a phone call from the Prime Minister. Her news is shocking: the Pentagon, the NSA, and the CIA have been hacked simultaneously, their seemingly impenetrable firewalls breached by an unknown enemy known only as "The Fox." Even more surprisingly, the culprit is revealed to be a young British teenager, Luke Jennings. He has no agenda, no secrets, just a blisteringly brilliant mind. Extradition to the U.S. seems likely—until Weston has another idea: If Luke can do this to us, what can he do to our enemies? **PW & DP**

****AGENT IN PLACE** by Mark Greaney (Berkley, \$27.00). **Kirkus, PW & DP**

****THE WAY I DIE** by Derek Haas (Pegasus, \$26.00). **BL & DP**

****THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED** by Mick Herron (Soho Crime, \$25.95). **BL & PW**

****LONDON RULES** by Mick Herron (Soho, \$27.00). **BL, LJ, PW & DP**

****SKYJACK** by K. J. Howe (Quercus, \$26.99). **PW, LJ & DP**

****HELLBENT** by Gregg Hurwitz (Minotaur, \$26.99). **BL**

****GALE FORCE** by Owen Laukanen (Putnam, \$27.00). **BL & Kirkus**

****HOUSE WITNESS** by Mike Lawson (Atlantic Monthly, \$26.00). **BL & DP**

****THE KREMLIN'S CANDIDATE** by Jason Matthews (Scribner, \$27.00). **Kirkus, BL, PW & DP**

****THE ESCAPE ARTIST** by Brad Meltzer (Grand Central, \$28.00). **LJ & PW**

****BOMB MAKER** by Thomas Perry (Mysterious Press, \$26.00). **Kirkus & DP**

****LIGHT IT UP** by Nick Petrie (Put-

nam, \$26.00). **DP**

****RIP CREW** by Sebastian Rotella (Mulholland, \$27.00). **Kirkus & LJ**

****THE MIDDLEMAN** by Olen Steinhauer (Minotaur, \$28.00). **BL & LJ**

Sneak Preview of 2019

Best Novels

****NEW IBERIA BLUES** by James Lee Burke (Simon & Schuster, \$27.99). Robicheaux first met Cormier on the streets of New Orleans, when the young, undersized boy had foolish dreams of becoming a Hollywood director. Twenty-five years later, when Robicheaux knocks on Cormier's door, it isn't to congratulate him on his Golden Globe and Academy Award nominations. Robicheaux has discovered the body of a young woman who's been crucified, wearing only a small chain on her ankle. She disappeared near Cormier's Cypemort Point estate. **Kirkus, PW & BL**

****THE PARAGON HOTEL** by Lyndsay Faye (Putnam, \$26.00). The year is 1921, and "Nobody" Alice James is on a cross-country train, carrying a bullet wound and fleeing for her life. Desperate to get as far away as possible from New York City and those who want her dead, she has her sights set on Oregon: a distant frontier that seems the end of the line. She befriends Max, a black Pullman porter who reminds her achingly of Harlem, who leads Alice to the Paragon Hotel upon arrival in Portland. Her unlikely sanctuary turns out to be the only all-black hotel in the city, and its lodgers seem unduly terrified of a white woman on the premises. **Kirkus & BL**

****STALKER** by Lars Kepler (Knopf, \$27.95, Feb.). The Swedish National Crime Unit receives a video of a young woman in her home, clearly unaware that she's being watched. Soon after the tape is received, the woman's body is found horrifically mutilated. With the arrival of the next, similar video, the police understand that the killer is toying with them, warning of a new victim. Detective Joonas Linna Linna, recruits Erik Maria Bark, the hypnotist and

expert in trauma, with whom Linna's worked before. Bark is leery of forcing people to give up their secrets. But this time, Bark is the one hiding things. Years before, he had put a man away for an eerily similar crime, and now he's beginning to think that an innocent man may be behind bars. **BL & PW**

First Mystery Novels

****SCRUBLANDS** by Chris Hammer (Touchstone, \$26.99). In Riversend, an isolated rural community afflicted by an endless drought, a young priest does the unthinkable, killing five parishioners before being taken down himself. A year later, accompanied by his own demons from war-time reporting, journalist Martin Scarsden arrives in Riversend. His assignment is simple: describe how the townspeople are coping as the anniversary of their tragedy approaches. But as Martin meets the locals and hears their version of events, he begins to realize that the accepted wisdom—that the priest was a pedophile whose imminent exposure was the catalyst for the shooting, a theory established through an award-winning investigation by Martin's own newspaper—may be wrong. **PW & DP**

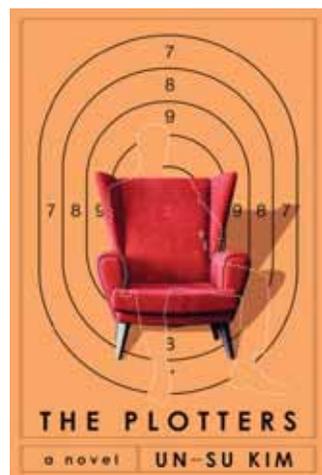
****THE PLOTTERS** by Un-Su Kim (Doubleday, \$25.95). Reseng is an assassin. Raised by a cantankerous killer named Old Raccoon in the crime headquarters "The Library," Reseng never questioned anything: where to go, who to kill, or why his home was filled with books that no one ever read. But one day, Reseng steps out of line on

a job, toppling a set of carefully calibrated plans. And when he uncovers an extraordinary scheme set into motion by an eccentric trio of young women—a convenience store clerk, her wheelchair-bound sister, and a cross-eyed librarian—Reseng will have to decide if he will remain a pawn or finally take control of the plot. **BL & PW**

Thrillers

****OUT OF THE DARK** by Gregg Hurwitz (Minotaur, \$27.99). Taken from a group home at age twelve, Evan Smoak was raised and trained as part of the Orphan Program, an off-the-books operation designed to create deniable intelligence assets, i.e. assassins. Evan was Orphan X. He broke with the Program, using everything he learned to disappear and reinvent himself as the Nowhere Man, a man who helps the truly desperate when no one else can. But now Evan's past is catching up to him. Someone at the very highest level of government has been trying to eliminate every trace of the Orphan Program by killing all the remaining Orphans and their trainers. After Evan's mentor and the only father he ever knew is killed, he decides to strike back. **LJ & PW**

****THE NIGHT AGENT** by Matthew Quirk (Morrow, \$26.99). No one was more surprised than FBI Agent Peter Sutherland when he's tapped to work in the White House Situation Room. When Peter was a boy, his father, a section chief in FBI counterintelligence, was suspected of selling secrets to the Russians—a catastrophic breach that had cost him his career, his reputation, and eventually his life. Nowhere is Peter more vigilant than in this room, the sanctum of America's secrets. His night job is monitoring an emergency line for a call that has not—and might never—come. Until tonight. At 1:05 a.m. the phone rings. A terrified young woman named Rose tells Peter that her aunt and uncle have just been murdered and that the killer is still in the house with her. Before their deaths, they gave her this phone number with urgent instructions: "Tell them OSPREY was right. It's happening. . . ." **LJ & DP**



A Conversation with Nick Petrie Author of TEAR IT DOWN

Each book in the Peter Ash Series is set in a different place. Why have you chosen this method as a signature of the series.

I love to read novels with compelling settings. A sense of place can add depth and emotion and even a personality to a book. As a writer, I try hard to get the most out of a setting, and with each of my books set in a distinctly different location, I get to play with something new each time. Also, a peripatetic series is a good fit for a guy like Peter Ash. He's no longer an active-duty Marine, but he's got some serious problems from his time at war. He's still a drifter, a little lost, and trying to find his way home. He's got a long way to go before he gets there.

How do you choose where the next adventure will take Peter? Why did you pick Memphis for the setting of TEAR IT DOWN and why does Peter go there?

Usually the topic of the book dictates the setting. **BURNING BRIGHT** is about cutting edge technology, so the West Coast was a natural choice. I set **LIGHT IT UP** in Colorado because it the first state to really dive into legalizing cannabis, which is central to the story. I also want a setting with great dramatic possibilities – crime writers can't waste any opportunities to put a character in trouble.

For this setting, I had originally planned to write about a natural disaster, and Memphis is in the heart of the New Madrid Fault Zone, the site of one of America's largest earthquakes. In **TEAR IT DOWN**, Peter travels to Memphis to help a troubled war photographer, whose personal problems are made worse when someone drives a dump truck into her house. Then Peter meets a young street musician who's been pulled into a robbery scheme. These characters were so vivid in my mind, and their stories captured me so completely, that somehow the earth-

quake never materialized. I'm hoping the earthquake will show up in another book.

In addition to his well-honed survival skills, Peter has post-traumatic stress that creates "white static" in his head, and prefers to live as far away from "civilization" as possible. In Memphis he is thrust into an intense urban world. What new challenges does this present for him?

In **TEAR IT DOWN**, Peter is getting used to living with the White Static, which is his name for his post-traumatic claustrophobia. But the city, as I write it, is more like a war zone than any place he's been since Iraq, complete with warlords and killers, machine gun attacks and improvised explosives. Peter is a complete outsider there, and he lacks the military resources he had as a Marine. Before he can stop the violence from escalating further, he must navigate this challenging urban environment and figure out who's cause these attacks, and why. Luckily, he can call a few friends for help.

Wanda Wyatt, a character Peter is helping, compares Memphis street violence with what she has witnessed in war zones in Iraq and Syria. How is this an apt analogy?

I'm not the first to compare America's troubled inner cities to war zones.

Armed conflict over territory, resources, and historic grievances, with innocent residents caught between two or more sides – this could describe Iraq, Syria, or many impoverished American neighborhoods. When you see your friends shot or killed, when you're safe on the streets or in your home because violence bleeds into the community, that's not so different from being a soldier or civilian in a combat zone. In fact, there's growing evidence that some of the challenges facing inner city residents are in fact due to undiagnosed post-traumatic stress.

Like Peter, Wanda carries with her the psychological scars of combat. Who is this complex woman? How are her experiences and issues similar and different to Peter's?

Wanda is a conflict photographer who's spent much of her career capturing images of war. She's been embedded with U.S. troops for months at a time, and has lived in war zones reporting on insurgents and civilians as well. Her job, as she sees it, is to show the costs of war, and to bear witness to its horrors, for the majority of Americans who have no idea what it can be like.

Lake many combat veterans, war correspondents often suffer from the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. In some cases, the symptoms can be quite debilitating, because they lack the



Nick Petrie

intense training of soldiers, and they are unarmed, which is essential to their work but can leave them feeling less in control. Both of these factors can increase post-traumatic stress.

Unlike Peter, Wanda doesn't get the White Static, but she's haunted by her memories, which she sees represented over and over again in her photographs. Rather than seek help, she self-medicates to survive. This is quite common with those suffering from post-traumatic stress.

Peter's innate sympathies for the underdog play out in his interactions with young Eli Bell. Who is Eli and what does Peter see in him that makes the young man worth trying to save?

Eli Bell is a talented street musician whose friends pull him into an armed robbery scheme. But things go badly wrong, and Eli finds himself way over his head. At first, Peter just wants to help out a kid in trouble. Peter finds that he really likes the kid's attitude, his intelligence, and his courage. When Peter fully grasps Eli's talents as a musician, he's determined to help give the kid a chance. But Eli's problems go much deeper than Peter knows. And Eli doesn't want Peter's help.

Though not overtly about racism, TEAR IT DOWN does cut deep into the hard realities of life in the poverty-stricken and crime-ridden African American community of North Memphis. What got you interested in this topic?

I'm fascinated by American culture, both its positive and negative aspects. Unfortunately, racism is an indelible part of our nation's formation and history and character – and not just our nation, either. We're in the middle of a noisy public conversation about this topic, and I think that's what gave this book this particular focus. But for me, writing about race and crime is just another way to tell the stories of the dispossessed – not just black Americans stuck in generational poverty, but also the white working Americans whose future is often getting worse, not better. The two groups share more than they know.

Did you spend time in Memphis to get a feel for the singularities of that community?

I didn't spend as much time in Memphis as I wanted – that's pretty much the case wherever I go – but my days in Memphis were vivid and illuminating. The city is really evocative, both culturally and to the senses. Driving through its neighborhoods and talking with residents, I could imagine telling any number of Memphis stories.

I've also spent a lot of time in impoverished parts of many cities, especially Detroit and Milwaukee, which are similar to Memphis in profound ways. For example, they are strikingly segregated from their suburbs, both in terms of race and wealth. All three cities have housing problems, with many homes torn down or condemned or otherwise in dire need of repairs. Urban violence is an epidemic, usually violence directed with the community, not outside it. I've spoken with police and regular folks about these issues, and those conversations have been fascinating, inspiring and heartbreaking. Often all at the same time.

When you wrote the first Peter Ash book, THE DRIFTER – which went on to win the ITW Thriller Award and the Barry Award for Best First Novel – did you intend to create a series? Has it been a challenge moving Peter's story forward?

I didn't set out to write a series and to be honest, I was pretty sure the book would never be published! But I truly love series fiction, and I must have been thinking about it in the back of my head, because when my editor told me she saw **THE DRIFTER** as the first in a series, I only had to change a few lines to keep Peter traveling on to his next adventure.

I was afraid that I'd have trouble writing a series and that I'd maybe get bored or run out of ideas, but I'm actually having the opposite experience. With Peter's unique character, I have the flexibility to write about essentially any topic I'm interested in, set in any place I'd care to visit. (I'd like to say I planned it that way, but I'm not that bright – just lucky.) So fare, I'm only

getting more interested in Peter and his friends, and I have more ideas than I have time to write them!

Thrillers are often called “escapist” reads, but the stories you tackle in your books actually remind readers of the complicated problems and conflicts that we face as a society. Do you hope to educate as well as entertain?

My first goal is to entertain – that's my primary job, to raise readers' adrenaline and keep them turning the pages faster and faster. My next goal is to create characters that seem like real people that make you think and feel. After that, I try to describe the setting with enough vivid details that you can close your eyes and see it. If I can accomplish those three goals, I've hopefully written a book that readers can get truly lost in.

But I am fascinated by the complexities of our changing world, and I often find the beginning of a book in a newspaper or magazine article. I write about things that interest me, complex topics that invade my waking hours and my sleep – topics I simply can't escape. I'm lucky that my books allow me to explore my obsessions, and even try to share a few things I've learned along the way.

At bottom, though, I do have a deeper mission. I work hard to convey the emotional realities of men and women who have put their minds and bodies at risk for their idea of a greater good. In a way, I'm like Wanda Wyatt – I'm trying to help readers feel, through these Peter Ash stories, the aftermath of armed conflict in all its human complexity, its triumphs and pain.

Most Americans have no idea of the true costs of war. Veterans reach out to me all the time, at book events and on social media, and tell me they appreciate what I'm doing. Those conversations are what keep me writing, and are, quite frankly, the best reward for the work.

Can you offer a sneak peek at the next Peter Ash book? Where will it be set?

The next Peter Ash book is set in Iceland, where he searches for a missing child amid the dramatic landscape and strange characters of this wild and wonderful place. Spoiler alert: bad things happen.

The Donus Report

Donus Roberts



I have backed off reading so many Scandinavian authors because, of course, one cannot keep up reading crime novels from around the world. As a result I missed Emelie Schep, a talented Swedish author who was named 2016 Swedish Crime writer of the year. Her first novel, **MARKED FOR LIFE**, Mira Books, 492 pages, 2016 English translation, \$9.99. **Rating: A**

If highly suspenseful scenes give you chills and send you burrowing under covers, mark this book for a future read. In addition, you will learn much about people stuffed into large containers and smuggled into countries illegally.

The novel begins with a crime. Hans Jubien, head of the Swedish Migration Board, is found in his living room shot to death. He is found by his wife who claims to have found the body after returning from a late night walk. Her only alibi is that she was out for a long walk.

There are complicating factors that draw attention from "the wife." There are palm and finger prints of a small child on a window, and the Jubiens are childless. In the bedroom there are unsigned threatening letters, all with the same message: "Pay now or else you'll pay the higher price."

The police detectives assigned to the case are Detective Chief Inspector Henrik Levin and his partner, Detective Inspector Mia Bolander. Jana Berzelus, the public prosecutor, is assigned oversight of the investigation. She will be the main character in the novel. Jana is very bright, but also emotionally cold. She reminds me of Carol O'Connell's crime investigative protagonist, Kathleen Mallory. Mia Bolander, who must work closely with the prosecutor, is very upset because she loves warmth

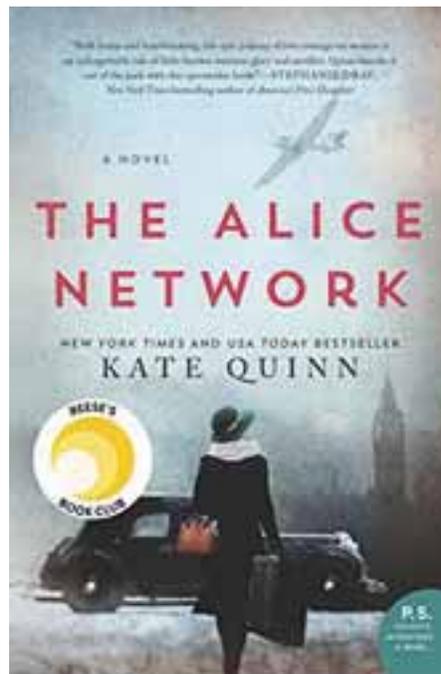
and Jana loves cold. Their interfacing throughout the plot will be difficult.

The plot of **MARKED FOR LIFE** moves into high speed early when a search of Hans Jubien's office computer reveals a series of ten different numbers and letters. Jana also recognizes one of the series of numbers and letters from reoccurring nightmares.

The plot and characters in this novel are a near-perfect match. There are many twists and turns both in the plot and in the interfacing of the characters. There is not just one crime, but multiple crimes, among which are child trafficking, drugs, and murder for hire.

At this point there are three novels in the series, **MARKED FOR LIFE** being the first. I became addicted to Schep's writing, her characters and her plots, so I had to finish the trio without interruption.

THE ALICE NETWORK by Kate Quinn, William Morrow, 494 pages,



2017, \$16.99. **Rating: A** This novel was a sleeper, albeit I had been selling the book at my bookstore since it was published. I was surprised about just how interesting I found **THE ALICE NETWORK**, which was an organization through which courageous men and women infiltrated the German lines in rural France. I also found both the plot and characters in this historical crime novel believable.

The memory of World War II has produced some brilliant novels in recent years, **ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE**, **THE NIGHTINGALE**, **THE GIRL FROM KRAKOW**, among others. **THE ALICE NETWORK** joins the group. In a traditional sense, **THE ALICE NETWORK** is on the fringe of crime novels, but this novel is about serious investigations into known criminal acts.

Lili, chief handler of the spy group, is based on a real woman who during World War II was called a "regular Joan of Arc." With thousands of operatives under her command, Lili claims that she is "a handful of water, running everywhere," and that the Germans would never find her. That did not happen.

"Charlie" St. Clair is a very intelligent student at Bennington College in 1947. Unfortunately, she was not as bright in the bedroom, and the result is an unwanted pregnancy. Her rich mother hauls her off to Europe to find a clinic that will take care of what is referred to as her "Little Problem."

Meanwhile, Charlie conjures up an alternative plan, to track down her beloved cousin Rose, lost somewhere in France. It is only two years after the end of World War II, and literally thousands of people are roaming Europe or recovering in care facilities. This quest results in the improbable connection to Eve Gardiner, an explosive, drunken, foul-mouthed espionage agent who may know where Rose has landed.

This leads to a romp across France in a dark-blue Aston Martin Lagonda convertible, driven by a war-veteran Scotsman, Finn. It is worth reading this novel for Finn alone.

Following the plot development to this point, **THE ALICE NETWORK**

is told by alternating chapters, within World War II and after World War II in 1947. The romp certainly applies to the near daily escapades of Charlie and Finn.

At times I was bothered by the bouncing back and forth, chapter by chapter. Overall, the author kept the two plots interesting in different ways, and by the end of the novel she merged the two plots. That took writing talent. Purists may be bothered by too much foolishness within one of the plots, but in my opinion there is nothing wrong with adding humor to escape from the deadly realism found in the World War II plot of the novel. It is a reading bonus.

I have read most of the noir crime novels of Yrsa Sigurdardottir since **LAST RITUALS**, her English language debut novel in 2007. Yrsa is commonly called Iceland's "Queen of Noir," but she is a "Queen of Noir" around the globe. Her latest novel is **THE RECKONING**, Hodder and Stoughton, 406 pages, 2018, 16.99 pounds. **Rating: A-** The second book in the chilling Children's House series, **THE RECKONING** is a very good example of Sigurdardottir's crime-writing style, and it may well be her most grisly, potentially too grisly for some readers.

The plot of the novel resembles some contemporary news. A time capsule is dug up ten years after being buried, and inside the capsule is a note that specifies six people who are going to die. A thirteen-year-old originally wrote it, so is it imagined or possible?

Detective Huldar believes that he has been assigned this case to keep him away from doing real police work. Nonetheless, he turns to psychologist Freyja to help him understand the child who hid the message. Then another shocking case arises, and the race is on. The reader understands from this point that these cases will converge, but the trick is how. Huldar and Freyja have a love-hate relationship which plays a role in their investigation, which also generates a sexual tension during the investigations.

Be prepared for detached body parts. I always thought that the scene in **SOPHIE'S CHOICE** by William Styron, where a German officer at a Nazi death

camp made Sophie choose one of her children to live or both would die was the most dramatic ever. In this novel a father has to have his hands cut off to save his children. Is this over the top or too much current news chasing fiction?

I should add that the book's conclusion will slam into you from the side, and you will never have see it coming. If you see the ending coming, perhaps you should be writing thrillers in addition to reading them.

I love the Alafair Tucker mysteries by Donis Casey. Although we both have Donis/Donus as a first name, I doubt that is the reason. Although she/Donis bought me a drink at the 2007 Bouchercon in Alaska, I discount that also. The truth is that Donis Casey has created one of the most authentic amateur detectives ever in the name of Alafair Tucker, mother of ten children, who thinks her way into the solution of crimes during the Oklahoma boom days of the 1910's.

FORTY DEAD MEN by Donis Casey, Poisoned Pen Press, 206 pages, 2018, \$26.95. **Rating: A-** This is the 10th novel in the series. I have been hooked from the very beginning, her first novel being **THE OLD BUZZARD HAD IT COMING**, which was named an Oklahoma Centennial Book in 2008.

The setting for this novel is post

World War I. Many soldiers who lived in the trenches and battled poison mustard gas returned from the war with a condition that we had not diagnosed until recently: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. At that time soldiers returned from the war and no one knew its cause or cure. When I was a child, there was a World War I veteran in our small town who never uttered a word after he returned from the war, and he lived for over 40 years.

Alafair's oldest son has just returned from the war. He is happy to be home, but everyone notices that he is restless and moody. His real name is George Washington Tucker, but everyone calls him Gee Dub.

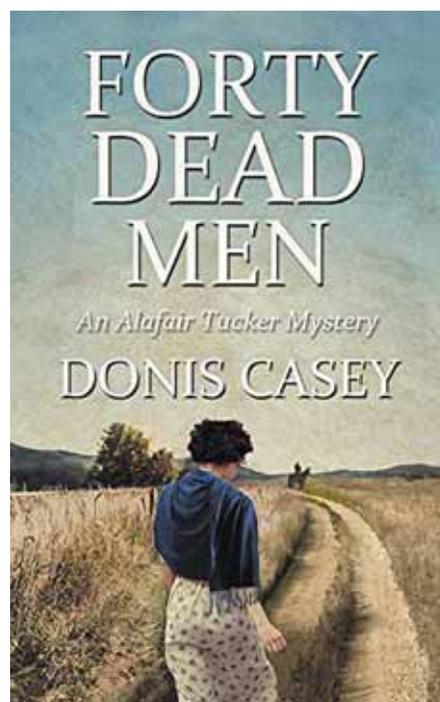
One day, while riding his horse, he encounters a woman trudging along a country road. She refuses to let him help her, so Gee Dub enlists his mother to take a horse and wagon out to help the woman named Holly.

So the mystery is triggered and Alafair can engage her investigative mind. Holly has come from Maine to Oklahoma to find the soldier she married before he shipped to France. The war now over, her husband has never returned to Maine, but he lived in a small town in the area before the war, which brought her to the dusty road in Oklahoma, penniless.

Alafair starts to gather information. She has to hurry because her son Gee Dub is arrested for the murder of Holly's husband. There is logic to the arrest since Gee Dub is smitten by Holly.

I have read almost all of the crime novels of Georges Simenon. His crime-solver was Jules Maigret, the Police Commissioner of Paris. He and Alafair Tucker are polar opposites except that both of them, literally, roam the scene of the crime and interview and observe the suspects. Finally, they essentially become the character(s) they are investigating.

In 1992 I was fortunate to read the first novel of Martin Limon entitled **JADE LADY BURNING**. The novel introduced me to two of my favorite characters in crime fiction. "George Sueno rose out of the barrios of East L. A. His partner, Ernie Bascom, escaped



the mean streets of Detroit. And both have found a home in the U. S. Army--the criminal Investigation Division in Korea..." Now, thirteen novels later, the two characters are still solving crimes in Korea, investigating ordinary crimes in an extraordinary setting, South Korea in the 1970s. If you have never heard of this series but are interested, start at the beginning with **JADE LADY BURNING**.

For this issue of *Deadly Pleasures* I am reviewing **THE NINE-TAILED FOX**, Soho Crime, 323 pages, 1917, \$26.95. It is actually the twelfth novel in the series, the thirteenth had not yet been published when I wrote this review.

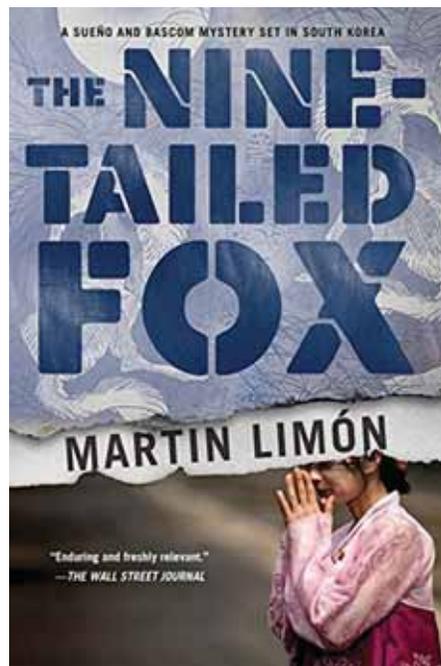
Rating: A

Three American GIs stationed in South Korea during the 1970s go missing in a short period of time, which triggers Army Criminal Investigation Sergeants George Sueno and Ernie Bascom into acting. Street intelligence points them to an underground organization connected to the local legend of the Gumihō, a nine-tailed fox that transforms into a beautiful woman in order to seduce men and eat their livers for dessert.

In South Korea during that period of time, one does not discount anything. They have hardly started the investigation when they are derailed by two army wives who are locked in a vicious fight over a refrigerator and a local women's shelter. If you enjoy comedy and crime, this episode in the novel is worth every penny.

Often the escapades by Sueno and Bascom are equal to their dogged pursuit of cases. Sueno has taught himself Korean which gives him an edge in investigations. Bascom, meanwhile has his back during particularly dangerous sorties into the South Korean bar scenes at night. If you are occasionally tired of crime novels whose plots or characters are too similar, read one of Martin Limon's Sueno and Bascom novels.

Off and on I have always read some true crime stories, and among those I remembered was one called the Lord Lucan Case, which led me to a current crime novel, **A DOUBLE LIFE** by Flynn Berry. Viking Press, 260 pages, 2018, \$26.00. **Rating: B**



The central character of this novel is Claire, whom we meet when she was eight years old. Claire and her younger brother are asleep in their home when an intruder breaks into the house, bludgeons their nanny, and beats their mother within an inch of her life. The mother unequivocally identifies the attacker as her estranged husband who is nowhere to be found. His rich friends come to his rescue and muddle and cover the crimes.

The father is gone, the crime is unsolved, and only Claire, now a doctor, is obsessed with finding him. This plot sounds similar to ones we have heard before, but I was ready for an exciting discovery and chase. The problem is that the plot never became exciting. It was resolved, but without any unusual discoveries or whoops moments.

I have complained that some writers of crime novels have often over-relied on plot turns to the detriment of any sense of reality. This plot needed more climactic scenes. When the father was potentially discovered, there needed to be more of a thrill to the chase.

The book is very well written, and the characters, particularly Claire, are very well developed, but the movement toward the plot resolution was just too predictable and ordinary. I first read about this case as a true crime story, and this novel, which was not trying to retell the true crime story, missed some golden

opportunities to make Claire's quest to discover her father's guilt or innocence more interesting.

Steven Saylor has been a major historical novelist--and crime novelist--since his first book, **ROMAN BLOOD**, was published in 1991. **ROMAN BLOOD** is still one of the best as well as most collectible historical/crime novels written by an American, and it introduced Saylor's most famous crime investigator, Gordianus the Finder who also is the central character in Saylor's most recent novel, **THRONE OF CAESAR**, Mino-taur, 392 pages, \$27.99. Rating: A

Gordianus has a knack to criminal research, mostly on the streets of Rome, and the personality to attract famous clients who do not want to find their confidences whispered on the streets. Thus Gordianus interacts with real people, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Cicero, Pompey, Cleopatra, and many others.

In **THRONE OF CAESAR**, Cicero contacts Gordianus because his ears have picked up news on the street that a plot exists to assassinate Caesar before he leaves for a military campaign against Parthia, which places the time, perhaps on the Ides of March. So in this case the motive is to prevent a crime rather than investigate one that has happened.

So much has been written about the assassination of Caesar that there could be no suspense. However, Saylor brilliantly adds the murder of the famous Roman poet Cinna, which occurred on the same day but after the assassination of Caesar. Much less is known about this second assassination so Gordianus has a real case to investigate after not being able to prevent the assassination of Caesar.

I realize that many crime novel readers dislike historical novels that include historical characters in novel plots. For me the question is whether the author re-invents history to play the novel game, and I have never found anything but historical accuracy in the novels of Steven Saylor. Saylor's novels do not need to be read in the order he wrote them, but I would encourage new readers to undertake **ROMAN BLOOD** first.

Central Booking

Kristopher Zgorski



LYING IN WAIT by Liz Nugent (Gallery/Scout Press, \$26.00). **Rating: B** Liz Nugent is one of those rare authors willing to take true risks with her writing. In terms of structure, themes, and character depth, Nugent defiantly refuses to adhere to long-held crime fiction conventions. Her debut novel, *Unraveling Oliver*, made an instant splash with its UK release and proceeded to experience a slow boil as other locations discovered the book's unparalleled uniqueness. By the time her new book appeared, it was clear that many fans the world over would be rushing to get their hands on **LYING IN WAIT**. They will not be disappointed.

LYING IN WAIT begins with Lydia Fitzsimons conspiring with her husband on a secret meeting that ends in the death of a young woman named Annie Doyle. By the end of the first chapter, Annie is buried in the garden behind the family estate.

The rest of the novel covers 36 years in the convoluted journey of this Irish family. Readers are given three points of view: Lydia, Laurence (Lydia's son), and Karen (Annie's sister). There are a number of other characters who play key roles in the development of this novel's plot, but the reader's only access to them is through the lens of the three leads. As the police, relatives, and their own guilt begin to close in on the Fitzsimons, this insular family must make some very difficult choices or risk having their secrets exposed.

Plot-wise, **LYING IN WAIT** is so elegantly structured that really to say much more would risk spoilers. The narratives of each of the main characters reflect upon the others in beautifully enlightening ways, weaving through each other's testaments, exposing the

speaker to the reader in subtle, by significant ways, and yet obscuring the most pertinent details until that precise moment when maximum impact can be achieved.

It is probably Laurence who elicits the most sympathetic response from readers. His choices are the ones that readers will most easily identify with – albeit, knowing that he is making mistakes along his journey. Watching him gain confidence and self-worth as he overcomes unhealthy eating habits and his obesity make him relatable in all his flawed glory. As the “outsider,” Karen's viewpoint allows readers a glimpse into the family dynamic that those intimately involved are unable to see. All that said, Lydia is likely the character readers will remember the most by the dramatic conclusion of this novel. To put it mildly, she is a piece of work.

Suffice to say, all three points of view are needed to work this word magic. One loose thread in any of their tales and this house of cards would crumble. Liz Nugent's talent is such that she makes this look so easy, when in fact later rumination reveals many deliberate choices that enhanced the overall enjoyment of **LYING IN WAIT**.

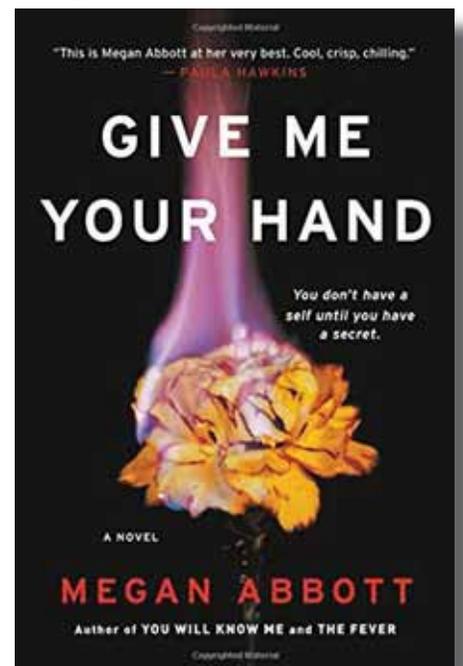
This is a very Irish tale, almost fairy tale in nature, assuming that one likes their fairies warped and their tales dark. Some readers may be put off by the overwhelming unhappiness on display throughout the novel, but Liz Nugent knows what she is doing. Even the main setting – the family estate known as Avalon – comes alive and vacillates between feeling like “home sweet home” and a menacing entity in which every crevice holds a secret.

All of this is in service to the win-

ning plot. **LYING IN WAIT** is one of those books where plot and character merge so successfully that it would be impossible to imagine one without the other. Prepare to dig in, you never know what you will find buried within.

GIVE ME YOUR HAND by Megan Abbott (Little, Brown, \$27.00). **Rating: A** No other crime fiction author can so perfectly and eloquently distill the complexities of female relationships in the way that Megan Abbott can and does repeatedly. Whether she is writing about classic femme fatales, kidnapping victims, high school cheerleaders, or elite athletes, Abbott has proven again and again that while her novels always center around crime, it is the female characters at the core that are truly worth exploring. With **GIVE ME YOUR HAND**, Megan Abbott once again excavates well below the surface in a story of female friendship, jealousy, and rivalry amidst extreme professional pressure.

Kit Owens and Diane Fleming meet in chemistry class at Lanister High. There is an immediate bond, a linkage that will follow them through life. What starts as a friendship morphs towards a competitive angle, with mutual respect and more than a note of fear always present. When both girls apply for the same STEM scholarship, a repeated pattern of healthy competition begins to emerge.



“...you don’t have a self until you have a secret.”

But then Diane tells Kit her darkest secret and the tentative nature of their friendship is shattered. The two part ways and life goes on. Kit continues with her interest in the world of science, rising up through the ranks within her laboratory-based career. When she hears that her idol, Dr. Lena Severin, is launching a new research endeavor examining the causes and effects of severe premenstrual dysphoric disorder, Kit immediately wants to be part of the team. The problem is, so do all her fellow Severinites at her current lab. Confident that she can beat any of them, Kit’s plans are suddenly thrown into disarray when Diane Fleming shows up also coveting a spot on Dr. Severin’s project.

“To be so ordered and so out of control.”

Bringing these two women together again stirs up the memories of their past together. Megan Abbott tells this story from the point of view of Kit Owens, so readers are only granted one half of the full story. This structure grants Abbott the ability to slowly build suspense around what exactly Diane’s secret is, to such an extent that it will have readers begging for relief. And when Kit does finally reveal the truth, the ramifications are felt both for the reader and for the narrative.

“Give me your hand...”

Not only is this the title of the book, but when those words are uttered at almost the precise middle of the book, the fate of these two women is forever linked and there is no turning back. Readers will have long felt the dangers at play within the novel’s tension and Megan Abbott makes that moment both shocking and inevitable. Many writers would lack the finesse necessary to pull off such a major moment, but Abbott allows it to flow naturally from the characters she has crafted. The idea of putting the book aside from this point to the final conclusion will never be an option for fans of psychological suspense tales.

“The blood is the life...”

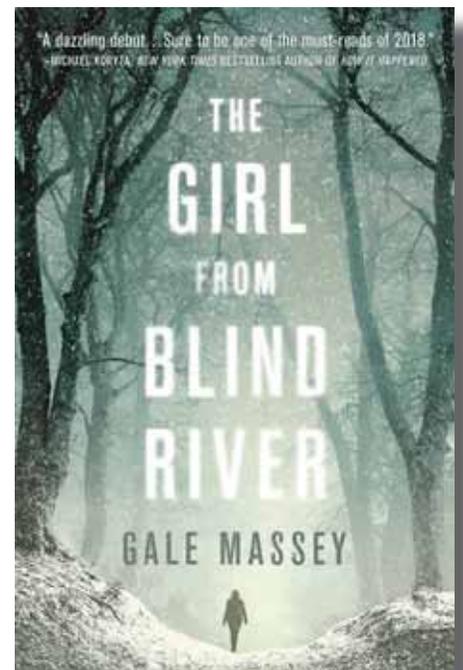
On the surface, **GIVE ME YOUR**

HAND would seem to be a story about women, for women, and of course, by a woman; and yet, Megan Abbott has proven over and over that she is able to draw men under her spell. She never shies away from going to difficult or controversial places, but she does it with measured restraint and beautiful language that is free of judgment. Much can be learned about our society by looking at how these two women ended up in their situation. The key to community is empathy and Megan Abbott is gifted enough to lead readers there without getting didactic or pedantic along the way. The scientific setting of **GIVE ME YOUR HAND** is so on-point with current trends that it makes for a refreshing change of pace within the crime fiction genre. It is to Megan Abbott’s credit that she never attempts to make this feel revolutionary, because while it may seem like a new angle for fiction, it is a journey women have traveled for years in reality. The verisimilitude of every action will send shockwaves while also entertaining any reader who dares open the cover.

GIVE ME YOUR HAND is another in a long line of successes for Megan Abbott. Don’t miss this novel – it’s sure to be one of the most talked about books of the season.

THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER by Gale Massey (Crooked Lane Books, \$26.99). **Rating: B** Occasionally, debuts come along that are so tightly-plotted and strongly-written that it is hard to believe they are first novels. When that happens, readers instantly know they will be following said author’s career for quite some time to come. That is exactly what will happen when readers pick up Gale Massey’s **THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER**; there is no turning back.

In a way that is not always the case, the title of Gale Massey’s debut clues her new fans in to what is most important; the girl – Jamie Elders and the location – Blind River. Based on the strength of those two elements alone, **THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER** would be a smashing success, but in an embarrassment of riches, Gale Massey manages to provide so much more.



Crime fiction needs a character like nineteen-year-old Jamie Elders. She’s spirited, candid, and steadfast to the core; she’s incredibly savvy, yet inherently world-weary; she’s an every-woman who manages to also be one-of-a-kind. This complex nature makes Jamie Elders the perfect type of character on which to base a series. Not only will readers not know where she is going to go in **THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER**, there is also no telling where Jamie is willing to go in the future.

Which brings us to Blind River. Gale Massey’s elegiac language brings this location to life in a way that makes it unforgettable. On the surface, Blind River is nothing special: a struggling corner of New York state one either passes through with arms tense and breath held or a birthplace one aims to rid oneself of as soon as possible. But it is more than a physical place; it’s an attitude that resides in the bones of its citizens, making escape impossible – and just maybe unwarranted.

Of course Jamie dreams of leaving Blind River behind, but she won’t abandon her younger brother, Toby. When Uncle Loyal gets Toby embroiled in a major crime – as the lead suspect, no less – Jamie’s fierce nature roars to the forefront. Self-preservation becomes a non-entity as she willingly sets out to do

whatever she must to save young Toby.

Jamie's journey toward a new understanding of maturity dominates **THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER**, but the secondary characters are never neglected. The good, the bad, and every permutation between are fleshed out in nuanced ways, eliciting true emotion from the reader with each new plot turn.

Poker plays a significant role in the plot, but excessive familiarity with the game is not really necessary. Massey creates an ambience out of the many risks gambling generates for her characters – a gateway to worse crimes. Based on the authenticity displayed throughout **THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER**, one suspects that this author's knowledge of card games is on point.

Gale Massey's writing style in **THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER** is unique. While the plot moves at fast clip, the language is methodical and at times lyrically beautiful. This is a writer in charge of every word and phrase, able to seduce readers, keeping them under her spell for the duration. Based on the strength of the writing, the complexity of the characters, and the uniqueness of the setting, a lot of new fans will be created once **THE GIRL FROM BLIND RIVER** is completed.

PRESUMED DEAD by Mason Cross (Orion, \$13.99). **Rating: B** Carter Blake finds people – that is what he does; but in many ways, it is also who he is on the deepest level. Having such purpose makes the challenges of life bearable and the rewards that accompany success are undeniably fulfilling. So when his latest case – in **PRESUMED DEAD** – finds him hunting down the last victim of a notorious serial killer, Carter discovers his entire world-view turned upside-down.

PRESUMED DEAD is the fifth book in Mason Cross's thriller series. Fans who have followed Carter Blake on his previous investigations will delight in visiting with an old friend, but this novel works equally well for new readers.

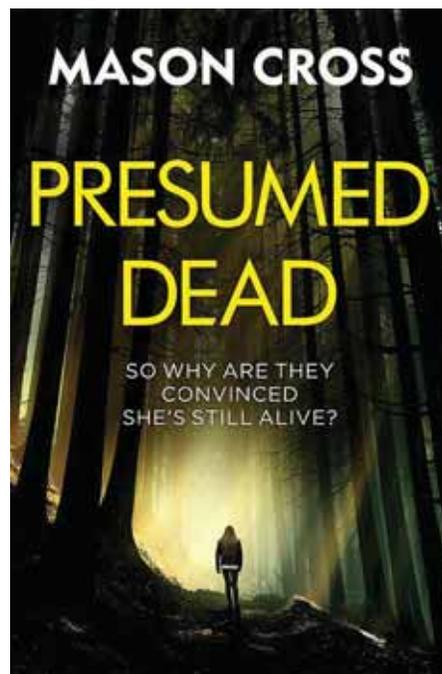
David Conner is traveling when he sees his sister, Adeline, through the bus window. By the time he can get to her, she has vanished into the crowd. No so unusual, except that Adeline was sup-

posedly murdered years ago – the final victim of the Devil Mountain Killer. Through mutual contacts, David reaches out to Carter Blake, begging him to look for his sister.

With that set-up, Carter finds himself in Bethany, Georgia. At first, Carter thinks he is just appeasing the delusions of this eccentric loner – a brother who never got over the loss of his beloved sibling – but when Carter finds out that the previous investigator hired by David is now dead, he begins to wonder if there might be some validity to this sighting. This brings Carter into the crosshairs of the local sheriff's department and it quickly becomes clear that this town does not want to revisit the source of its infamous notoriety.

Determined to follow his client's claims through to whatever end result develops, Carter teams up with Deputy Isabella Green. At first, Green – whose father was involved in the original investigation – is reluctant to dig up past memories, but the more she and Carter follow the trail of clues, the more convinced everyone is that the truth of what happened years ago is still disrupting lives throughout Bethany today.

Even though Carter doesn't call himself a private investigator – he much prefers the term locating consultant – he does employ standard methods of investigation as he works through cases.



With the multiple viewpoints, Mason Cross outlines the logical flow of that information while using the shifting focus to increase tension and suspicion.

The resolution of **PRESUMED DEAD** is a true stunner, eliciting a “holy shit” from this reader. But unlike some twists that appear totally contrived, this development is organic to the novel, so the emotions generated are rewards for the reader and deserve kudos for the author who laid such complex groundwork. Crime fiction fans who have not yet met Carter Blake should certainly rectify that as soon as possible. Mason Cross has crafted a modern-day hero – flaws and all – and fans will happily follow him to any destination.

LITTLE COMFORT by Edwin Hill (Kensington, \$26.00). **Rating: B+** **LITTLE COMFORT** is the title of Edwin Hill's debut novel, but it is also an apt description of the reader's experience while reading this suspense-filled book.

LITTLE COMFORT is billed at the first Hester Thursby Mystery, but let's get that marketing matter out of the way immediately. **LITTLE COMFORT** reads more like a thriller than it does a mystery, so readers should know this going in. There are certainly mysterious elements within the plot, but the thrills remain dominant. And while Hester is no doubt a main character – and the one that will be the focus of the series – *Little Comfort* is very much an ensemble piece with multiple points of view. It is this weaving of perspectives, building a whole-cloth tapestry, which makes Edwin Hill's book feel so fresh and innovative.

Of late, much has been made about the lack of diversity in crime fiction – but certainly no one can lay that claim again **LITTLE COMFORT**. Along with Hester – who, at around four-foot-ten inches and eighty-nine pounds, qualifies as a little person – Hill populates his novel with a Benetton commercial's worth of variety, making the Boston setting feel vibrant and realistic.

As **LITTLE COMFORT** begins, Hester is hired by Lila Blaine to locate her brother who has been missing for over a decade. It doesn't take Hester long to find Sam Blaine – even though that is

no longer the name he is using – but rather than tell her client immediately, Hester decides to monitor the actions of this man and his roommate, Gabe, for a while. It is this decision that puts her and those she loves dearly in the cross-hairs of danger.

Sam and Gabe ran from their home – called Little Comfort – for a reason, and over time they have grown accustomed to living the lifestyle of the rich and famous. Except for the fact that they are doing it on a shoestring budget. How is that possible? This is just one of the many startling things Hester uncovers as she digs deeper into the Blaine Family history.

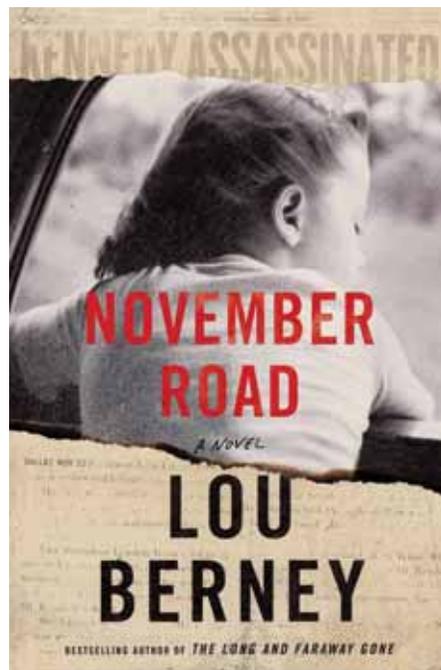
Along with the case complexities, Edwin Hill also puts Hester in the position of having to care for her very young niece, Kate, while traversing the state looking for answers to each new question. Hester is none-to-pleased with this arrangement and watching her struggle to juggle this situation helps the reader bond with this unique character. Her love of movies – especially horror films – and the constant allusions to them within the novel are another way the author brings the reader closer to Hester.

As one can see, the mystery of “where is Sam?” is answered very quickly, but that revelation serves to launch the thriller aspect of the novel into full bloom. This book is most definitely not a cozy. It is Edwin Hill’s ability to imbue every character with the necessary psychological make-up that keeps readers invested. This is not a book of good versus evil but one of troubled souls on life’s journey where no one is completely innocent, but some stray too far to ever return home.

Readers will react to the originality of **LITTLE COMFORT** and will surely for many return visits with Hester Thursby.

NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney (William Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: A+**

Nostalgia is a complex concept. Most often, we define it as fondly looking back on a simpler time, a better time; but it has a sinister side as well. Because, in order to long for yesteryear, we must also forget – or at the very least obfuscate – that those times had challenges not un-



like, and often worse, than the time we wish to escape. Nostalgia requires us to paint the past with a sepia-laden brush of incongruity. This is the area in which Lou Berney places readers with his new historical crime novel, **NOVEMBER ROAD**.

For many, **NOVEMBER ROAD** will be much more than a crime novel – and there is no denying this truth – but it is also a novel that never shies away from its genre-based touchstones – by a writer who refuses to deny his genre-based origins. The literary world is going to embrace **NOVEMBER ROAD**, but crime aficionados will remain the heart behind the hug.

NOVEMBER ROAD is a road-trip novel with three distinct journeys on a collision course with destiny. Set just before, during, and after John F. Kennedy’s assassination, the novel documents a time of strife that reverberates into our modern world. The struggle for civil rights for all citizens was in full swing and was as contentious then as it sadly remains today. But **NOVEMBER ROAD** is not a novel “about” this topic, but rather is a story in which these realities resonate through the characters and situations presented to the extent that the two become inseparable. In fact, these characters become universal because of their singularity of time and place.

Frank Guidry has worked for mob boss Carlos Marcello for years. Loyal to a fault, when he becomes privy to information of National significance, he realizes that his life is in danger from those he trusts most. On the run, making spur-of-the-moment decisions, Frank must stay one step ahead if he has any hope of surviving. Frank is a man who does bad things, but he is also a man with a moral compass. Riding with him as he struggles with this dichotomy is a lesson every reader deserves, even needs.

Paul Barone also works for Carlos – as a hitman. His assignment is to find and eliminate the problem of Frank Guidry. Teaming up with a young African-American kid named Theodore, Barone tracks this fugitive’s every move across multiple States. The bond between Barone and Theodore elucidates much about the status of race relations during this transitional period in our country’s history and readers will feel both hope and fear in equal measure.

Charlotte is also on the run – but her journey represents one more of self-discovery than of survival. With her two daughters – Rosemary and Joan – in tow, Charlotte leaves her stable and contented life behind in the effort to find herself and make a better future for her girls. Charlotte embodies the move towards female empowerment that seemed so revolutionary at the time. Her actions may seem impulsive, but Charlotte is committed to them with no less vehemence than the others. Charlotte is the character with which readers will likely most identify; she is the everywoman who is unlike any woman.

And when these three groups converge – come on, it’s not like you didn’t know that was going to happen – the resulting cacophony will echo for generations. If *November Road* teaches us anything (and believe me, it teaches us tons), it is this: major events affect even the most minor of individuals; but minor alterations can also have a major impact. These characters – simply because of how real they are – will stay with readers forever, and their choices – both the good and the bad – will influence future decisions for each and every one of the folks who read this

novel. Sure, we won't be able to track how this string of continuity actually flows, moment to moment, but every true reader knows that books do make a difference. This book will make a difference.

NOVEMBER ROAD is an eminently readable thriller with a power and depth that belies that ease. There are grander ideals at play within Lou Berney's words, sentences, and chapters. Sometimes the greatest changes are spurred from the most unexpected of sources. To read **NOVEMBER ROAD** is to live **NOVEMBER ROAD** – and it is impossible not to be altered by that experience.

IN HER BONES by Kate Moretti (Atria, \$16.00). **Rating: B-** The reading public's interest in psychological suspense shows no sign of diminishing. **IN HER BONES** is Kate Moretti's third book in this genre and yet, each of these stand-alones is distinctly different. Unifying them all is an easily-readable writing style and a gift for plotting complex tales in which character is the focus.

IN HER BONES tells the story of Edie Beckett, the daughter of notorious serial killer, Lilith Wade. Fifteen years after those crimes, Edie is still haunt-

ed by her mother's crimes and finds herself drawn to the families of the victims.

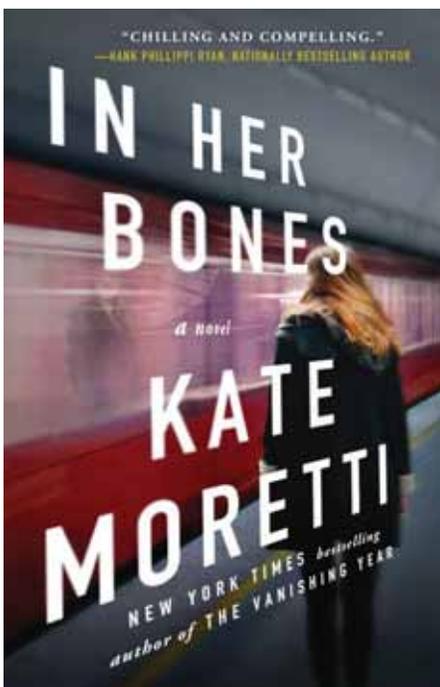
Given the nature of the narrative structure, psychological suspense novels often have very complex character development and Moretti's new book is no exception. For some readers, this makes these lead characters more challenging. There is no question that Edie is a difficult character to "like," but it is precisely because of her poor choices that **IN HER BONES** is able to unspool with constant surprise. Given her peculiar history, Edie's troubled life is perfectly understandable and given enough time, readers will feel responsive towards her.

Edie's infatuation with the relatives left in the wake of her mother's murderous spree leads her directly into her own nightmare. When a man is murdered and Edie becomes the prime suspect, she must go on the run and evade capture until she can remember exactly what happened on the night in question. Hopefully for Edie, that means figuring out who the real killer is – assuming it's not herself.

Kate Moretti gives readers the other side of things via point of view chapters from Gil Brandt – the detective who arrested Edie's mother and the man hunting Edie down now. Gil's history with the family makes for an interesting way to expose readers to more of the backstory while never losing sight of the current cat and mouse game.

One other element weaves its way through **IN HER BONES**. Occasionally readers get excerpts from a true-crime book that was written about Lilith's case. These chapters are incredibly well-written and many readers will find them their favorite part of this story. But they are also integral to the structure of this overall novel and fans of Moretti will know that nothing is included simply to fill pages.

Despite a prickly lead character, Kate Moretti's **IN HER BONES** will please readers looking for psychologically-astute explorations of criminal



Agatha Award Nominations 2019

The names of winning works and authors will be declared on May 4, during Malice Domestic 31, set to be held in Bethesda, Maryland from May 3 to 5.

Best Contemporary Novel

- MARDI GRAS MURDER** by Ellen Byron (Crooked Lane)
BEYOND THE TRUTH by Bruce Robert Coffin (Witness Impulse)
CRY WOLF by Annette Dashofy (Henry Press)
KINGDOM OF THE BLIND by Louise Penny (Minotaur)
TRUST ME by Hank Phillippi Ryan (Forge)

Best Historical Novel

- FOUR FUNERALS AND MAYBE A WEDDING** by Rhys Bowen (Berkley)
THE GOLD PAWN by L.A. Chandlar (Kensington)
THE WIDOWS OF MALABAR HILL by Sujata Massey (Soho Crime)
TURNING THE TIDE by Edith Maxwell (Midnight Ink)
MURDER ON UNION SQUARE by Victoria Thompson (Berkley)

Best First Novel

- A LADY'S GUIDE TO ETIQUETTE AND MURDER** by Dianne Freeman (Kensington)
LITTLE COMFORT by Edwin Hill (Kensington)
WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU by Aimee Hix (Midnight Ink)
DEADLY SOLUTION by Keenan Powell (Level Best)
CURSES BOILED AGAIN by Shari Randall (St. Martin's Press)

From The Waterfront

by Ted Hertel



NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney (William Morrow, \$26.99, October 2018), **Rating: A** November 1963. Frank Guidry is a fixer for powerful mobster Carlo Marcello who ruled the New Orleans crime family from 1947 until the late 1980s. Guidry has been sent on several mysterious missions by Marcello, including stashing a getaway car just blocks away from Dealey Plaza in Dallas days before John F. Kennedy was assassinated. The more he thinks about it, the more he comes to believe that Marcello was behind the killing and the more it appears that the mob boss is wiping out everyone who was in any way involved in order to eliminate any link back to him. This includes Guidry himself. So he decides to disappear. On the road he meets Charlotte Roy, her two daughters and their dog, also running, this time from a stifling small town life and her drunk of a husband. Guidry sees an opportunity to enhance his cover by traveling with a ready-made family. They join up on the road to Las Vegas and California together. But fugitives shouldn't fall in love, especially with the mob not far behind.

This is Lou Berney's follow-up novel to the outstanding Edgar, Anthony, Barry, Macavity, and ALA Award winning **THE LONG AND FARAWAY GONE**. With **NOVEMBER ROAD** he is a serious contender to sweep those awards once again. This is a powerful novel, involving real life crime boss Carlos Marcello, centered around one of the 20th Century's most horrific crimes, the assassination of a United States President. But the reader only sees that from a distance, through the eyes of ordinary people watching reports on television. What becomes central to the story is how that event affected the lives of

individual Americans, from an ordinary woman and her children to a criminal tangentially involved in the event.

Charlotte Roy is the beating heart of this story. At times she doesn't know whether to laugh or to cry. She is all the more human for that. Guidry, with all his contradictions, is equally well presented, as he searches his soul over what he has done and what salvation might lie ahead. Berney has the ability to see into people and know how they act. What's more, he can translate that into words on the page better than just about any writer today. That was true for **THE LONG AND FARAWAY GONE** and it is no less true here. Along the way, he creates nonstop tension, not only for his main characters but also for his readers.

This was difficult book to put down – in fact, I didn't want to – and I don't say that very often. It is an incredibly absorbing story of two people caught in webs of secrets and lies with danger following them every step of their paths. Steeped in a history of "what might have actually been," we see an America at the moment of change, of loss of innocence, of hope dashed, and of prayers for a better future. Simply put, do not miss this novel. You can thank me for the recommendation later but read it now.

THE NEGOTIATOR by Brendan DuBois (Midnight Ink, \$15.99, August 2018). **Rating: A-** The unnamed negotiator does just that: negotiates transactions between people in order to obtain a fair price for the object being sold. He is an expert appraiser whom both sides know they can trust. The negotiations involve such things as rare books, hot diamonds, stolen artwork, even limited edition Air Jordan sneakers. So, of course, the parties on either side of the negotiations are criminals, making the

negotiator's job just that much more dangerous. But when he is called in to negotiate the sale of a long-missing Rembrandt, things turn nasty. The seller kills the negotiator's partner and the negotiator barely escapes with his life. Naturally, he decides that he must pursue the killer, ably assisted by two women with their own motives.

This is an amazingly fast-paced novel that only slows down to take the occasional breath, usually involving one of the women. Brendan DuBois, award-winning author of the fine Lewis Cole series and many short stories, knows how to keep the pages of this tough standalone tale turning with short scenes and interesting characters. Sharp, witty dialogue and what at first appears to be a straightforward plot drive the book to its twisty ending.

Humor, suspense, romance, and indiscriminate (and some discriminate!) killing. What more could a mystery reader want? Maybe another book about *The Negotiator*.

UNDER A DARK SKY by Lori Rader-Day (William Morrow, \$15.99, August 2018). **Rating: B+** Five former classmates and a guest walk into a guest house with an interloper and one by one they meet with disaster. This sounds like the beginning of a bad joke or a riddle. But it's not. It's deadly serious, just like the Christie classic *And Then There Were None*. Eden Wallace arrives at a resort home reserved by her husband before his untimely death only to discover that the owner had also rented the home to the five classmates, one of whom brings along his new girlfriend. Before the first evening is over, there's a bump and a murder in the night. All are suspects, including Eden who claims she has never met any of the others previously. But like all who are there, Eden too has secrets that she is keeping, especially her paralyzing fear of the dark. As the other classmates come under attack, it becomes apparent that Eden is a more and more likely suspect, her denials notwithstanding.

This is Lori Rader-Day's fourth standalone novel. Each of her other three books have won either the Anthony or the Mary Higgins Clark Award

and were nominated for others, as well, including the Barry Award from *Deadly Pleasures*. This one looks like it will follow in the path of the earlier novels. It is a fine blend of suspense, mixed with Rader-Day's terrific characterization of all the suspects and exploration of the human condition, with a great setting in a "Dark Sky Park" in upper Michigan. This is not a place that Eden Wallace wants to have anything to do with, but goes there anyway in remembrance of her and her late husband's anniversary. It's a decision she quickly comes to regret.

While the first few chapters dwell almost too heavily on Eden's first person narrated feelings of grief and moroseness, once past that the story really takes off. The author slowly peels back the onion of Eden's life with her husband, her unhappiness finally given sound reason. Eden is particularly well-drawn and Rader-Day's decision to set her in a place that is in total darkness works very well. Her fear of even going outdoors at night limits her ability to investigate on her own (as all good amateur sleuths do) when all she wants is to get out and go home where it's more-or-less safe.

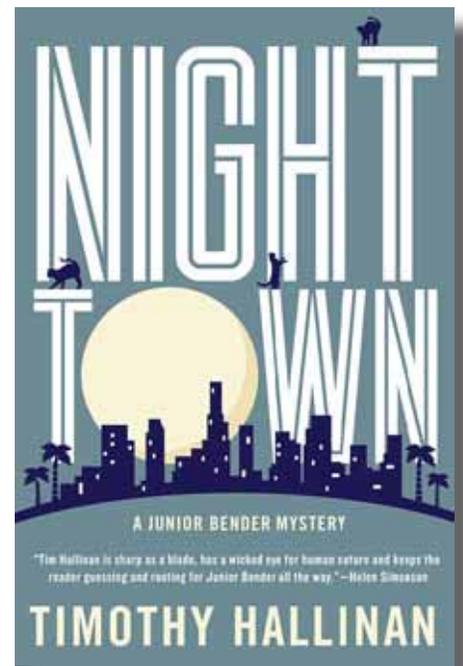
The how, the why, and, of course mostly importantly, the who are all adroitly handled. My one criticism is the book's length. At nearly four hundred pages, it really is too long. But you won't regret passing the time with Eden Wallace and her creator Lori Rader-Day, who is fast becoming one of the more dependable and entertaining crime novelists we have.

HIGH CRIMES by Libby Fischer Hellmann (The Red Herring Press, \$16.99/Ebook \$5.99, November 2018). **Rating: B+** Fourteen months after the 2016 presidential election a resistance group has been formed to actively protest the results of that election. Dena Baldwin, the founder of that 42,000 member group, is assassinated during an anti-presidential rally. Immediately following the shooting, the gunman is blown up at his perch on a nearby hotel rooftop. Private investigator Georgia Davis is hired by Erica Baldwin Stewart, Dena's mother, "to get to the bottom of this." Erica had received an anonymous

email claiming that the assassin had been set up, that the resistance group had been infiltrated by trolls and other adversaries. She was concerned that there was a conspiracy of some nature behind her daughter's death. When relatives of those who died at the rally begin to disappear, Davis realizes that she has undertaken a most dangerous investigation. Her search for those behind the killing takes her from Chicago to Washington D.C., and to the frozen ice of Minnesota. But how do you ferret out one person from a list of 42,000 suspects? Libby Fischer Hellmann's fifth Georgia Davis novel revolves heavily around today's political turmoil. As the author admits in an afterword, she was seriously affected by the results of the 2016 election, until finally she used her anger to create this story. So, the question is: do the politics get in the way of telling a good story? I am glad to say that, while the story is politically driven, this is still a solid mystery filled with familiar characters who act without political motives. Davis seeks justice regardless of personal viewpoint.

Hellmann creates a suspenseful story while at the same time not overlooking the personal aspects of Georgia's life with her half-sister and estranged mother. Mixing the personal with the professional is not always easy, of course, and the conflicts between the two aspects of Davis' life are well handled. Other family conflicts involving Dena and her (also estranged) right-wing father come into play, as do appearances by disgruntled veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. There is corruption at the heart of the political system here, with a ripped-from-the-headlines feel to it. But those motives can be misleading. Not everything either needs to be or can be explained by politics. All these aspects are skillfully portrayed as this series continues to improve with each novel.

NIGHTTOWN by Timothy Hallinan (Soho Crime, \$26.95, November 2018). **Rating: B** Los Angeles burglar Junior Bender desperately needs cash to help his girlfriend Ronnie snatch her son back from her mobbed-up ex. So he breaks his number one rule: don't take a job if someone offers to pay you too



much for stealing too little, because sure as shooting (literally!) someone will end up dead. Naturally, when he undertakes just such a job (for fifty grand to steal a doll), an old friend of Junior's ends up murdered. What was in that doll worth fifty thousand dollars and ultimately more than one person's life? Junior decides that he must find out what and why so that he can even the score.

This is Timothy Hallinan's seventh Junior Bender novel and, as usual, it is entertaining, humorous and a bit too long. Along the way, we once again get to hang out with some of Junior's acquaintances, as well as meet new people who sometimes help, sometimes hinder, his efforts to earn his pay. But he reluctantly has to proceed because he needs the money. As his repulsive, strangely orange-wigged client tells him, "[a] salary is what they give you because you'd rather be somewhere else." After all, you don't have to like your clients to like their money. Besides, he figures it'll all work out. As Junior tells a friend, he specializes in "[g]etting away."

The center of the main story concerns what Junior refers to as a "creep factor," so much unhappiness, betrayal, greed, illness, death and darkness, coupled with revenge that has been plotted for years so it could take effect at the very moment of the death of the schemer. This is all well and cleverly

handled by Hallinan. But the subplots here really get in the way of moving that main story along. Yes, those subplots can be fun at times but when they go on at length, they can overpower the main thrust of the book. At nearly 400 pages, there is just a lot of that. However, a reader unfamiliar with previous novels in the series can still feel comfortable jumping in right here without any prior knowledge of Junior and his cast of quirky but generally loveable characters.

Throw in a mixture of burglar lore, Spiritualism, Arthur Conan Doyle, and other esoterica and you have a typical Junior Bender novel, one that can be enjoyed in spite of its flaws. Hopefully, the next book contains the actual effort to grab Ronnie's son, since a lot of time here was spent on that subject but left hanging in the end.

SHELTER COVE by Colin Campbell (Lulu Publishing, \$13.80, September 2018). **Rating: B+** Cole Thornton owns a lovely bookshop in the peaceful town of Shelter Cove, California. But while talking in the store with part-time police deputy Holly West, a careening car comes crashing through the storefront, causing serious damage to the building and the two people in the shop. Then when the dead people start washing up on the beach, Thornton begins to wonder just how peaceful the town really is. But when he learns that Jim Grant, a British cop dubbed "The Resurrection Man" by the press, is headed to town looking for him, Thornton knows it's time to get out while the getting is good. Too bad Grant arrives before that happens.

This is the sixth novel in Colin Campbell's Resurrection Man series and it's the first one I've read. Frankly, I would have liked a bit more detail on Grant and his sobriquet than the book gives. However, that didn't spoil the enjoyment of it. The background of the two men, why Grant wants to arrest Thornton, and why Thornton wants to get out of Grant's way, is made clear as the story moves along. The two bitter enemies, however, must set aside their differences in order to discover where those bodies came from and why they washed up dead on the beach.

The reader is nicely kept in the dark for much of the story, as it unwinds. But the relationship between the two men does seem to slide a bit too quickly, as one minute they are at each other's throats and the next working together without much explanation as to the shift in their attitudes. If the reader can get past this, the book is suspenseful and mysterious as the danger in town grows. The book, at an economical 270 pages, moves swiftly and without a lot of subplot to distract from the story. There's even time for a bit of romance without unnecessarily having that get in the way of the engrossing tale.

BLEAK HARBOR by Bryan Gruley (Thomas & Mercer, \$24.95 hardcover/\$4.99 eBook, December 2018) **Rating: B** Autistic fifteen-year-old Danny Peters has been kidnapped the day before his sixteenth birthday and a five million dollar ransom has been demanded. His mother, Carey, estranged daughter of Bleak Harbor, Michigan's wealthiest woman, is in the midst of blackmailing her boss while Danny's adoptive father, Pete, has gone into the sale of legal medical marijuana. Danny's birth father has just been released from prison. So the suspect list is plentiful. Contrary to the kidnapper's instructions, the police have been called in, which only complicates matters, as the kidnapper seems to be working with someone on the inside.

Brian Gruley has created a complex and suspenseful, if somewhat overlong, novel. He has chosen a wonderful location in the Michigan setting, with its Dragonfly Festival for its background. The small town setting works perfectly for this novel. The descriptions of the town, its docks, bars, and stores make the story come to life.

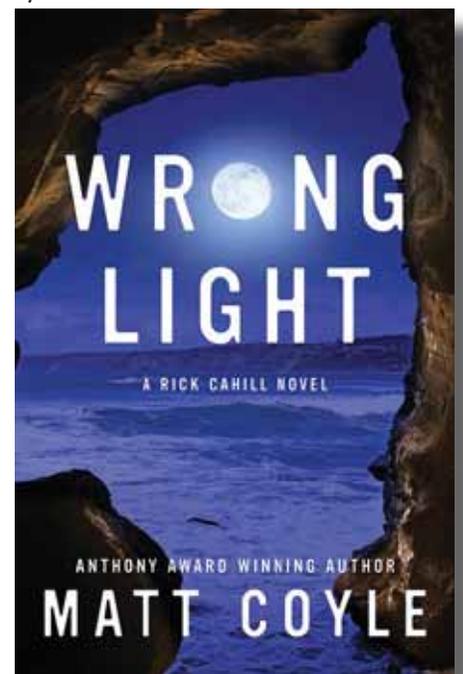
There are so many secrets here, everyone keeping them from everyone else, that any one of them (or none of them) could be the motive for the kidnapping. But the twists keep coming, each one whipsawing the reader in a different direction. Text messages arrive, changing the amount of ransom demanded. Small town secrets, jealousy, and hatred abound. Gruley does a good job revealing things slowly with a well-

drawn variety of characters, each with a potential motive. Mix in drug thugs, disgruntled town folk, cops, and the FBI. All of this keeps the reader guessing throughout. However, in the long run, I admit to disappointment with the end of the story and its final revelations. But getting there was a lot of suspenseful fun.

WRONG LIGHT by Matt Coyle (Oceanview Publishing, \$26.95 hardcover/\$16.00 trade paper, December 2018).

Rating: B+ When a crazed individual begins to harass AM 1350 "Heart of San Diego" sultry-voiced radio star "Naomi at Night" Hendrix, the radio station hires private investigator Rick Cahill to protect her and track down the stalker. The man has made it clear that he is just waiting for the right moment to snatch her and fulfill his twisted fantasies. Cahill discovers that Naomi is hiding secrets about her past that could help unmask the man. However, before the PI can get the truth from Naomi, he is thrust into a missing person's case—an abduction he may have unwittingly caused. The investigating detective in that case questions Rick's motives for getting involved and pressures him to stop meddling.

This is the fifth book in Matt Coyle's Anthony Award-winning Rick Cahill series. It follows two different storylines, the first of which is more credi-



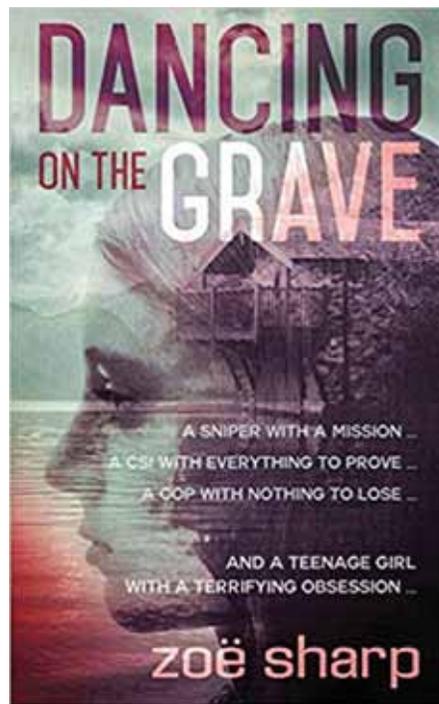
ble than the second. The first has all the trappings of a terrific private eye novel. A detective with a dark past is hired to protect a woman, also with a hidden past. He comes into conflict not only with her but also with the radio station which hired him. He has to dig deep into the past to discover twisty motives and try to help Hendrix, who just might not want to be saved. This held my attention with its tightly written scenes and good old-fashioned detective work by Cahill. I thought this worked well on many levels, giving us a good look at its California atmosphere.

The second story line concerns Cahill's obligation to repay a Russian crime lord by helping him when asked. This promise arises out of the prior novel, **BLOOD TRUTH**. While there is information here that would allow a new reader to follow that premise, it would be helpful to have read that previous book for additional detail. Without giving anything away, this second story was less satisfactory to me because of Cahill's involvement with the FBI and the rather bizarre medical aspects of that part.

There is plenty of well-written action here, coupled with solid detection, often leading down paths that appear to go nowhere until something pops up to propel the investigation on the right road. Suspense mounts as the PI tries to juggle the two cases, not always successfully. But he proves himself to be someone who pursues the truth, no matter what the cost. But here the cost was high, perhaps even too high for Cahill. He has to ask himself: Is the truth worth it?

This dark novel book is recommended reading for the main plot, which I was hooked on right to the finish. However, I would suggest reading **BLOOD TRUTH** first to get a better feel for what's going on with the Russian mob aspect. Nevertheless, overall, this was a fine addition to Coyle's series.

DANCING ON THE GRAVE by Zoë Sharp (Zace Ltd., \$11.99 paperback/\$5.34 digital, June 2018). **Rating:** A- While a sniper lies in wait for a different target, he sees seventeen-year-old Edith Airey shoot a dog that was



attacking sheep at her neighbor's farm. Detective Constable Nick Weston, newly transferred into England's Lake District, arrives on the scene expecting something much more serious than a dead dog. But crime scene investigator Grace McColl insists that Weston treat the shooting as important. Later, the sniper kills a politically connected woman who had been at the scene of the dog's shooting and mortally wounds a police officer. The police make a connection between the two events. Can Weston and McColl, two damaged people carrying a lot of baggage from their pasts, act in time to stop more killings and bring a murderer to justice?

Zoë Sharp, author of the outstanding Charlie Fox series, is one of the best, and most underrated, thriller writers around. This book proves that she should be better known. Creating suspense from the opening line right through to the novel's bloody denouement, Sharp knows how to keep readers turning the pages. She understands people and what drives them to act, weapons and how they work, action and how to write it.

This book, in part, is an examination of the quest for fame – or more rightly infamy – as well as the effects of the search on the seeker, and its tragic consequences, including one not revealed

until the final page of this harrowing novel. But it is also an in depth look at the roots of revenge and how long it can simmer before bursting into the open, destroying people's lives. Though the story is told with little sentimentality, you will still come to care about the characters and their fates.

his is a straightforward, no holds barred, thriller. No one writes this kind of book better than Zoë Sharp. If you haven't read one of her books before, the only question is "why not?"

ROBERT B. PARKER'S COLOR-BLIND by Reed Farrel Coleman (Putnam, \$27.00, September 2018) **Rating:** A- Paradise, Massachusetts, Police Chief Jesse Stone has just returned to town after a stint in rehab for his long-time problem with alcohol. No sooner has he gotten his badge back on when a young black woman is found raped and beaten to death on a nearby beach. This is followed by a cross burning on the lawn of an African-American family who have moved into Jesse's old house (while he has moved on to a condo). His deputy, Alisha Davis, the first black woman on the Paradise police force, is then framed for the murder of an apparently unarmed man. As if hate crimes on the rise in the area were not enough to deal with, Stone also has other problems, including a young man who has come to town with a problem with authority, in particular with Jesse.

Reed Farrel Coleman continues his expansion of Robert B. Parker's Jesse Stone series, in his fifth novel about the character. While remaining true to Parker's original vision of Stone, Coleman has given him a depth and breadth he never had before. His problems with Jenn, his ex-wife, are in the past. Stone is now struggling with recovery from alcohol abuse, has even removed the temptation of the bottle in the bottom drawer of his desk, and is attending AA meetings. The cast of characters has also grown as some old-time acquaintances have died, retired, or otherwise moved on, and new ones have taken their place.

Coleman skillfully plots this topical story of racial hatred and violent white supremacists, mixing in what seems to

be an impossible crime that must be solved: the shooting death of a young man who fired first at Deputy Davis, but left no weapon at the scene. The author manages to work all of this around Jesse's struggle with recovery and also adds revelations that will change his life forever. Coleman has taken a successful series, written by an MWA Grand Master, updated it, and essentially recreated Jesse Stone for a new generation. If you liked Parker's novels, you will really enjoy Coleman's expansion of Stone's world.

LIKE TO DIE by David Housewright (St. Martin's Minotaur Books, 26.99, June 2018) **Rating: A** Unlicensed private investigator Rushmore McKenzie is asked by a friend to help Erin Peterson, owner of a food company that makes salsa. Her factory has been vandalized, though not to the point of closing down operations. Someone was supergluing her trucks and building locks. She was reluctant to report this to the police, as she was in the midst of trying to get a better distribution deal. So McKenzie stops by to chat and offers to help. Eventually, as the vandalism escalates, she accepts. But things go from not too bad to a lot worse and more dangerous. Erin, naturally, has her own secrets she is reluctant to share, complicating McKenzie's efforts to help her.

This is the fifteenth novel in Edgar winner David Housewright's consistently entertaining McKenzie series. Not only is the novel humorous in places, it is also suspenseful, easily keeping the reader "superglued" to its pages. The book is flat out fun. The characters are wonderfully drawn and Housewright makes excellent use of his Minnesota setting – and why not? He lives in St. Paul. Not only is this first person point of view, we are also party to McKenzie's innermost thoughts – things perhaps he wishes he could have said aloud but more wisely kept to himself.

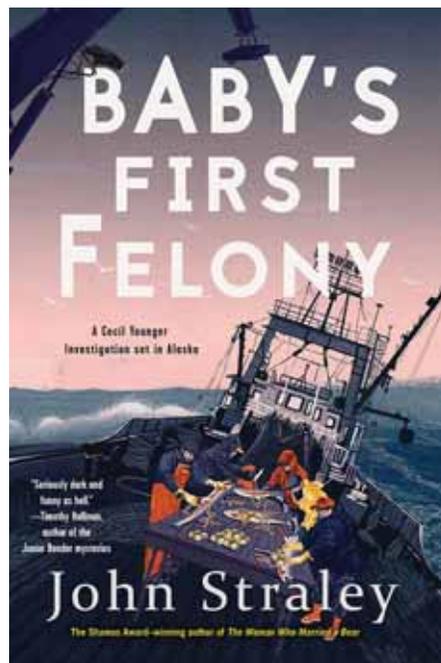
If you haven't read previous novels in this series, you can feel free to jump right in here because the author gives sufficient backstory where needed without overwhelming or boring the long time reader. McKenzie is one tough character and a smart cookie to boot,

no matter how much self-deprecation he uses to deflect his opponents. Plus you will learn a lot about mob influence in corporations, corruption, double-dealing, how to hide in plain sight, keeping secrets from others and, of course, making salsa. Wonderfully done!

THE INNS (AND OUTS) OF COURT

BABY'S FIRST FELONY by John Straley (Soho Crime, \$25.95, July 2018)

Rating: B This book opens with the longest allocution in legal history, fictional or otherwise. In it criminal defense investigator Cecil Younger explains to a sentencing court what lay behind the actions that got him convicted of destruction of property and negligent homicide. Younger lays out a tale of assisting criminal clients, theft of evidence (a large pile of cash), drugs, kidnapping, and murder. Meanwhile, the attorney Younger works for has created a book entitled *Baby's First Felony*, filled with rules designed to assist clients. Among these helpful hints are "While you are incarcerated and awaiting trial, when talking on the jail phone, [remember] Pig Latin is not an unbreakable code" and "Never use the phrase 'How dumb do you think I am.' You are just asking for an answer."



This is the seventh book in the series, but the first in seventeen years, in John Straley's entertaining Cecil Younger series set in Sitka, Alaska. Straley has the ability to bring the beauty of Alaska to life on the page and mingle it in a most fascinating (and often very dark) way with the strange characters, often criminals, Younger encounters. These characters are often based on people the author actually met in his years doing similar work (only without the crimes Younger apparently committed here!).

Through the use of Younger's allocution, which takes 234 pages of the book's 250, Straley slowly peels back the onion of the crimes for which his protagonist has already been convicted. This gradually reveals Younger's motives for what he has done, laying them out in a way that is designed to be sympathetic to his position seeking a reduction from a mandatory sentence. However, at times this seemed to drag on and if I were one of the judge's listening to this, I would have encouraged Younger to pick up the pace. One of the rules that could be added to the attorney's advice book for criminals is "Quit while you are ahead."

The darkness of portions of this story are leavened by the humor that runs through it, particularly in the use of the "advice" from *Baby's First Felony*, the book within the book. Further, the reader will find it amusing to see how often Younger actually avoids taking the advice himself. A word of caution: sensitive readers should be aware that there are some hideous crimes against children in the novel and their descriptions might be too much for some people.

THE SHORT CIRCUIT

THE TRUE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: The Annotated Edition by Terence Faherty (Gasogene Books, \$19.95, January 2019) **Rating: A** We're all familiar with Sherlock Holmes and very few are more familiar with him than Terence Faherty. He is the editor of this slim collection of what purports to be the recently discovered notebooks of none other than Dr. John H. Watson containing the very first drafts of eleven

of the earliest Holmes stories. The startling revelation here is that these original drafts differ significantly from the stories as published in *The Strand* between July 1891 and June 1892. So this volume contains what the editor refers to as “a tantalizing glimpse of the true facts behind eleven cases Watson did write up as well as insights into his writing methods.”

Among the previously little known facts we learn from these early drafts are that originally Holmes didn't play the violin, but rather the banjo. He drank beer instead of taking cocaine. He cheats at cards. These stories present more of a blue-collar version of Holmes, who was later gentrified by Watson for publication in the magazine. As just one example of the complete change of thrust of a story, the Beryl Coronet, of the story of the same name, was actually a horse rather than a gem. In fact it is in that draft that Holmes first inquired about the incident of the dog in the nighttime, although with a totally different response than we are accustomed to from *Silver Blaze*, where Watson chose to later place it. We also are treated to Watson's personal notes on the choices he made for his later revisions. This is accompanied by Editor Faherty's helpful historical and informative annotations putting everything into context.

All of this is played very straight, but Faherty's incredibly dry sense of humor shows through in every story here. Seven of these tales originally appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and four are new here. Even if you read those stories there, this volume contains the annotations which were not in *EQMM*. Each tale is a little gem (and not of the Beryl Coronet or Blue Carbuncle variety!). The best way to read these “drafts” is first to re-read the stories as published over 125 years ago (you *have* read them before, haven't you? If not, do so immediately!). Then settle down with this book and prepare to be thoroughly entertained by their cleverness and flat out fun. As Holmes says, “[in] the interests of a lively tale, there's no disbelief [Watson] is not willing to suspend.” Apparently the same holds true for Faherty, who promises more to

come “with the same scholarly dignity and respect we lavished on this initial series.” Looking forward to it.

AN ELDERLY LADY IS UP TO NO GOOD by Helene Tursten (Soho Crime, \$12.99, November 2018). **Rating: B+** Maud is an 88-year-old woman. Her family is long dead. She has no apparent friends. All she has is an apartment in downtown Gothenburg, Sweden, that she has lived in her entire life. All she wants is a little peace and quiet. Sometimes she just has to commit a murder to get it.

This little book, about the same size as one of those paperback books from the '50s and '60s, contains five short stories about the life and times of Maud. A spry lady, Maud finds she must take some action to fend off a woman who covets Maud's apartment. Or to help her ex-fiancé out of a wedding jam, whether he knows about it or not. And what's wrong with having a little peace at Christmas, the Time of Peace, anyway. Finally, what's that antique dealer doing with her precious silver and a bag while she's peeking at him through the door? Can't an elderly lady just be left alone?

These five humorous tales make for a very pleasant change of pace from some of the darker novels we get from the Scandinavian writers these days. Plus, Helene Tursten includes some of her other characters, such as Irene Huss and Embla Nyström, into a couple of these stories. My only complaint is that the final, and longest, story in the book is a rehash of the previous story, just told from a different point of view. I could have done with just one of those two. Still, this is a thoroughly entertaining collection, one that would make a great stocking stuffer or a gift for anyone who enjoys humor sprinkled with a touch of homicide.

THE MISADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN edited by Josh Pachter & Dale C. Andrews (Wildside Press, \$29.99 hardcover/\$19.99 paperback/\$5.99 ebook, March 2018) **Rating: A-** My favorite Golden Age author is Ellery Queen. I enjoyed his early novels in the late 1920s and early '30s, containing his intricate plots and famous

Challenge to the Reader. I got a kick out of both his lighter Hollywood tales and then his more serious works in the 1940s and '50s. Of course, Queen the author was really two cousins, Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee and their mysteries were huge bestsellers in their time. Now, unfortunately, many of the works are out of print and Queen the author has been lost in the shadow of the Queen of Crime herself, Agatha Christie.

So it was with great anticipation and pleasure that I received this book containing sixteen stories connected in one way or another to Ellery Queen. I was not disappointed. All sixteen are reprints, mostly from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. The editors divide them into three parts consisting of pastiches, parodies, and “potpourri” (stories which defy characterization). There are pure novelty stories, such as *Dying Message* by Leyne Requel (a pseudonym). Some are serious efforts to duplicate Queen's successful approach to crime solving, including the intricate *The Book Case*, by editor Andrews and Kurt Sercu, featuring an elderly Ellery solving what could be his final case. Others touch on people or things related to Queen but driven by other characters. For example, Arthur Vidro examines the mystery of the two different covers to the first issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in the entertaining *The Ransom of EQMM #1*. Joseph Goodrich sets Frederic Dannay on the trail of a murderer, ably assisted by Dashiell Hammett, in the clever *The Ten-Cent Murder*. Other contributors include such luminaries as Lawrence Block, Edward D. Hoch, Jon L. Breen, and Francis M. Nevins.

These stories are interesting, and occasionally ingenious, but they do make clear one thing: no one ever did it better than Dannay and Lee. Still, the book is thoroughly enjoyable and certainly worth reading, especially for fans of Queen who will particularly appreciate it, as there are many references throughout the stories to matters in the original Queen canon. It is a wonderful tribute to a Mystery Writers of America Grand Master.

Just in Crime

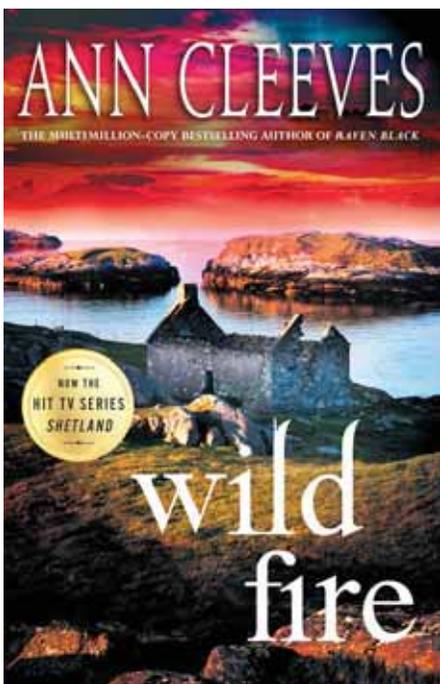
Norma Dancis



WILD FIRE by Ann Cleeves (Minotaur, 2018, \$26.99). **Rating: A** Emma, the young nanny for the Moncrieff family, is found hanging in the barn owned by the Fleming family. The previous owner of the barn had also hanged himself here shortly after the Flemings moved in. The Moncrieff and Fleming families are both incomers from England.

Detective Jimmy Perez finds it had to learn much about the self-contained Emma and the two families whose lives are so intertwined and separate from most Shetlanders. His emotional life is also challenged by the arrival of Willow, his supervisor in Scotland, to assist in the investigation.

Perez begins to move tentatively from his emotional paralysis over Fran's death. The book's cover touts this as the final book in the Shetland series. This book revolves around newcomers who are shaped and affected by the island's isolation. The



reactions of autistic Christopher, one of Emma's charges, accentuate the families' separation and loneliness. Cleeves also pulls away slightly from her normal focus on Perez, which allows us to see him in others' eyes. The estrangement of the characters from one another and the life of the community and Cleeves' moody prose both contribute to a memorable, atmospheric experience.

BURY THE LEAD by Archer Mayor ((Minotaur, 2018, \$27.99). **Rating: A-** Mick Durocher has confessed to the murder of a young woman found at a ski resort. He was also employed at a local business hit by industrial sabotage. Joe Gunther and his team at the Vermont Bureau of Investigation don't believe the confession, but they can't figure out if or how the two crimes fit together.

Willy Kunkle and his wife Sammie, important members of Gunther's team, are of limited help due to Willy's medical emergency. As the sabotage grows in violence, Gunther and his unit struggle to find the answers before the body count grows higher.

Mayor writes mysteries at the highest level. This is nearly the thirtieth entry in the Gunther series. As always, it feels fresh, sharing the quick pace and compulsive readability of the first books. For fans of the series, Mayor adds depth and breadth to some of the continuing characters. While the motivation for the crime is less compelling than usual, the narrative is so absorbing that the reader might be too caught up in the story not to notice. The ending is a bit confusing, with a somewhat rushed conclusion, which is the cause of the minus to the "A" rating. You will need to pay full attention at the end. A thoroughly good read, if not a blue-ribbon winner.

FIELD OF BONES by J. A. Jance (HarperCollins, 2018, \$27.99). **Rating: A**

Sheriff Joanna Brady's maternity leave is interrupted by the finding of a recent corpse and the skeletal remains of several other individuals in a field.

Latisha Marcum is being kept prisoner in a basement with three other women under terrible conditions. The complex investigation strains Joanna's small department to the utmost, testing Joanna's attempts to help without taking over. But the question of whether Joanna will take her full leave is overshadowed by a bigger question: will Latisha survive long enough to be rescued?

Jance balances Latisha's story of suffering with her compassionate account of the prisoners' lives. The darkness of that story is in turn juxtaposed against the warmth of Joanna's family life and the sincerity and humanity of the investigation.

Serial killer novels tend to gloat over the victims' pain and suffering and the kidnapper's inhumanity. Jance doesn't fall into that trap. She presents the women dealing with their predicament with dignity and humor and even spiritual growth. Their tormentor is chilling, but he is still a believable person. The characters in general are fully rounded and distinctive. The story moves briskly with many surprising elements raising this above the genre.

Jance overturns many of the conventions of the serial killer story and maintains a high level of interest. I had given up serial killer mysteries because they were so similar, but Jance has provide a fresh and enjoyable take on the subject.

SHELL GAME by Sara Paretsky (William Morrow, 2018, \$27.99).

Rating: A- Private Investigator Vic Warshawski is called in to help her friend Lotty Herschel's nephew, Felix. His name and phone number have been found in the pocket of a murdered man, and the local Sheriff is convinced that Felix is the killer. After Vic identifies the dead man, she discovers that he had links to Middle East archaeology and the Muslim community.

This investigation is complicated by Vic's second investigation into the disappearance of her niece, Reno. Trying to solve both mysteries involves Vic in issues and danger involving Russians, financial fraud, immigration, stolen antiquities, and family concerns that she must handle before uncovering the truth. Paretsky has

created almost a kitchen sink of a mystery—she has thrown everything into the pot. Even trying to retell the plot of this book is nearly too complex to manage. In fewer than 400 pages, Paretsky has packed more thrills and complications than many authors' entire works, perhaps too many for an exhausted reader.

Even in an obviously plot-driven book, Paretsky takes time to create memorable characters. You will need to read carefully and perhaps take notes in order to keep up, but the trip is well worth it.

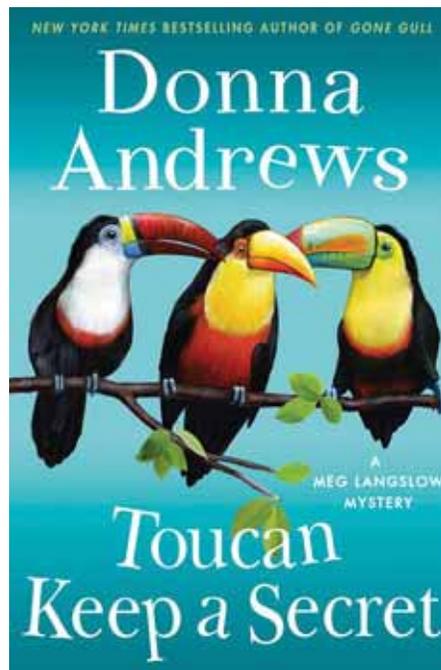
MURDER AT THE MANSION

by Sheila Connolly (Minotaur, 2018, \$24.99). **Rating: B+** Having lost her job at a high-end, boutique hotel in Baltimore, Katherine Hamilton returns to her hometown of Ashford, Maryland.

The Town Council explains that the town is on the verge of bankruptcy and asks her to see what she can do with the large Victorian mansion that it owns. Cordelia Walker, her high school enemy and the person who engineered Kate's biggest embarrassment, is the only townspeople who has an alternate plan. When Kate and a historian first visit the site, they stumble over Cordelia's corpse. Kate's plans to rescue the mansion are complicated by her efforts to discover who killed Cordelia.

Connolly, with over thirty cozy mysteries to her credit, exhibits a smooth and charming prose style. Kate, her romance, and her attempts to save the mansion and the town, form a delightful book in their own right. Character, writing, and basic plot, minus the mystery, keep the reader interested. Unfortunately, the mystery feels like an interruption and sideline rather than the centerpiece of the book. If you love women's fiction or cozy mysteries, you will enjoy this book. If you are more interested in the mystery itself, you won't find it satisfying.

TOUCAN KEEP A SECRET by Donna Andrews (Minotaur, 2018, \$26.99). **Rating: A** While Reverend Robyn Smith of Trinity Episcopal Church is on enforced bed rest, Meg Langslow has taken over some of her duties as well as the pet toucan Robyn was keeping for a deployed parishioner. While Meg is locking up the church one evening, she hears the sound of hammering from the cremation niches.



Upon investigating, she finds the body of an elderly parishioner and several niches that have been pried open and their urns spilled out.

The murdered man, Junius Hagley, had been threatening to sell his niche and take back his wife's ashes. A valuable ruby ring stolen in a robbery to which Hagley had had a connection is found among the ashes. Was this murder connected? At the same time, the toucan is stolen. Is the theft related to the robbery? Are the rest of the stolen jewels nearby to be found? Meg works to solve both mysteries.

Andrews is the queen of the humorous mystery. As always in this long-running series, she blends a serious mystery with lunacy bubbling beneath the surface. Andrews whips together witty writing, silly situations, and offbeat characters. She caps them off with a laugh-aloud final chase scene. This is one of the best offerings in the series. If you enjoy a humorous mystery, don't miss it.

WALKING SHADOWS by Faye Kellerman (William Morrow, 2018, \$27.99). **Rating: A-** Pete Decker is called to investigate the death of Brady Neil, found in the woodlands of his Greenbury, New York, jurisdiction. However, Neil was a resident of nearby Hamilton, whose police chief doesn't want Greenbury police investigating on his turf. This situation is complicated because Hamilton's police chief, Victor Baccus, had previously asked Decker

if his daughter, Lennie, could join the Greenbury force to gain some more experience.

When the body is found, Baccus pulls his daughter from Greenbury. Lennie is angry and decides to work the case on her own. As Decker investigates, he realizes Neil's murder probably stems from a decades-old case in Hamilton for which Baccus was responsible. Decker and his force must work the case in another jurisdiction in which the police chief might be implicated. Complications and the body count rise.

Kellerman has added some strong characters to the regular series cast. Kellerman's writing is straightforward and easy to follow, which helps to clarify the extremely complex plot. If you like to solve the puzzle yourself, pay strict attention. Otherwise, sit back as the story carries you along and enjoy the journey. The plug for Kellerman's husband's mysteries was annoying. Nonetheless, the book is a solid piece of good work.

PROTECTED BY THE SHADOWS

by Helene Tursten (Soho, 2017, \$26.95). **Rating: B-** Inspector Irene Huss is a member of the Violent Crimes Unit in Göteborg, Sweden. A bomb is set under her husband's car, apparently by a gang trying to collect money from him. But that's not the only gang problem. The two main gangs seem ready to explode into gang warfare, starting when a member of a biker's gang is set on fire alive.

Faced with danger to her family, Irene goes into hiding and sends her family hiding elsewhere. But someone seems to know too much about what the unit and its members are doing. Then more violence seems to arrive from an outside source. Can Irene solve the case before she or her family is killed?

Tursten's thriller is only partly successful. The setup is promising, and many of the scenes are well executed. Many of the plot twists are exciting, particularly concerning Irene's personal danger. However, the subplot involving Irene's husband feels unbelievable. The narrative tends to plod. Either the prose is too flat or the translator not very good. Action that should have set the pulse racing remained interesting rather than exciting. There's a lot to like about this book, but it doesn't completely succeed.

DESOLATION MOUNTAIN by William Kent Krueger (Atria, 2018, \$26.00). **Rating: B** A private plane carrying a United States Senator crashes into Desolation Mountain on the Ojibway Reservation. Cork O'Connor and his son Stephen are among the first at the crash site. Elements of the crash strike Stephen as relating to a recurring vision he has been experiencing. They and the other first responders start to search the wreckage, but the FBI quickly arrives and assumes control. Other unidentified, presumably governmental, groups also arrive to work the site. The locals are treated roughly and several of the first responders disappear. Cork meets up again with a private security consultant. The two work together, despite the violent opposition of the official searchers, to rescue the missing and discover what really happened.

On the positive side are Krueger's pacing and his mastery of suspense. The solution is so complicated that at the end, I could not have explained exactly what happened. It is a mark of Krueger's talent that that wasn't a decisive mark against the book. He is able to make the reader care deeply for the characters and be breathless over their fate. I enjoyed the ride, even though I wasn't sure just where I had been.

On the other hand, Stephen's visions are an important clue in Cork's investigation. I dislike the entry of the supernatural into any mystery and normally immediately discard a book in which it surfaces. My disbelief in the visions undercut both my desire to read the book and my belief in the solution. This is a seriously flawed book redeemed by Krueger's writing skill.

TWO FACED by A. R. Ashworth (Crooked Lane, 2018, \$26.99). **Rating: B+** Detective Chief Inspector Elaine Hope is still somewhat of a wreck nine months after a devastating assault. Not only is she barely holding onto physical and emotional health, but her career seems doomed. She is pursuing an unauthorized investigation into the criminal conspiracy involved in the earlier investigation, but is beginning to suspect the involvement of higher-ups at Scotland Yard itself.

Loyal members of her former team

now assigned to a gangland killing approach her to report that their supervising officer is hindering their work and abandoning proper procedure. Elaine runs an off-the-books effort to find where the rot in the police service lies and how her old nemesis is connected to this case.

Hope is a believably obsessed and emotionally damaged officer. While she and a few other characters are well delineated, the others are more shadowy. The plot is complex and rather confusing. Ashworth jumps into the middle of the action. Despite an attempt to bring the reader up to speed on what happened in the first book, putting everything together is challenging. Near the end, Hope's lover explicitly discusses her mental state and their relationship. This conversation explains a lot, but it would have been more illuminating if it had occurred earlier. It also undermines the suspense that Ashworth had been expertly crafting. Nonetheless, the reader who perseveres will get caught up on what happened and enjoy the hunt. Nearly excellent, but not quite.

THE BANKER'S WIFE by Cristina Alger (Putnam, 2018, \$27,00). **Rating: A** Annabel Werner is devastated when the remains of a private plane carrying her husband, Matthew, banker with the powerful Swiss United Bank, are found. The plane's owner, Fatima Amir, a beautiful, wealthy investor related to the Syrian dictator, has also been killed in the crash. Agents interview Annabel,

determined to discover her knowledge of Fatima and the Amir family. The crash was clearly no accident, and Annabel must protect herself from those who think she can reveal more about what Matthew was doing and what information he left behind.

Meanwhile, Marina Tourneau is a society journalist engaged to Grant Ellis, whose father is about to run for President of the United States. She is handed explosive information about money laundering at Swiss United. Everyone involved with the story turns up dead. Can she prove and polish the story before she dies, too?

This is a smart and edge-of-your-seat thriller. Alger explains the facts and implications of money laundering clearly and without slowing the narrative or lessening the suspense. One twist is that all of the main characters are female and in danger. They are not portrayed primarily as victims or villains but as strong characters grappling with dangerous circumstances. They make choices based on idealism and intelligence as well as fear. Unfortunately, the ending lets down the reader by dispelling too much of the tension and grittiness. Nonetheless, this book is certain to figure on Best of Year lists. I nominate it for best thriller of 2018.

LIES COME EASY by Steven Havill (Poisoned Pen Press, 2018, \$15.95). **Rating: A** Undersheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman of Posadas County is waiting impatiently for her two sons to fly in for Christmas. They will only be there for a day due to son Francisco's career as a celebrated pianist. Naturally, crime peaks as she waits. First, a toddler is found on a snowy road apparently dumped there by his father. Then a range tech is missing, and the search for him turns up a dead woman in a tiny nearby town. The police force is stretched to its limits as Estelle tries to solve all these cases and still make time for her family.

This twenty-third entry in the Posadas County series takes place about ten years later than book twenty-two. For the fan of this series, reading it is enriched by observing all the changes that have taken place in the county's police force and Estelle's family. For once, reading the book might be simpler for a newcomer than a longtime fan, who will stop to observe



Cristina Alger

the differences. Personal relationships within the family and police force, as always, remain central and help knit together the narrative. Despite the central mayhem, the rich characterization and vivid settings help create a warm, human background. Havill is one of my favorite authors. It is good to see him maintain the same high quality of writing and imagination for over twenty-five years.

HEAD WOUND by Judith Cutler (Allison & Busby, 2018, \$25.00).

Rating: B Jane Cowan, head teacher at two village schools, is living in temporary accommodations. Her abusive ex-husband is finally in prison, and her most serious concern involves major cuts to the school's budget instead of physical threats. However, she is also worrying about her landlord's deteriorating health, the odd behavior of her neighbors, mysterious white vans, and screams that are dismissed as fox screams. All these problems seem like pieces of different puzzles that she must try to assemble. As she begins to do so, however, the puzzles become increasingly violent and threatening.

Judith Cutler is one of my favorite writers, and I welcomed this third volume in the series. However, I hadn't read the earlier books recently, and the first several chapters were quite confusing. Cutler only alludes to rather than retells previous events. Cutler also ties in characters from other earlier books, particularly those involving Caffy of **SCAR TISSUE**. Familiarity with previous works would also help the reader understand all the allusions. If I, who have read them all, was confused, a reader new to Cutler probably shouldn't begin with this book. Since one of the book's strengths is its handling of the confusing, seemingly unrelated incidents, that additional confusion requires more intensive reading than should be necessary. That's a pity, because the plot is fascinating and well worth reading. Fortunately, catching up on Cutler's work can be a delight in itself.

2019 Left Coast Crime Lefty Award Nominations

Lefty for Best Humorous Mystery Novel

MARDI GRAS MURDER by Ellen Byron (Crooked Lane Books)
HOLLYWOOD ENDING by Kellye Garrett (Midnight Ink)
NIGHTTOWN by Timothy Hallinan (Soho Crime)
DEATH AL FRESCO by Leslie Karst (Crooked Lane Books)
THE SPIRIT IN QUESTION by Cynthia Kuhn (Henery Press)
SCOTT FREE by Catriona McPherson (Midnight Ink)

Lefty for Best Historical Mystery Novel

(Bruce Alexander Memorial) for books covering events before 1960

FOUR FUNERALS AND MAYBE A WEDDING by Rhys Bowen (Berkeley Prime Crime)
THE LONG-LOST LOVE LETTERS OF DOC HOLLIDAY by David Corbett (Black Opal Books)
ISLAND OF THE MAD by Laurie R King (Bantam Books)
THE WIDOWS OF MALABAR HILL by Sujata Massey (Soho Crime)
A DYING NOTE by Ann Parker (Poisoned Pen Press)
IT BEGINS IN BETRAYAL by Iona Wishaw (Touchwood Editions)

Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel

BROKEN PLACES by Tracy Clark (Kensington Books)
COBRA CLUTCH by A J Devlin (NeWest Press)
THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW by A J Finn (William Morrow)
A LADY'S GUIDE TO ETIQUETTE AND MURDER by Dianne Freeman (Kensington Books)
WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU by Aimee Hix (Midnight Ink)
DEADLY SOLUTION by Keenan Powell (Level Best Books)
GIVE OUT CREEK by J G Toews (Mosaic Press)

Lefty for Best Mystery Novel

NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney (William Morrow)
WRONG LIGHT by Matt Coyle (Oceanview Publishing)
KINGDOM OF THE BLIND by Louise Penny (Minotaur Books)
UNDER A DARK SKY by Lori-Rader-Day (William Morrow Paperbacks)
A RECKONING IN THE BACK COUNTRY
 by Terry Shames (Seventh Street Books)
A STONE'S THROW by James W. Ziskin (Seventh Street Books)

Deadly Pleasures

George Easter



WE, THE JURY by Robert Rotstein (Blackstone, \$24.99). **Rating: B+** When David Sullinger killed his wife with an axe, he claimed he was a battered spouse and he feared for his life. The story of his trial is told by a dozen or so participants in the trial, including witnesses, the judge, prosecutor, celebrity defense counsel, bailiff, clerk and all eight jurors. To me it had somewhat the same feel as the old Henry Fonda movie, *12 Angry Men*.

By far the most interesting chapters of the book are the ones told by the jurors – and how their backgrounds, prejudices and interactions weigh heavily in their decision making.

It is clear that the author really knows his stuff when it comes to all the ins and outs of a murder trial. And he puts this knowledge to very good use in this admirable character study. This should be required reading in every law school, just as *12 Angry Men* was required viewing at the law school I attended. If you are looking for something different and creative, check out **WE, THE JURY**.

THE TRUTH ITSELF by James Rayburn (Blackstone, \$26.99). **Rating: B+** Former spy Kate Swift blew the whistle on some nefarious goings-on (some considered it treason) and has been in hiding under an assumed identity for a few years. But one day, on dropping off her daughter at school, she notices some suspicious activity and follows two young men into the school, suspecting an imminent school shooting. She foils that attack, but her cover is blown, so she and her daughter go on the run again, in search of the legendary operator Harry Hook, who may be her only hope for salvation.

Meanwhile, her twisted nemesis is

pulling out all of the stops to find and kill her.

There are several surprising revelations along the way and a bitter-sweet resolution.

The author James Rayburn is a pen name for Roger Smith, who has published crime novels set in South Africa, two of which I have read and reviewed in DP. He is very accomplished and really knows his craft, but he definitely dwells on the dark side.

A note on the publisher, Blackstone. It produces the finest quality hard cover in the U.S., which I, as a collector, very much appreciated. Very solid top and bottom of spine and boards overall. Well done.

NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney (Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: A-** A poignant story told in two tracks. Track one: Frank Guidry is a loyal underling of New Orleans's mob boss Carlos Marcello. But he is privy to explosive information about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. He knows that he is expendable, so he takes off toward the West, being pursued by Barone, a relentless mob hitman.

Track two: Charlotte Roy is an Oklahoma housewife with two young daughters. She is very dissatisfied with her life with her alcoholic, controlling husband. She finally musters up the courage to leave and takes her two daughters with her on a journey to Los Angeles where she plans to stay with an aunt while she gets her life in order.

Along the way Charlotte's path and that of Frank Guidry intersect when her car breaks down. He realizes that Charlotte and the two girls provide an excellent cover for him. So disguised as an insurance salesman, Frank charms Charlotte into joining him on the rest of

the journey.

A beautifully told story of redemption and new birth that has universal appeal. A Barry Award nominee for best novel.

THE FRACTURED by Brett Battles (CreateSpace, \$15.95). **Rating: A-** Jonathan Quinn has had better years, but now most of the trouble is behind him, if not forgotten. There is one issue that remains unresolved—the break between him and his partner, Nate. Quinn has come to accept the only potential path to healing the wound is via the passage of time. The secret world has other ideas. Quinn and his girlfriend, Orlando, are hired for a new mission, but they must include on their team the operative who is one of the few to have ever seen the face of the job's target. This operative is unknown to the client, but not to Quinn and Orlando. Now, to stop a plan that could slaughter tens of thousands of people, they must turn to the one person who wants nothing to do with them. If they can even find him in time.

As in every book in this series, the narrative is chock a block with the well-realized actions scenes that we've come to expect from this Barry Award-winning author. Although, these are mostly plot-driven books, I've grown to care about the main characters and it is always nice to check in a see how they are doing.



Lou Berney

RIVER OF SECRETS by Roger Johns (Minotaur, \$27.99). **Rating: B-** The staged murder of a prominent, black Baton Rouge politician raises puzzling questions for homicide detective Wallace Hartman. DNA evidence points toward political activist Eddie Pitkin, but this doesn't fit with the Eddie Pitkin she has known for years (Eddie is the half-brother of Wallace's childhood best friend.). When she finds a possible alibi witness, who promptly disappears, her quest to exonerate Eddie gets that bit harder.

Aided by her former FBI boyfriend (who plays a minor role in this novel compared to the first book), Wallace continues to dig deeper and uncovers a decades-old conspiracy among the Southern wealthy and powerful.

RIVER OF SECRETS was an o.k. read, but not nearly as good as the first in the series, **DARK RIVER RISING**. The resolution of the plot was a bit hard to swallow and the delightful tension between Wallace and her boyfriend in the first book was totally missing in the second..

FOREVER AND A DAY by Anthony Horowitz (Harper, \$26.99). **Rating: A-** This time around Anthony Horowitz treats us with an exciting story of how James Bond came to be 007 with a license to kill. It seems that British Intelligence had four agents with such a license, but one of them – 007 – has been found dead, his body floating in the harbor of Marseille.

M laid down his pipe and stared at it tetchily. "We have no choice. We're just going to bring forward this other chap you've been preparing. But you didn't tell me his name."

"It's Bond, sir," the Chief of Staff replied. "James Bond."

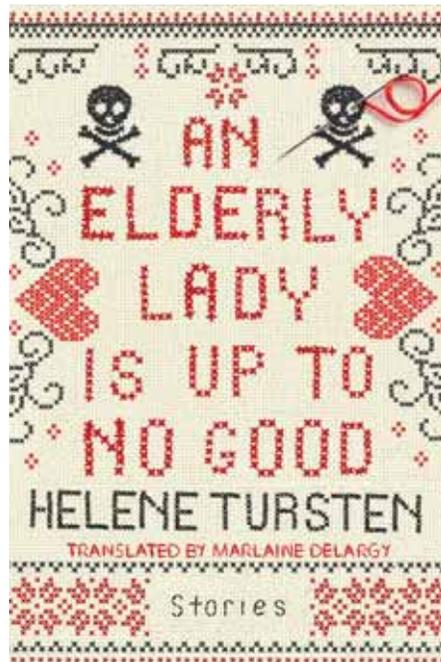
First assignment: find out who killed his predecessor and deal with it. What ensues is an archetypal Bondian thriller in which he matches wits again a wealthy megalomaniac with designs to destroy America as we know it.

First class job in capturing the essence of a James Bond novel – fast paced and exciting in its execution. An added bonus is the very believable back story of James Bond's origins. This should

satisfy even the most hardened of James Bond fans. It has been nominated for a Barry Best Thriller Award.

AN ELDERLY LADY IS UP TO NO GOOD by Helene Tursten (Soho Crime, \$12.99). **Rating: A-** The author explains how this small hardcover gem of a short story collection came to be: *"One of the biggest publishers in Sweden asked me for a story for their Christmas anthology. I said yes, but then realized that I didn't know what story to tell. The deadline came closer, and I felt totally empty. I almost panicked. And then she came to me: Maud. She was 88 years-old and looked like most old grannies. But inside she was quite special. Her age was a perfect disguise for a criminal! Even ... a murderer. I wrote the first story "An Elderly Lady Seeks Peace at Christmas," in just three hours, and I enjoyed every minute of her company. But let's just say I would not like to have her as a neighbor or a relative!"*

Maud's "adventures" include her plotting to get rid of an obnoxious neighbor, a gold-digger fiancée of a long-ago lover, a local celebrity with eyes on Maude's spacious, rent-free apartment and a crooked antiques dealer. These well-told stories have a surfeit of black humor which I greatly enjoyed, but recognize is not for everyone. My appetite for Maud stories has been whetted. More, please.



THE DARKNESS by Ragnar Jonasson (Minotaur, \$27.99). **Rating: B+** DI Hulda Hermannsdottir is a very good and dedicated detective. But she has always been a loner and critical of her colleagues who have isolated her. She loves her work and can't imagine doing anything else. But she is 64-year-old and being forced to retire. She is asked to clear out her desk for a new hire but manages to extract one concession from her boss – let her work a cold case for the two weeks she has left on the force.

The case she chooses is the death of a Russian asylum-seeker who was found dead in the water. The death was ruled a suicide or accident. She suspects otherwise – especially since the young woman had been granted asylum the day before her death.

Jonasson gives us glimpses of events in Hulda's early life that shaped her into the person she became – an interesting (and admirable for her determination), but not necessarily a likeable character.

The ending is a real shocker. I, for one, would like to know the aftermath of what happened, but I understand that the next book in the series will be a prequel, so I may have to wait awhile. Ragnar Jonasson continues to show us why he has leapt into the forefront of Nordic crime fiction.

TEAR IT DOWN by Nick Petrie (Putnam, \$26.00). **Rating: A-** Iraq war veteran Peter Ash suffers from severe claustrophobia and a general restlessness whenever in one place for a period of time, so his committed girlfriend June Cassidy sends him on a mercy mission to help an old friend Wanda Wyatt (war photographer and world traveler), who is being harassed to move out of her ramshackle Memphis home.

Peter arrives to find a large dump truck sitting in Wanda's living room.

On a parallel track, a homeless black youth (who also happens to be a very talented jazz guitar player) takes part in a botched robbery of a mall jewelry store and is now on the run. He encounters Peter at a gas station and steals his beloved truck, with all his tools in it, at gun point.

Not only are the cops after him, but also the owner of the jewelry store who

happens to be a powerful gangster.

Events continue to escalate and soon Peter and Wanda are in considerable danger.

Nick Petrie's novels are very much in the Lee Child/Jack Reacher vein, but also quite different in plotting and style. They have at least one very memorable action scene in each one. I've enjoyed them all and predict that Nick will be a star, if he isn't one already. He's my go-to recommendation to friends who like Lee Child.

THE NIGHT AGENT by Matthew Quirk (Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: A-** Son of a disgraced FBI agent, Peter Sutherland has followed a difficult path full of doubt and scorn to reach his goal of being a valued and trustworthy FBI Agent. He has been diligent in his adherence to the rules

After working for an extended period of time in a surveillance unit, Peter now has been assigned a job in the White House Situation Room, where his principal assignment is to man the night action desk, monitoring an emergency phone line for government agents. He's never had to respond to a call – until tonight when at 1:05 a.m. the phone rings. A terrified young woman named Rose tells Peter that her aunt and uncle have just been murdered and that the killer is still in the house with her. Before their deaths, they gave her this phone number with urgent instructions: "Tell them OSPREY was right. It's happening. . ."

Peter passes the information on to the appropriate parties and is told to stand down, but there is something about Rose's voice that stirs his protective instincts so he goes to the site of the murder and tries to comfort Rose.

His superiors once again tell him to stand down and he has every intention of doing so – until Rose calls him again and asks for help. He begins to understand that Rose may be the key to uncovering a Russian plot involving a traitor at the highest level of government.

My idea of good thriller elements are a deadline, chases, grave danger, fast pacing, likeable characters and lots of action. **THE NIGHT AGENT** has all those elements and provided me with

hours of on-the-edge-of-my-seat entertainment.

THE KILLER COLLECTIVE by Barry Eisler (Thomas & Mercer, \$24.95, \$15.95). **Rating: B+** Barry Eisler's two main series, one featuring killer-for-hire John Rain and the other Seattle sex-crimes cop Livia Lone are merged in this exciting thriller.

Livia Lone is as obsessed with catching and bringing bad guys to justice as Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch, so she is more than upset when her operation to shut down a child pornography/child abuse ring is shut down by unnamed power brokers in Washington, D.C. It seems that Livia had gotten too close to exposing very powerful people, who now are seeking to not only shut down the operation, but extinguish anyone who knows about it.

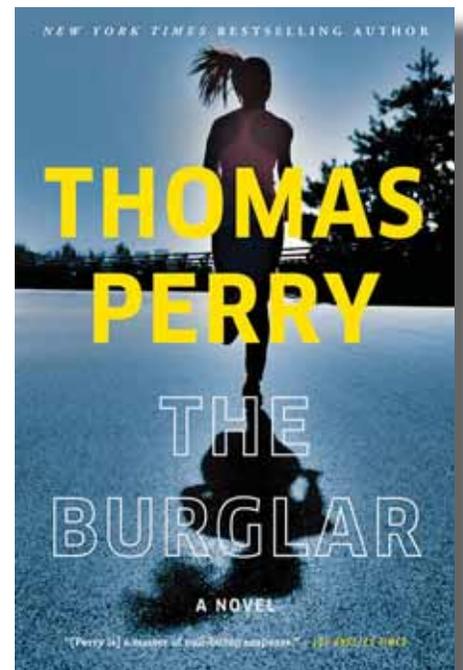
John Rain ("make it look like an accident") is contacted to kill a female cop in Seattle, Washington for a very sizable fee. He turns down the contract because he doesn't kill women. Well that doesn't sit well with the powers that be and his name gets added to the list for extermination. No loose ends.

Over time the people on the list band together with the aid of John's old friends Dox and Delilah and plan to strike back.

Most of this exciting, action-packed story was an A or A- for me, but the by-the-numbers ending, with no real surprises, demoted it to a B+. If you like Barry Eisler's prior work, you'll want to read this to keep up with the characters and enjoy the ride, but I wouldn't recommend this as a starting place for those who have not read Barry's work before.

THE BURGLAR by Thomas Perry (Grove Atlantic, \$26.00). **Rating: A-** Elle Stowell targets ritzy L.A. neighborhoods to ply her trade – burglary. She is meticulous and very patient in "casing" her targets and credits her preparation with the fact that she have never been caught.

Her latest objective is the home of a wealthy art dealer and she successfully enters the house without setting off any alarms. When she proceeds to the master bedroom (her first stopping



point in any house because it contains the most valuables – jewelry, cash, guns, etc.) she encounters three dead bodies and a video camera still on and still recording. So she takes the camera with its memory card and makes a quick exit. She returns the next night to see what the police are doing and a black SUV follows her when she leaves and tries to catch her. She escapes (barely) and decides to go into hiding for awhile.

But she can't help being very curious about the murders so she starts using her burglary research skills to investigate the lives of the victims. And when subsequent attacks occur, her investigation moves from one of curiosity to one of necessity.

Another great thriller from Thomas Perry – one infused with insider burglary tips of the trade (no fair using any of them) and an air of total authenticity. I look forward every year to my annual Thomas Perry fix.

HEADLONG by Cynthia Harrod-Eagles (Severn House, \$28.99). **Rating: B+** Ed Wiseman is a very likeable and very well-known literary agent in London. Then he takes a dive out his office window into a construction site next door. Was it suicide, an accident or was he pushed? DCI Slider takes the case and is immediately being pressured by the Borough Commander to close the case as quickly as possible and conclude

it was a accidental death.

When evidence points to murder, Slider discovers a number of people with possible motives for the crime: an embittered ex-wife, a discarded mistress, a frustrated would-be author, and a disgruntled former employee. Many had reason to hold a grudge against the late lamented literary agent. But who would feel strongly enough to kill him?

Another satisfying case for Bill Slider and for us as his loyal fans. A traditional British police procedural that provides a few hours of pleasant pastime and distinct pleasure.

HOUSE ARREST by Mike Lawson (Grove Atlantic, \$26.00). **Rating: A-** It's a new year and that means a new book from Mike Lawson to brighten up what is otherwise a dreary winter day.

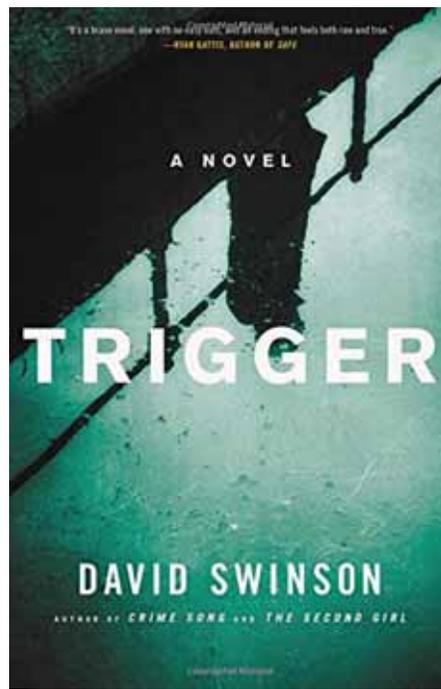
Joe DeMarco is Congressman John Mahoney's behind-the-scenes fixer. But he's now in a lot of trouble and his relationship with Mahoney has been made public, endangering his future employment. Joe has been accused of shooting and killing Representative Lyle Canton, the House Majority Whip and there is substantial evidence to back up the prosecution.

Unable to call upon Mahoney for help, DeMarco turns to his friend Emma, an ex-DIA agent. She follows her own leads and discovers that a prominent businessman had a great motive for seeking Canton's life.

Meanwhile, in jail, forces have been hired to kill Joe DeMarco before his case even gets to trial and his friends become aware of this and have to call in a lot of help to keep Joe alive while Emma is finding evidence to prove his innocence.

This is the thirteenth in this consistently high quality series. But with **HOUSE ARREST** the life of Joe DeMarco has certainly taken a new course. I will be very interested to know what's in store for him in the next novel. And congratulations to the author on his Edgar nomination for **HOUSE WITNESS** – another great book.

TRIGGER by David Swinson (Mulholland, \$27.00). **Rating: A** With **TRIGGER**, we complete the trilogy cycle that started with **THE SECOND GIRL**, in which we encounter the protagonist ex-cop Frank Marr beginning to cycle



down into serious drug and alcohol addiction. He hits bottom in **CRIME SONG**, which was a tough book to read because Frank Marr has a good heart in spite of his problems. Now with **TRIGGER** we have an uplifting story of redemption. So I guess what I'm saying is, if you decided to stop with **CRIME SONG**, you shouldn't.

As the book opens we find Frank having some success battling his addictions. He's still robbing the houses of drug dealers, taking their cash and drugs. He keeps the cash, but flushes the drugs away.

Then his former partner on the police force is accused of gunning down an unarmed black youth. His friend is adamant that he saw a gun, so Frank investigates to find out what really happened. Along the way, Frank recruits a young man he nearly executed years before. The scenes of them working together are some of the best in this wonderful novel.

Swinson's writing is top notch, but the subject matter (drugs and violence) is heavily laced with profanity and so is not for everyone. I just turn my filter on and ignore the distasteful in order to experience the many highlights of **TRIGGER**.

This brings to an end the story arc that began in the first book in this trilogy, **THE SECOND GIRL**, but I hope that we will see Frank Marr again some time in the future. He is too rich a character,

serious flaws and all, to leave unmined. And the same could be said to his newly minted sidekick.

WOLF PACK by C. J. Box (Putnam, \$27.00). **Rating: B+** When we last saw Joe Pickett had lost his job as game warden. Well, he's got it back due to friends in high places, and is doing better than ever with a new house and a new pickup truck.

Joe witnesses a high-tech, sophisticated drone track and scare wildlife into stampeding, with attendant loss of life. He teams up with a female game warden who has also seen the drone be a serious danger to wildlife and they go in search of the owner. Joe finds that the drone belongs to a mysterious and wealthy man whose son is dating Joe's own daughter, Lucy. He lays down some rules for the drone operator, but then is asked by agents of the FBI and the DOJ to back off, which doesn't sit well with Joe.

Meanwhile dead human bodies are showing up in Joe's jurisdiction, apparent victims of a Mexican cartel murder squad known as the Wolf Pack. Joe's close friend Nate Romanowski, on the threshold of fatherhood for the first time, helps out with both cases.

This was an enjoyable, fast-paced, easy read, but lacked the "pop" of some of Box's better books.

MERCY RIVER by Glen Erik Hamilton (Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: B+** When Van Shaw received a call for help from his former Ranger buddy Leo Pak, he heads off to a remote Oregon town called Mercy River to find out what kind of trouble Leo is in. It's big trouble: Leo is accused of murdering a local gun store owner. Van elicits help from big-time attorney Ephraim Ganz. But both Ganz and Van are shocked when Leo pleads guilty at the arraignment. What is going on? Van is convinced Leo is innocent. Why would he plead guilty?

Complicating matters is a three-day party for Army Rangers which has become an annual event in Mercy River. As Van investigates he finds that the town has had a rocky history with a community of white supremacists, which were run out of town by the Rangers but threaten to return. To save his buddy, Van reverts to the skills taught him by his master-thief grandfather.

This was a fun read with some big coincidences to overlook. But Glen Erik Hamilton always puts out a good product. But if you haven't read him yet, you should start with his excellent first novel **PAST CRIMES**.

THE LAST ACT by Brad Parks (Dutton, \$26.00). **Rating: A-** Tommy Jump simply loves being an actor, but roles for a short, muscular young man are getting harder and harder to find. So with reality setting in and a girlfriend-artist who needs a more stable life (especially now that she is expecting their first child), Tommy is searching for a more permanent job.

A childhood friend, now an FBI agent, offers Tommy what could be considered the role of a lifetime: \$150,000 for a six-month acting gig. They want Tommy to go undercover to prison and get close to Mitchell Dupree, a banker/money launderer, who is believed to know the whereabouts of incriminating documents that could put a major drug lord in prison.

With a lot of trepidation, Tommy assumes a false name and identity and begins his mission. There are missteps and challenges to overcome but Tommy appears up to the task.

The story progresses as one might predict until about the 3/4 mark and then takes a very dramatic turn and the tension ratchets way up.

This is the third of Park's standalone novels which I would describe as Harlen Coben-esque. I've read and greatly enjoyed all three. They are all very creatively plotted and are wonderful entertainments. As more and more readers become familiar with his work, I can only hope that he will attain Coben-like success.

THE GOOD DETECTIVE by John McMahon (Putnam, \$27.00). **Rating: C+** Detective P.T. Marsh is hurting from the loss of his wife and young son who died in a car accident. He may be a "good" detective but he is now prone to rash and professionally risky decisions. For example, when he decides to teach an abusive boyfriend a lesson by beating him up.

The next morning P.T. is summoned to the scene of a murder and is shocked to find that the victim is the boyfriend he visited the night before. He's sure the

guy was alive when he left, but he was quite drunk so he begins to doubt his certainty. Another problem: his fingerprints and DNA are all over the crime scene.

Then the body of a African-American teenaged boy is found in the remnants of a fire. He was apparently lynched. This discovery creates a lot of racial tension and media scrutiny in the town which adds to P.T.'s problems. But being a "good" detective, P.T. doggedly marshals on, eventually discovering a conspiracy leading all the way back to the time of the Civil War.

This first novel is an example of the type of story that starts off with a bang and is enjoyable for 2/3 of the way through the book and then becomes so improbable that I'm sorry I wasted my time on it. I have been encountering this more and more of late. Perhaps I'm just getting old and grumpy.

THE WOMAN IN THE BLUE CLOAK by Deon Meyer (Atlantic Monthly, \$22.00, May, 2019). **Rating: A-** It's been three years since the last Benny Griessel mystery and Benny has been spending his time getting his life in order. Both his girlfriend, a famous singer and he are alcoholics, but both have been on the wagon for many months. And Benny is thinking of popping "the question," with the only thing holding him back is the cost of a diamond ring that "she could be proud to show her friends." Hard to do on a cop's salary.

Meanwhile, Benny and his partner catch a case of a unidentified woman's body found posed in a tourist area. First item of business: identify her. Next, find her killer. Pretty simple premise for a story but the veteran Meyer throws in some twists and some wonderful dialogue.

At 160 pages I'm not sure this qualifies as a novel, but I'll take any helping of Deon Meyer/Benny Griessel I can get and savor it. I read this in one night and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Please, don't make us wait three years for more.

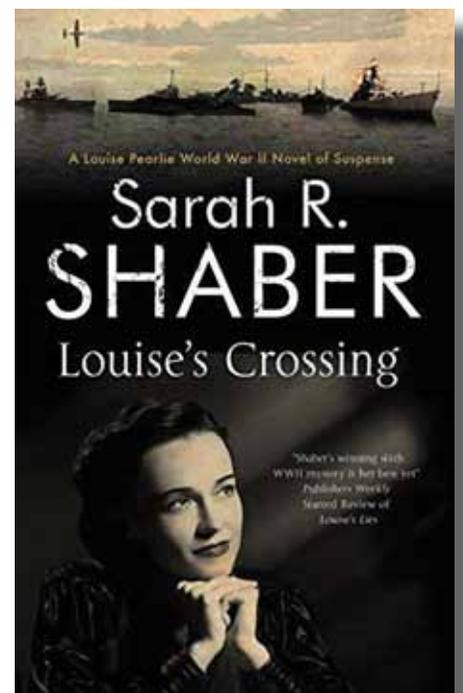
LOUISE'S CROSSING by Sarah R. Shaber (Severn House, \$28.99, May, 2019). **Rating: B+** February, 1944. Washington D.C. Louise Pearlie has shown her bosses enough of her talents

and determinations that they are willing to reassign to the London office of the OSS. She is excited about the opportunity but has misgivings about traveling across the Atlantic Ocean in the SS *Amelia Earhart*, a Liberty Ship carrying ammunition and supplies for the troops.

Accompanying her on the voyage to Liverpool are an eclectic group of passengers, including the aloof Blanche Bryant, whose husband, Eddie, died in mysterious circumstances on the ship's prior voyage out to New York three months before. Most of the same crew and passengers are on the return voyage, and one question remains: was it really suicide?

When the body of one of the passengers is found on deck, it's clear that German bombs and raging storms aren't the only threats to Louise's safety. Can she expose a brutal killer before the ship docks in England?

I'm a big fan of this series for two reasons. One is the admirable character of Louise Pearlie and two is the insight into what everyday life on the homefront was like during WW II. The mysteries are o.k., but not exceptionally plotted. This one Louise was fortunate to solve on the last day possible. I look forward to her adventures in London. I envy the author, who, of course, will have to travel to England to do substantial research.



Lookin' For A Few Good Books

Larry Gandle



HARD AGROUND by Brendan DuBois (Pegasus, \$25.95). **Rating:** **B** Lewis Cole is a defense analyst who has recently undergone surgery to remove a couple of tumors from his torso. He is recuperating in his historic beach front home. At night, he hears someone breaking into his house but is unable to go down the stairs to investigate. Between an old friend (with a shady criminal past) and his girlfriend, he is kept abreast of the local news including the violent death of an antique dealer in town. He is also being bothered by a genealogy couple who want to explore his house for research purposes. Lewis tries to solve the mystery at home as peaceful recuperating just doesn't seem to be possible.

The Lewis Cole series is a long one. I admit I never read any of them before and it is quite evident that there is quite a long history associated with this character in previous books. There is no doubt this is a character-driven, cozy mystery, but quite a charming one.



Brendan DuBois

There is enough suspense interjected into the lives of Lewis and his friends as to keep the pages turning. The solution is clever and all is neatly wrapped up. I do not normally like cozy mysteries, but I was won over by the characters' charm. It is recommended.

PIECES OF HER by Karin Slaughter (Morrow, \$27.99). **Rating:** **B-/C+** Andrea spent her whole life with her mother, Laura, in a beach town called Belle Isle. She has a reasonably normal childhood but never knew her biological father. She thinks she knows all there is to know about her mother -- until an event at a local restaurant. While Andrea is at lunch with her mother, a young man walks in with a gun and kills the girl and her mother at the next table. Laura gets up to protect her own daughter, gets stabbed in the hand and using the blade of the knife, calmly slices the boy's throat killing him. The entire world wants to know who this lady is. Next comes an assassin to kill Laura and Andrea flees in bewilderment. In alternate chapter form, we follow Andrea in the current time and Laura in her past life slowly -- very slowly -- discovering exactly who she is and why people want her dead.

I would never have picked up a 600-page book by an author I did not usually read except for two things -- first, the buzz was very positive but second -- upon opening the front cover, there was a neatly hand-printed note written by the author. I thought I felt the ink lines and it was original. This impression was reinforced when I saw it for sale for \$75.00 online because of the handwritten note on the inside cover. So, I read the very long book. When I saw it in the airport, I opened the front cover expecting to see it blank and was surprised to

see every copy with the note. I was fooled! From the publicity standpoint it worked beautifully, but I was not amused.

What did I think of the book? Did I mention how long it was? Probably 200 pages too long. Initially I was drawn into the story and the suspense was ratcheted up. However, the plot began to drag with numerous pointless episodes. Characters were uneven -- some solid creations and others stock, cartoonish villains. The conclusion was no surprise in that everything was meticulously explained before that. The bottom line -- the book is entertaining enough but really needed some major editing.

A SHARP SOLITUDE by Christine Carbo (Simon and Schuster, \$16.00, PBO). **Rating:** **B-** Reeve Landon lives near Glacier National Park. His job is to train his dog to find scat or animal waste for a scientific investigation on wild, indigenous animals. When a woman reporter's body is found nearby, Reeve is immediately a prime suspect as he was the last one to supposedly see her alive. Ali Paige is the mother of his child and an FBI agent working in the region. Hiding her past relationship with Reeve from local authorities, Ali investigates while attempting to prove Reeve's innocence.

The reason I picked up and read this book is an individual at Bouchercon said it was one of the most suspenseful books he read all year. I will respectfully disagree. It is a typical regional mystery that is pretty good. A big positive is that the author has an excellent sense of the locale as she lives there. Her characters are realistic and complex enough. The book is told in alternate chapter form from Reeve's or Ali's perspective. This

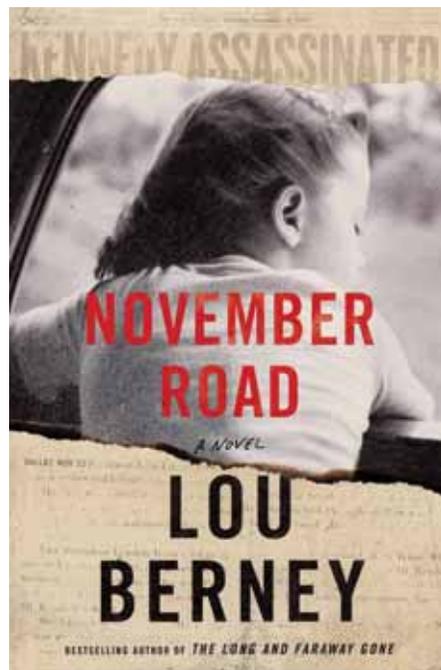
does manage to ratchet up the suspense. The negative is there is so much filler -- descriptions and episodes that do nothing to advance the plot. This is obviously a way for the author to bulk up the book. As a result, it dragged for a considerable length. The book is okay -- nothing unique.

NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney (Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: A-** In November, 1963, Frank Guidry, a loyal henchman to New Orleans mobster, Carlos Marcello, is asked to drive a car to Houston. Kennedy is assassinated and he is again asked to go to Houston to pick up the car and drive it into the ocean. He quickly realizes that he is a potential leak in the assassination and finds himself in mortal danger as Marcello's hitman is sent after him. He flees west to Las Vegas where he hopes a rival of Marcello will help him out.

In the meantime, Charlotte Ray, a disgruntled housewife living in Woodrow, Oklahoma with a drunken husband, decides to leave with her two children giving them a chance at a better life. Broken down in Arizona, she meets Frank Guidry who quickly realizes that Charlotte and her two girls will be an excellent shield hiding him from Carlos loyalists and the hitman. But the mobster crowd is too clever for that and they soon close in on him with Charlotte and the two girls in the way. Things get bloody really quickly leading to the surprise ending.

This book has been raved about by many reviewers of crime fiction. I will join their ranks. The author is an excellent writer for the genre. His characters are well fleshed out. The story is clever and compelling. The length is not excessive and the multiple point of view alternating chapters is an excellent technique to keep the reader's interest. This will prove to be one of the best novels of the year. Highly recommended.

PAST TENSE by Lee Child (Dellacorte \$28.99). **Rating: B+** Wandering from Maine to New Hampshire, Reacher sees a sign with the name of a town his father was from. He decides to visit and locate his parent's old home. In the meantime, a couple



traveling from Canada to New York are forced to stop at a remote motel when their car breaks down. The owner appears to be friendly and helpful but they soon notice they are trapped with no means of getting away. The question is - why? To what purpose is there in keeping them there? As Reacher investigates his family, he eventually wanders to the same motel where, literally, all hell breaks loose.

This is probably the most satisfying Reacher book in years. It is classic Reacher where he enters a small town, makes things right and leaves. There is plenty of action and suspense with the puzzle as to what is going on at that motel. Reacher causes harm to all kinds of nefarious people. Yes, the characters are stock figures in many instances and reality must be suspended throughout, but these books are generally meant to be fun and entertaining. With a compelling plot and a rapid pace, this is truly superior entertainment. Highly recommended.

THE FERAL DETECTIVE by Jonathan Lethem (Ecco, \$26.99). **Rating: C-/D+** Phoebe Siegler is looking for the daughter of a friend of hers. Arabella, the daughter, has fled to the California desert to enter a commune. Phoebe hires a detective, Charles Heist, who lives in a trailer outside the desert. She initially meets him in a shabby office -- dishev-

eled, hairy and totally weird keeping a possum in his desk drawer. The two of them travel off into the desert looking for Arabella who appears to be in peril from competing desert tribes.

I have been following Jonathan Lethem's career for decades -- since **GUN, WITH OCCASIONAL MUSIC** became a collectable first book. I picked up this one because it is his first detective novel since then. Initially the book was faintly amusing and the characters of Phoebe and Charles were interesting enough to warrant spending time with them. It was when they moved off into the desert mountains and meeting the members of the tribe that I lost interest. The tribal members are strange and very difficult to relate to. The plot just seemed to slow down -- almost stopping -- and my interest waned as the pages went by. I crawled to the finish and was thrilled to close the book. No more Jonathan Lethem books for me!

THE WITCH ELM by Tana French (Viking, \$28.00). **Rating: D-** Toby is a young man working in an art gallery. He comes home and, while in his bedroom, hears people breaking in. He confronts them and is severely beaten and left for dead. He manages to survive and decides to recover in his ancestral home, The Ivy House. All is well until a skull is discovered in the witch elm in the garden. This sets off a sequence that leads to the unraveling of family secrets long left behind.

I listened to the book on Audible and read it on my Kindle. The reason I picked up this book is that the pre-publication buzz was intense, as well as the fact that it was featured on the front cover of the *New York Times Book Review* with a very favorable review written by Stephen King. First of all, the pacing is slow -- incredibly slow and the narrative is filled with so much minutia that the plot gets lost frequently in useless dialogue. It borders on maddening as nothing happens for literally hundreds of pages. In over five hundred pages, there are maybe six important events that occur, each interspersed with addition endless dialogue. The only reason I finished the book -- and finish it I did -- God help me -- is that there were

indications that the conclusion pays off in a big way. Well let me break it to you -- it doesn't! It ends on a whimper. The characters are an unlikeable bunch and not whom I would want to spend 500 pages with. 95% of the book takes place in Ivy House so there is a claustrophobic sense to the book. The story is dull, dreary and desperately needed editing. I do not foresee me reading another book by Tana French -- no matter what rave reviews it gets.

BLUFF by Michael Kardos (Mysterious Press, \$26.00). **Rating: C+** Natalie Webb is a 26-year-old magician with a washed-up career. She, foolishly, places herself into a position where she will need a lot of money. Initially, she decides to write an article about card sharks -- cheaters at poker but is eventually convinced to work with a partner in an effort to fleece some very rich, but dangerous men, out of a million dollars. It will take practice and nerves of steel. At the big moment, things do not quite happen the way she hoped, leading to danger.

BLUFF is an entertaining novel with stereotypic characters. I felt like I was reading a cozy novel filled with so much useless descriptions and episodes in an effort to both help define characterizations and bulk up the book. However, the book is not lengthy and as a result, the ancillary material is not too trou-



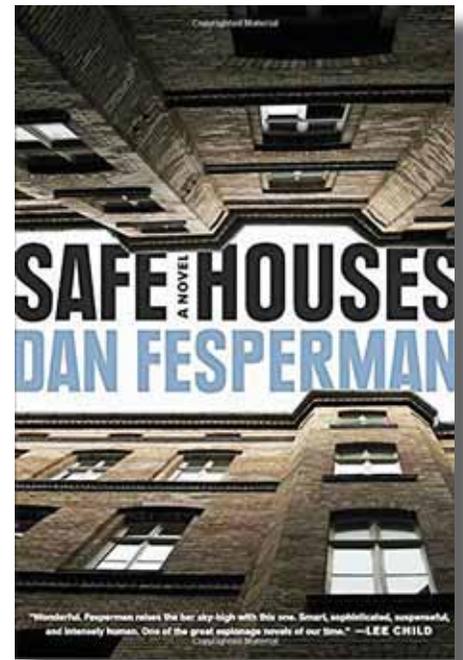
blesome. I was hoping for something more clever in the end. There are some technical details on how to cheat at poker, but they were quite dull and did not truly help me understand what they were doing. Yet, the book is entertaining enough. But, overall, not enough to recommend as there are so many other great books out there.

FOREVER AND A DAY by Anthony Horowitz (Harper, \$26.99). **Rating: B** In a prequel to **CASINO ROYALE**, James Bond is promoted to the double-O service and is sent on a mission to discover what happened to the previous 007 who was found in the Marseilles harbor with three bullet holes in his chest. It appears that the Corsican mob is very much involved in narcotics smuggling and Bond's predecessor discovered something that got him killed. In order to discover what happened, Bond must get to know Jean-Paul Scipio -- an enormously obese individual who appears to be calling the shots in Marseilles. Sixtine is a beautiful older woman who has a lot of knowledge about the British secret service and might have been involved in the death of the agent. She is dating Irwin Wolfe, a billionaire who is about to launch his new cruise ship which will travel to New York. Bond sets out to discover what is happening in Marseilles and, as a result, the body count begins to ratchet up, as usual.

Anthony Horowitz has written an excellent pastiche of the Bond opus. It is written very much in the same vein as Ian Fleming with the usual devices of a beautiful women, infiltration of an impregnable fortress and, of course, the destruction of a ship.

This book is not only entertaining but it is also quite cinemographic. It is silly, at times, and the plot occasionally drags. The actual goal of the villain is truly idiotic but no more so than any of the other Bond villains. Yet, all of these flaws fall within the normal storyline of the Bond novels so the book is true to its source. Recommended.

SAFE HOUSES by Dan Fesperman (Knopf, \$26.95). **Rating: A-** There are two apparently separate stories being



told. One takes place in 1979 as Helen, a low-level CIA agent, is in charge of keeping up with several safe houses located in Berlin.

While she is upstairs in one of the safe houses checking out the recording device, she overhears a rape taking place downstairs and intervenes. The agent, who was raping the young girl, is found to be dangerous and is actually beyond reproach, as Helen learns, when she reports him to her supervisor. Helen eventually bonds with other female agents in an effort to bring him down.

In a separate story that takes place in the current time frame, in the rural Eastern Shore of Maryland, Helen and her husband are killed in their bed by their mentally impaired son. Their daughter, with the help of a local PI, investigates the murder which does not appear to be so clear cut. The implications are the crime has much to do with Helen's past life that has finally caught up with her.

Dan Fesperman is one of my favorite writers in spy fiction genre. He is very much underappreciated and deserves a wider audience. His books are extremely diverse. They could be foreign or historical and usually both. In any event, the reader will be left both entertained and educated. They are all compelling tales. This book is no exception. It is intriguing and complex.

The characters are realistic. The plot generally moves quickly and the book is hard to put down. My only problem is the length. It is simply too long and could have been cut by a hundred pages -- too many dead ends. Yet, there is so much good in this book that it is highly recommended.

A LADDER TO THE SKY by John Boyne (Hogarth, \$27.00). **Rating: A** Maurice Swift is a handsome young man anxious to become a famous writer. He has the talent for writing but, unfortunately, lacks the imagination necessary to create original stories. While working as a waiter in Berlin in 1988, he encounters Erich Ackermann, a well-known and acclaimed novelist. Erich, is gay and is smitten by the young man. He decides to take him on his latest book tour as his assistant. Maurice accepts wholeheartedly and uses the experience to meet others who could help advance his career. He soon proves himself to be duplicitous -- a total opportunist willing to walk over anyone to get ahead. In fact, Maurice's first book is based on a story from Erich's life which the author confided to him. Erich had disclosed a deep dark secret of something he did during WWII. When Maurice's book is published, it leads to Erich's ruin. In that way, Maurice continues to walk on others. Nothing is above his desire for success -- not even murder.

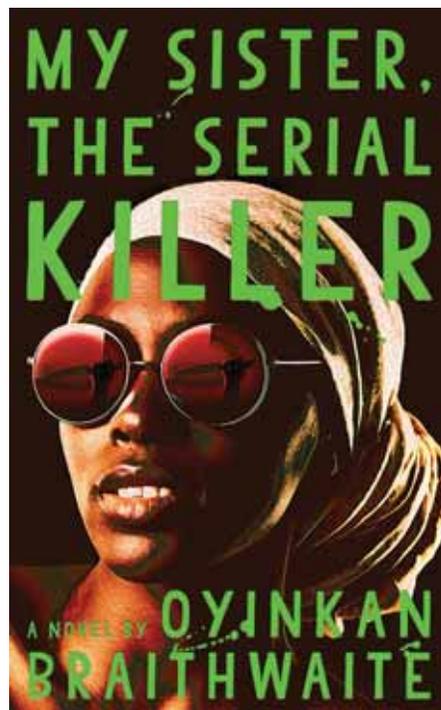
The book covers the life of Maurice Swift. The various chapters tell separate stories of people in his life and the impact they made on him and him on them. It is written from various points of view. In that sense it is disjointed but the book works as a whole. Characters are richly brought to life with so many contradictory traits. Few of the characters are sympathetic to the reader. The plot is always interesting and full of surprises. This is a very entertaining and well written novel.

HOW IT HAPPENED by Michael Koryta (Little Brown, \$27.00). **Rating: B-** Rob Barrett is an FBI investigator who specialized in being able to detect the truth in a confession. He is assigned to go back to his roots in rural Maine to

assess the story of Kimberly Crepeaux, a drug user currently incarcerated for the killing of two local youths. Barrett is convinced she is telling the truth, however, when it is time to recover the bodies, there is no trace of them. Kimberly's story implicates a successful businessman. This creates a scenario where Barrett must go after this individual and, of course places himself into grave danger.

The first eighty percent of this book is brilliant. A double murder must be solved and nothing seems to fit. The last twenty percent of the book (except for a brief interlude on a boat) is nothing but talk, talk talk. Endless discussions and confessions are necessary to explain away the complex plot. Prior to this, Michael creates strong and deep characters with a vivid setting. The plot is compelling and the mystery keeps the pages turning. This makes the ending incredibly frustrating as discussion and confession take turns in revealing just about everything. Not my favorite of the author's work.

MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER by Oyinkan Braithwaite (Doubleday, \$22.95). **Rating: B+** Ayoola phones her older sister, Korede, and informs her that she just killed her boyfriend and could she help clean everything up.



This has, apparently, happened before. Korede is a nurse and is quite proficient at cleaning up blood. They manage to make the body disappear.

Soon after this, a physician at the Lagos hospital where Korede works (whom she is secretly in love with) asks Ayoola out and the fear of another murder becomes quite real. Korede really likes this physician and does her best to dissuade him from dating her sister but does not succeed. Can another murder be on the horizon?

This book is filled with dark humor. It is short and quite a fun read. Characters are well developed and the plot moves swiftly. Chapters are brief and the author uses the short chapters for small vignettes of the characters and their relationship to others. There are some unexpected developments which does keep the pages turning. This is a popular book and highly recommended.

George's Take: With a title like **MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER** how can one resist reading it? And the title turned out to not be a gimmick. The writing is excellent and the humor very black (not in a racial sense). Each short chapter is a delicious morsel. It would have been easy to devour this little book in a few large bites, but I would intentionally put it down so as to make it last longer. **Rating: A-**

NO EXIT by Taylor Adams (William Morrow, \$26.99). **Rating: B+** Darby Thorne is a college student heading home for the holidays to see her dying mother. A sudden blizzard forces her off the highway into a rest stop where she meets several strangers -- including the driver of a van that contains a young girl inside locked in a dog cage. With no cell phone signal or means to calling for help, she must devise a way to rescue the little girl as a blizzard rages outside.

The author sets up a truly ingenious scenario full of rich possibilities. The result is a fun-filled adventure that will keep the reader riveted to the pages. Characters are stock figures and poorly developed but that is not unusual in a suspense thriller such as this. The story almost stretches the boundaries to

reach the allotted number of pages. But for pure fun -- which is the reason we read most of these books, it cannot be beat. Highly recommended.

And now for some psychological/domestic suspense thrillers. Oh, joy!

THE PERFECT NANNY by Leila Slimani (Penguin, \$16.00). **Rating: B-A** A nanny is accused of killing two young children. We are told this at the very beginning of this seemingly slight book. We then learn about this family -- Myriam is an attorney who has decided to go back to work. Her husband, Paul, helps her pick the perfect nanny for their young children, Mila and Adam. The nanny, Louise, works tirelessly to make herself indispensable to the family. They even take her on vacation to the Greek Islands. She cooks, cleans, is quiet, polite and pleasant. That is, until she eventually and inexorably begins to go mad, leading to murder.

This book appears, on the surface, to be one of the usual domestic thrillers that dominate bookstore shelves in the wake of **GONE GIRL**. However, it was named one of the ten best books of the year by the *New York Times Book Review*. This is the only reason I picked up this book. As a fan of crime fiction, I thought this book would fit perfectly into the genre. It simply does not. There is always an underlying sense of dread as the end result is known. The question is how Louise reaches this point of murder. The plot is relatively mundane almost to the point of boredom. The crime comes upon us almost insidiously. The book is more of a psychological study as opposed to a thriller with well created, realistic and complex characters. It falls much more into the literary camp and thus the literary accolades. Personally, I was less than enthralled and often just downright bored.

AN ANONYMOUS GIRL by Greer Hendricks & Sarah Pekkanen (St Martin's, \$27.99). **Rating: C-** Jessica Farris, a makeup artist in NYC, signs up for a psychology study at NYU which promises to pay her \$500.00 for two days time -- money she desperately needs to help her family who are in dire

financial straits. Dr. Shields, running the study, requests that they meet for a follow-up study. Jessica agrees and she soon finds herself in the midst of a so-called psycho-social experiment possibly placing herself in grave danger.

This is a very popular book with some positive reviews. These psychological suspense novels have become all the rage following **GONE GIRL**. This book was named one of the best books of the month by Amazon and was a Book of the month Club selection. It also has a lot of buzz. I wanted to read it as I suspected these types of domestic thrillers are really bad and this one confirms it. It is horribly written -- characters so very superficial. The plot was intriguing up to a point -- then it became overbearing. The length is about 150 pages too long. I thought there would at least be the usual twist that would hold a surprise and make the book worth slogging through. I was wrong -- no twist. This book, and others like it, are getting way too much attention. Please ignore this one. It's not worth your time.

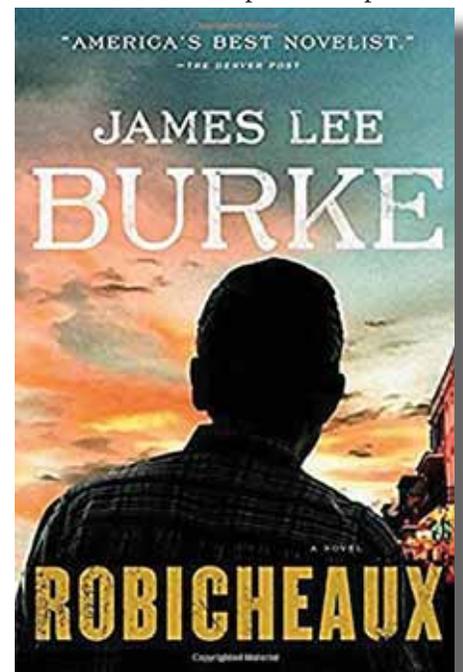
NINE PERFECT STRANGERS by Liane Moriarty (Flatiron Books, \$28.99). **Rating: C** Nine people go to a remote spa called Tranquillum House in an effort to change their lives. Frances Welty, a middle-aged novelist has been swindled in a relationship and has come in an effort to heal herself. The eight others have similar problems. They first undergo three days of silence with no alcohol, no electronics, and no food other than what is served. The owner, Masha, initially appears odd but it is soon apparent she is quite mad, placing all the characters into a precarious and potentially fatal situation.

I selected this book to read due to the huge publisher's push. This is an extremely popular author and there were some mentioning in other reviews that this compares to Agatha Christie's **AND THEN THERE WERE NONE** in the sense that they were stranded in a remote house in Australia. Foolish me in thinking this was in any way a mystery novel. The book is a long and mostly dull book. The characters are superficial stock creations and the story

eventually devolves into idiocy. Not for me! I should know by now to not trust hype from sources I don't trust.

ROBICHEAUX by James Lee Burke (Simon & Schuster, \$27.99). **Rating: A-** When a local gangster calls Dave Robicheaux to come over to his house to look at an old civil war sword that he wants to sell to a local author with whom he wants to produce a motion picture, it sets off a chain of events leading to death and destruction. Multiple plots intertwine involving Dave and his best friend Clete Purcel. One of them includes the death of the man responsible for killing Dave's wife in a car accident. Dave has a blackout and it is not certain if he actually murdered the man or is being setup. Also lurking is one of the creepiest assassins I have ever encountered in crime fiction.

With any James Lee Burke novel, expect two things- great writing and a convoluted plot that can be either character driven or suspense driven. In this case, the writing is beautifully lyrical where, so often, I find myself rereading passages. Nobody will evoke the Louisiana bayou country like he does. The characters are all realistic with superbly authentic dialogue. The pacing is languid, as usual with interludes of fast paced action. The book is a bit too long but otherwise is a superb example of the



History Mystery Potpourri



Sally Sugarman Reviews

FOR THE SAKE OF THE GAME Edited by Laurie R. King and Leslie S. Klinger (Pegasus Crime, 2018). **Rating: A+** This is the fourth of this duo's Holmes anthologies. This volume offers the same high quality as the other three books and belongs in all Sherlockian collections as well as on the shelves of those who are mystery fans or those who just enjoy a good read. The editors attract and select fine writers who offer a selection of stories of different kinds.

It is the variety as well as each of the specific tales that is appealing. Some directly and others indirectly involve Holmes. Time periods vary as do the genres. Some readers may prefer different stories, but all of them are engaging. Each has its unique quality, characters that quickly grab your attention and stories that unfold satisfactorily. Trying to pick favorites is difficult since each writer projects his or her own individuality, which is as appealing as are the stories themselves.

Collections such as these are a reminder of the power of the short story. After all, it was in the short story that Holmes primarily existed as readers perused their magazines. Many of our favorite sleuths started out in this form and it is a pleasure to revisit the great detective and others in this format. King and Klinger should be congratulated on the authors that they present and the balance that they offer in each of their anthologies.

A KNIFE IN THE FOG by Bradley Harper (Seventh Street Books, 2018). **Rating: A+** Narrated by Arthur Conan Doyle, this story plunges Doyle into the mystery of Jack the Ripper. Having moved to Portsmouth, written *A Study*

in Scarlet, worked on an historical novel, *Micah Clarke*, and attended patients Doyle is awaiting the birth of his first child. Therefore, he is surprised to receive a letter from William Gladstone, asking him to come to London. Since the former prime minister enclosed funds for the fare, Doyle decides to go. On meeting an emissary from Gladstone, Doyle is asked to assist the police in solving the Whitechapel murders.

Evidently, the insights he demonstrated in his Holmes story indicated his skill as an investigator. The recompense is generous and includes expenses. Doyle stipulates that his mentor, Dr. Joseph Bell assist him. Wilkins, Gladstone's representative agrees. Later he suggests that the two men use Margaret Harkness, a writer who lives in the East End, as their guide. She lives there to better understand those whose lives she records. Harkness is a feminist who often goes about dressed as a man. In this

guise Harkness forshadows someone who will appear in a later Holmes story.

It is clear that Doyle learns much from this experience which will help him in his future writing. The three of them, Doyle, Bell and Harkness work effectively as a team to uncover the identity of the killer.

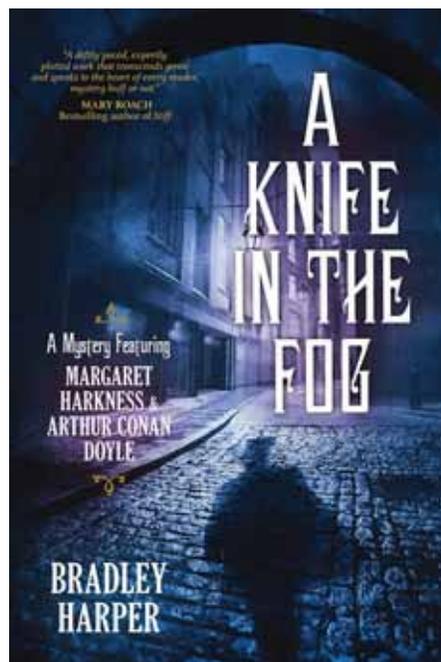
This is the author's first novel and it is a fine beginning. The chapters are short and informative. There are plenty of surprises. The time and place are effectively recreated. The characters are well developed. Besides being a model for Holmes, Bell is a delight in his own right. Harkness embodies the new woman and enlarges Doyle's understanding of many aspects of which he was unaware. Although Doyle tends to play Watson, he offers significant insights at crucial moments. Hopefully, these three will meet again to solve some more mysteries even if they are not as spectacular as the Ripper case.

MYCROFT AND SHERLOCK by Kareen Abdul-Jabbar and Anna Waterhouse (Titan Books, 2018). **Rating: B** This is the second novel in the series about the young Mycroft Holmes. As before, the writing is skillful and smooth with interesting characters. Mycroft is back in London. His friend Cyrus Douglas has set up a home to help orphan boys – a dream of his to create a tribute to his dead son. With help from Mycroft, it seems to be doing well.

Mycroft thinks it would benefit Sherlock to work at the home. In the first novel, Sherlock was glimpsed, but not central to the story as he is in this book. At eighteen years of age, Sherlock has some of the same skills as Mycroft, who sees his younger brother immature and in need of mentoring.

Since the original Holmes stories were written over a span of forty years, the image of Sherlock that emerges from them is complex. For many Sherlockians, this version of Sherlock may seem unconvincingly unformed. There is an arrogance in this Sherlock that limits his abilities as a sleuth. His attitude towards others is not that which will enable him to blend into other roles which he does so effectively in the Canon.

The authors have created a complex



character in Mycroft who is recovering from the death of his first love in the first book and considering his future. Douglas is also interesting, maneuvering as a successful black man in Victorian England. As for Sherlock, the authors seem to have taken their cue from *A Study in Scarlet* and projected the image Watson presents backward to show how much Sherlock improved under Mycroft's tutelage.

The plot about a drug ring also seems to suggest a possible explanation for Sherlock's use of drugs later in life. Otherwise, it is not as engaging as the mystery in the first novel. Since there is relatively little about Mycroft in the Canon, his character in this series is believable. Watching him transform into whom he becomes in the Canonical tales is absorbing. However, the image of Sherlock is not that effective in this reader's opinion. It will be interesting to see how Sherlock and the other characters develop in future novels in the series.

WILD JUSTICE by Priscilla Royal (Poisoned Pen Press, 2018). **Rating: A** On the surface medieval mysteries present a challenge to the author and the reader, particularly when set in a religious order. That wasn't a problem for Ellis Peters and her Cadfael mysteries, but the setting limits the number and type of suspects as well as the nature of the crimes. This at least was my thought when I started reading **WILD JUSTICE**. Before I knew it, however, I was engaged in the story.

This is the first of the author's fourteen medieval mysteries that I have read so I had to glean the backgrounds of the major characters from the references made in the text. Prioress Eleanor and her two faithful assistants, Brother

Thomas and Sister Anne, are on a mission to Mynchen Buckland Priory of the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem. Much to Eleanor's surprise there have been changes at the Order due to a murder supposedly committed by the former Prioress. When Eleanor is finally admitted to see the new Prioress, she discovers some disturbing facts that arouse her curiosity. This is intensified when she meets the accused woman who has neither pleaded guilt or innocence. However, after reading a message from Prioress Eleanor's brother, the accused woman asks Eleanor to prove her innocence.

Clearly, not welcomed by the new Prioress, Eleanor fakes an injury to prolong her stay. The new Prioress who supervises the nuns and the Commander who supervises the monks are sister and brother and they make sure that the visitors are closely monitored so that they cannot investigate as their reputation indicates they are likely to do. Under these circumstances, the suspense is generated around how they will be able to communicate.

Even with the limited number of characters, the culprit is a surprise. The third person narrative switches perspectives throughout the story and includes those of the suspects as well as the sleuths. This is a skillfully written book. Even the author's historical notes at the end of the book are worthy reading. Time to revise one's misconceptions about medieval mysteries in a religious setting.

THE BUTTERFLY CONSPIRACY by Vivian Conroy (Crooked Lane, 2018). **Rating: B** This is the first in a series by an author who has written three other series. Merula Merriweather was sent to her mother's sister's home

when she was a baby. The sister, Lady Emma DeVeeere and her husband, Rupert took her in, assuming that her mother and her husband had died or at least this was the story they told. Now as a young lady, Merula is a companion to her cousin Julia.

Merula is not a typical Victorian young lady. She is much more interested in science than she in young men. Since this was not a proper pursuit for a young woman, her uncle took the credit for her work. She has developed a rare butterfly and she and her uncle are going to a Royal Zoological Society meeting to exhibit this rare specimen. As Lord Raven Royston, whom her uncle dislikes, expresses disbelief that the butterfly is real, Merula releases it at the meeting. When the butterfly lands on the guest of honor Lady Sophia's arm. Merula and the rest of the company are startled when the lady collapses and dies. Merula's uncle Rupert is accused of the murder by butterfly which the group tramples to death before it can infect anyone else. Lord Royston whisks Merula away so that the police will not arrest her with her uncle.

This is the most questionable aspect of the story. Why would Merula go with him? This is far more ruinous of her reputation than raising butterflies. Staying with Royston, his scientific friend Galileo and Royston's man servant, Bowsprit seems unusual for even a young, naïve, scientifically inclined lady of the period. Once the reader adapts "a willing suspension of disbelief," the efforts of the three honorable men and Merula to investigate the mystery move along in a relatively believable fashion.

There is an obvious suspect whom the experienced reader knows to disregard. Not surprisingly it is Merula who eventually solves the mystery. Having saved the reputation of both Uncle Rupert and the butterfly, Merula's unusual adventure with the three gentlemen is forgiven and the Uncle changes his opinion of Lord Royston, making further detecting adventures for Merula and the Lord possible.

This is the first book in the series. The characters are likeable and once the relationship between the two has been accepted by the family and society, it is



worth giving the team another try since there is the promise that the secrets in the family lives of both Merula and Lord Royston will be uncovered.

DEATH OF AN UNSUNG HERO by Tessa Arlen (Minotaur Books, 2018).

Rating: A- This is the fourth book in the series about the sleuthing adventures of Lady Montfort and her housekeeper, Mrs. Jackson. All the books begin with "Death" in their title. They are set in the early twentieth century.

In this book, it is 1916 and Clementine, Lady Montfort has persuaded her husband the Earl of Montfort to convert Haversham Hall, the dower house on the estate, into a hospital for wounded soldiers suffering from shell shock. In England large estates had dower houses for the widow of the owner when the official residence passed to the next generation. Shell shock was the designation at that time for those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

For the time being Mrs. Jackson is overseeing the hospital which is implementing a treatment which was advanced for the time. The Haversham Hall Hospital is also supervised by Major Andrews who has the men painting, working on nearby farms and gardens and talking with him. This disturbs the Montforts' neighbor Sir Winchell Meacham who has lost two sons in the war. Like many, he thinks the men were cowards who should have been sent back into action without being coddled.

Complicating matters for the estate and the community re the Woman's Land Army, helping the farmers by taking over the farming roles of the young men who were off at war. The War Office is scheduled to review the hospital shortly to reauthorize its continuation. Unfortunately, a patient is found murdered. Further complicating matters is that the deceased's brother is scheduled for a visit the day that the young man is found.

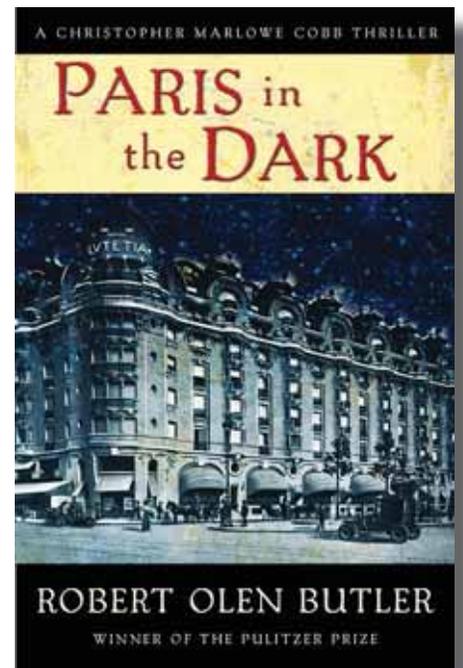
The third person narrative alternates between Lady Montfort and Mrs. Jackson as they try to find a solution to the crime before the War Office visit. The local police are more of a hindrance than a help. When a second patient is killed, the team intensify their efforts.

Although the astute mystery reader will solve the crime earlier than the detecting team does, the historical elements of the story maintain the reader's interest as do the personalities of the two women. The author recreates the time and the place with an assortment of characters who are all individualized so that a sense of the community emerges. The contrast between the two amateur detectives reflects class differences, but respect for each other and an equality of thinking skills.

Ted Hertel Review

THE BLACK ASCOT by Charles Todd (William Morrow, \$26.99, February 2019). **Rating: A-** It's January 1921. Alan Barrington, a suspect in a ten year old murder, has evaded capture but was believed spotted entering England and reported to Scotland Yard Inspector Ian Rutledge. The Yard's inability to capture Barrington after all those years has been an embarrassment, one Rutledge plans to set right. He delves deep into the original inquiry, laying bare long-held secrets that begin to rip apart relationships. Solving the case becomes a matter of survival for Rutledge, both professionally and personally when an attempt is made on his life. Along the way the shell-shocked Rutledge is helped not only by his friends and family but also by the ghost of Hamish, the man he killed in the Great War. Is Barrington really still alive or is Rutledge perhaps chasing the ghost of another dead man?

This is the twenty-first novel in the excellent Ian Rutledge series. Charles Todd, a mother and son writing team, have once again captured post World War I England right down to its tea and crumpets. The reader is immersed in history, from the Black Ascot of the title (though I would have loved to have seen more of this 1910 royal horse race honoring the late King Edward VII) through the horrifying effects the War had on everyone, whether they served in it or lived through it at home. The plot of the novel appears to be rather straightforward, but not everything (or everyone) is what it seems. Rutledge's



frustrations grow and he runs into one dead end after another, as he is stonewalled time and again. Ultimately he finds that he must take a leave from the Yard to finally put everything together.

But the driving force of the novels has been the relationships between Rutledge and those around him and – in the case of Hamish – within him. These are deeply personal stories of the struggle of a nation back to normalcy after years of brutality. Yet nearly every day Rutledge faces violence. All he can do to retain his sanity is to bring order out of that chaos, to bring justice to a little corner of the war-shattered world. He is fortunate to have those relationships to strengthen him. And we, as readers, are fortunate to have him to do that.

Larry Gandle Review

PARIS IN THE DARK by Robert Olen Butler (Mysterious Press, \$26.00). **Rating: B-** In the autumn of 1915, Chris Cob, a Chicago newspaper reporter is in Paris to report on the war which is raging in Europe. The United States has not yet entered the war. He is recruited to be a secret agent for the United States Government. His assignment is to infiltrate the local German community (given that he speaks German), locate an individual suspected of random

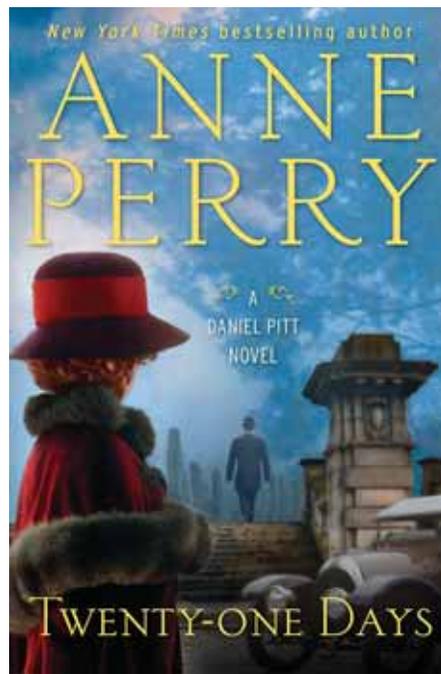
bombings throughout the city and to kill that individual. There are a number of twists along the way with, of course, fatal results.

I read this book because it was recommended by a very nice owner of an independent bookstore. The book is merely okay. The main characters are adequately conveyed but the minor characters are superficial. What is good about this book is the locale. The descriptions of Paris during WWI are very detailed and realistic. Obviously, a lot of research went into this book. However, the story is weak and not really compelling in spite of its brief length.

Norma Dancis Reviews

TWENTY-ONE DAYS by Anne Perry (Ballantine, 2018, \$29.00). **Rating: A** 1910. Daniel Pitt, son of Sir Thomas Pitt, is now a junior barrister trying his first case. He is also seconded to Kittredge, a barrister who is defending Russell Graves, charged with the murder of his wife. Daniel dislikes the arrogant and nasty Graves but suspects he may be innocent. Graves is found guilty and sentenced to death, with only twenty-one days in the appeal period. As Daniel digs into the circumstances of the murder, he begins to realize that the motive may have come from Graves' biography in progress. That manuscript slurs Daniel's aunt and would ruin his father's career as head of Special Branch, as well as destroy public confidence in the Special Branch.

Daniel works desperately to save the despicable Graves, his father's career, and the truth. The book is the first in a series transferring interest from Thomas and Charlotte Pitt to their son. Unlike the books focusing on his father, Daniel's story involves trial tactics and the newest police techniques. Daniel's style, thoughts and techniques are contrasted with those of Kittredge, who deeply venerates the law. Daniel, on the other hand, wants both to win and to serve individuals. The conflict between the two lawyers and between Daniel's professional and personal interests are central. They ratchet up the time-pressed search for the truth about Graves to a painful personal dilemma.



Perry skillfully pours on the tension. The solution is unexpected but believable.

The characters introduced suggest that this beginning of a new series has a solid foundation. This is one of the best books I have read all year. I look forward to the next entry.

A FORGOTTEN PLACE by Charles Todd (William Morrow, 2018, \$27.99). **Rating: B-** 1918. World War I is over. Bess Crawford is still nursing the wounded soldiers, although back in Britain. When given a ten day leave, she decides to check first on a group of Welshmen amputees to discover their success in adjusting to civilian life. She discovers that almost all but the officer, Captain Hugh Williams, had committed suicide.

Williams is now living with his sister-in-law, Rachel, a war widow. When Bess visits, she finds herself marooned in a completely isolated Welsh village. Men washed up by the sea are buried in the dead of night, and secrets abound. Bess realizes that for some reason, she is not being allowed to leave. Somehow, she knows too much, even though she's not sure what it is. She tries not to put at risk Captain Williams and Rachel, her only allies, as she searches for answers and a way to escape.

The final Author's Note engagingly explains the idea giving rise to the book. Unfortunately, the idea is better than the realization. Menace builds intellectually

but not viscerally, the unfolding of the plot only fitfully convinces, and the action moves slowly. Todd's writing skill and interesting characters rescue the book from mediocrity. However, this is one of the weakest books in the series. Perhaps Todd needed the immediacy of the war to add urgency to the plot.

THE PRISONER IS THE CASTLE by Susan Elia MacNeal (Bantam, 2018, \$26.00). **Unrated** 1943 or 1944. Just back from a dangerous mission, Maggie Hope, British spy, finds herself a prisoner in a remote Scottish castle. For some unknown reason, she and another 10 former agents are being kept on an island. Their only access to the outside world is a shortwave radio tuned directly to an overseer and a rare boat delivering supplies. Besides the prisoners, the island contains just a family of three locals who act as cook and caretakers.

One of the other prisoners finds a copy of Agatha Christie's **AND THEN THERE WERE NONE** at about the same time as a new prisoner arrives. Suddenly, the inmates begin to die, one by one, as in the book. Can Maggie figure out the killer before she becomes a victim?

This book was impossible to rate due to my deeply divided response. I had liked each previous book in the series. The book jacket is full of gushing praise from respected authors. I agree that MacNeal writes richly and vividly creates the setting and atmosphere of distrust. She plots cunningly and ratchets up the terror. However, I found the book a failure on two counts. A minor problem was difficulty telling some of the characters apart. Fatal, however, was finding the basic premise and even beyond that, the reason for Maggie's presence, ridiculous and unbelievable. I read with a curled lip, unmoved. If you are a fan of Maggie Hope and can accept the setup, you will enjoy this book. Otherwise, read anything else in the series or wait for the next book.

WHY KILL THE INNOCENT by C. S. Harris (Berkley, 2018, \$26.00), **Rating: B+** 1814 The body of a beautiful young musician, Jane Ambrose, is found in the snow. Jane had taught piano both to the Prince Regent's estranged wife and his nearly imprisoned daughter, Charlotte, heir presumptive to the throne. The Palace acts quickly to shut down the investigation, declaring the death an accident

despite the large head wound. Viscount Devlin and his wife, Hero, refuse to let this death go unpunished, even though Hero's powerful father is working against them.

This is the year of the Frost Fair, held on the frozen Thames River. His dogged and dangerous investigation contrasting with the festival atmosphere, Devlin finds strong evidence of the connection between Jane's death and political maneuvering concerning both Caroline and Charlotte.

The lack of women's and, secondarily, gays' rights are major themes in this book. The polemics sometimes threaten to overwhelm the story, and the plot is too prolonged far beyond what is necessary and almost beyond what is interesting. Nonetheless, it is clever, and Harris illuminates an almost forgotten aspect of British history. The sense of place and understanding the period are among the strengths of the series. Harris takes for granted the continuing characters and doesn't recap much of their personal history. If you are a new reader, you may miss the personal details known to previous fans. Even without that enrichment, the book is absorbing and well worth reading.

Mike Dillman Review

UNEASY LIES THE CROWN by Tasha Alexander (Minotaur, \$27.99). **Rating: A** The 13th Lady Emily novel. It switches in time between the 15th Century and 1901 (the present). There is a murder and the victim is posed in the manor of a dead king.

When other murders follow, the victims posed in similar fashion, Lady Emily sets out to determine who is the murderer. The investigation takes Emily to all parts of London and includes a visit to a bordello and encounters with the King's Boy gang.

The 15th Century story is about the Battle of Agincourt. William Hargrave goes with the King to the battle and his recent wife Cecily is left behind. This part of the story goes into what is happening to Cecily and William individually. At the end of the book the two time periods are tied together.

A very enjoyable story as are all of Tasha Alexander's work.

Experts' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2018

Oline Cogdill Nationally Syndicated Mystery Reviewer

- NOVEMBER ROAD** by Lou Berney
IF I DIE TONIGHT by Alison Gaylin
GIVE ME YOUR HAND
 by Megan Abbott
DARK SACRED NIGHT
 by Michael Connelly
JAR OF HEARTS by Jennifer Hillier
SUNBURN by Laura Lippman
THE WIFE by Alafair Burke
THE LONELY WITNESS
 by William Boyle
SAFE HOUSES by Dan Fesperman
DEATH OF A RAINMAKER
 by Laurie Loewenstein
LULLABY ROAD by James Anderson
LEAVE NO TRACE by Mindy Mejia
THE DISAPPEARING by Lori Roy
THE THREE BETHS by Jeff Abbott
RIVER BODIES by Karen Katchur
UNDER A DARK SKY
 by Lori Rader-Day
CAGED by Ellison Cooper
DODGING AND BURNING
 by John Copenhaver
SWEET LITTLE LIES by Caz Frear
LAST GIRL GONE by J. G. Hetherington
THE OTHER WOMAN
 by Sandie Jones
THE OTHER SIDE OF EVERYTHING
 by Lauren Doyle Owens
WAYS TO HIDE IN WINTER
 by Sarah St. Vincent
THE CHALK MAN by C. J. Tudor
THE REAL LOLITA by Sarah Weinman
FLORIDA HAPPENS (short stories),
 edited by Greg Herren

Otto Penzler's Top Ten

- THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW**
 by A. J. Finn
DARK SACRED NIGHT
 by Michael Connelly

- GIVE ME YOUR HAND**
 by Megan Abbott
THE HUSH by John Hart
THE MAN WHO CAME UPTOWN
 by George Pelecanos
**CLASSIC AMERICAN CRIME
 NOVELS OF THE 1920s**
 edited by Leslie S. Klinger
ALL THE BEAUTIFUL LIES
 by Peter Swanson
THE LIBRARY BOOK by Susan Orlean
LAST FERRY HOME
 by Kent Harrington
THE LONELY WITNESS
 by William Boyle

Marilyn Stasio New York Times Best Mysteries 2018

- IN A GALWAY SILENCE** by Ken Bruen
WRECKED by Joe Ide
HOLY GHOST by John Sandford
DARK TIDE RISING by Anne Perry
SHELL GAME by Sara Paretsky
NEWCOMER by Keigo Higashino
PAST TENSE by Lee Child
THE MAN WHO CAME UPTOWN
 by George Pelecanos
WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING
 by Delia Owens
ROBICHEAUX by James Lee Burke
THE BOMB MAKER by Thomas Perry
THE GATEKEEPER by Charles Todd
DOWN THE RIVER UNTO THE SEA
 by Walker Mosley
**THE TEMPTATION OF
 FORGIVENESS** by Donna Leon
THE CUTTING EDGE
 by Jeffery Deaver
HOW IT HAPPENED
 by Michael Koryta
THE WOMAN IN THE WOODS
 by John Connolly
BEARSKIN by James A. McLaughlin

Publications' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2018

Library Journal

Best Crime Fiction 2018

THE NIGHT VISITOR by Lucy Atkins
 NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney
 BROKEN PLACES by Tracy Clark
 A DEATH OF NO IMPORTANCE
 by Mariah Fredericks
 THE WITCH ELM by Tana French
 SUNBURN by Laura Lippman
 DEATH OF A RAINMAKER
 by Laurie Loewenstein
 A NECESSARY EVIL
 by Abir Mukherjee
 CULT by Fuminori Nakamura
 AN AEGEAN APRIL by Jeffrey Siger

Kirkus Best Mysteries and Thrillers 2018

THE STRANGER GAME
 by Peter Gadol
 THE MYSTERY OF THREE
 QUARTERS by Sophie Hannah
 NEWCOMER by Keigo Higashino
 HOW IT HAPPENED
 by Michael Koryta
 SUNBURN by Laura Lippman
 THE PERFECT MOTHER
 by Aimee Molloy
 CLOSER THAN YOU KNOW
 by Brad Parks
 KINGDOM OF THE BLIND
 by Louise Penny
 RIP CREW by Sebastian Rotella
 THE OTHER WOMAN by Daniel Silva
 MISS BLAINE'S PREFECT AND THE
 GOLDEN SAMOVAR by Olga Wojtas
 EIGHTEEN BELOW
 by Stefan Ahnhem
 SAFE HOUSES by Dan Fesperman

Booklist (Bill Ott) Best

Crime Novels 2018

DOWN THE RIVER UNTO THE SEA
 by Walter Mosley
 HELLBENT by Gregg Hurwitz
 LET ME LIE by Clare Mackintosh
 SUNBURN by Laura Lippman
 THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW
 by A. J. Finn
 ANATOMY OF A SCANDAL
 by Sarah Vaughan
 NEED TO KNOW by Karen Cleveland
 OUR LITTLE SECRET by Roz Nay
 SIRENS by Joseph Knox
 TANGERINE by Christine Mangan
 WEEPING WATERS by Karin Brynard

Publishers Weekly Best Mysteries of 2018

Anthony Horowitz, THE WORD IS
 MURDER
 Sujata Massey, THE WIDOWS OF
 MALABAR HILL
 Eliot Pattison, SAVAGE LIBERTY
 Emma Viskic, RESURRECTION BAY
 Lea Carpenter, RED, WHITE, BLUE
 Louise Candlish, OUR HOUSE
 Liane Moriarty, NINE PERFECT
 STRANGERS
 George Pelecanos, THE MAN WHO
 CAME UPTOWN
 Frederick Forsyth, THE FOX
 Elsa Hart, CITY OF INK
 Takemaru Abiko, THE 8 MANSION
 MURDERS
 Derek B. Miller, AMERICAN BY DAY

The 10 Best Thrillers and Mysteries of 2018

Washington Post

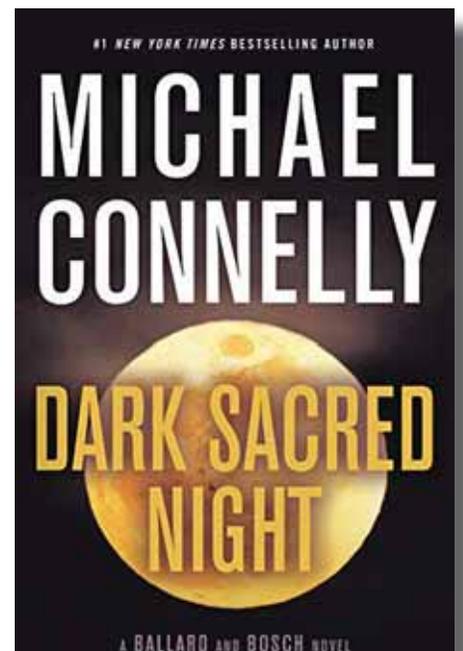
DARK SACRED NIGHT

by Michael Connelly
 THE DEATH OF MRS. WESTAWAY
 by Ruth Ware
 THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 by Chris Bohjalian
 THE FOX by Frederick Forsyth
 GIVE ME YOUR HAND
 by Megan Abbott
 THE INFINITE BLACKTOP
 by Sara Gran
 OUR HOUSE by Louise Candlish
 THE RECKONING by John Grisham
 SUNBURN by Laura Lippman
 THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW
 by A. J. Finn

Best Mysteries of 2018

The Seattle Times

WILD FIRE by Ann Cleeves
 DARK SACRED NIGHT
 by Michael Connelly
 DON'T EAT ME by Colin Cotterill
 THE WITCH ELM by Tana French
 Y IS YESTERDAY by Sue Grafton
 THE FERAL DETECTIVE
 by Jonathan Lethem
 WINTER SISTERS by Robin Olivera
 KINGDOM OF THE BLIND
 by Louise Penny
 FIREFLY by Henry Porter
 THE PRICE YOU PAY
 by Aiden Truhen
 THE SEVEN DEATHS OF EVELYN
 HARDCASTLE by Stuart Turton



Websites' Lists

Best Mysteries of 2018

CrimeReads.com 20 Best Crime Novels 2018

THE DEATH OF MRS. WESTAWAY
by Ruth Ware

CULT by Fuminori Nakamura

THE FERAL DETECTIVE
by Jonathan Lethem

THE WITCH ELM by Tana French

JAR OF HEARTS by Jennifer Hillier

WRECKED by Joe Ide

THE NIGHT VISITOR by Lucy Atkins

BEARSKIN by James A. McLaughlin

HOLLYWOOD ENDING
by Kellye Garrett

LYING IN WAIT by Liz Nugent

SNAP by Belinda Bauer

SUNBURN by Laura Lippman

THE PERFECT NANNY
by Leila Slimani

GIVE ME YOUR HAND
by Megan Abbott

THE LONELY WITNESS
by William Boyle

THE WIFE by Alafair Burke

MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER
by Oyinkan Braithwaite

THE INFINITE BLACKTOP
by Sara Gran

OUR KIND OF CRUELTY
by Araminta Hall

NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney

NPR Best Mysteries & Thrillers 2018

THE WITCH ELM by Tana French

GREEKS BEARING GIFTS
by Philip Kerr

GRIST MILL ROAD
by Christopher J. Yates

THE PERFECT NANNY
by Leila Slimani

BITTER ORANGE by Claire Fuller

DEATH OF A RAINMAKER

by Laurie Loewenstein

TRANSCRIPTION by Kate Atkinson

RED WHITE BLUE by Lea Carpenter

MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER
by Oyinkan Braithwaite

GIVE ME YOUR HAND
by Megan Abbott

THE DEATH OF MRS. WESTAWAY
by Ruth Ware

THE CHALK MAN by C. J. Tudor

THE INFINITE BLACKTOP
by Sara Gran

THE WORD IS MURDER
by Anthony Horowitz

SOCIAL CREATURE
by Tara Isabella Burton

WHO IS VERA KELLY?
by Rosalie Knecht

THE CABIN AT THE END OF THE WORLD by Paul Tremblay

CITY OF ASH AND RED
by Hye-Young Pyun

THE HOLLOW OF FEAR
by Sherry Thomas

THE HELLFIRE CLUB by Jake Tapper

ONLY TO SLEEP by Lawrence Osborne

GoodReads Best Mysteries and Thrillers 2018

THE OUTSIDER by Stephen King

THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW
by A. J. Finn

LETHAL WHITE by Robert Galbraith

THE WIFE BETWEEN US
by Greer Hendricks & Sarah Dekkanen

THEN SHE WAS GONE by Lisa Jewell

THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING
by James Patterson & Bill Clinton

THE DEATH OF MRS. WESTAWAY
by Ruth Ware

THE WITCH ELM by Tana French

FORCE OF NATURE by Jane Harper

SOMETIMES I LIE by Alice Feeney

THE 7-1/2 DEATHS OF EVELYN

HARDCASTLE by Stuart Turton

SOMETHING IN THE WATER
by Catherine Steadman

THE CHALK MAN by C. J. Tudor

THE WIDOWS OF MALABAR HILL
by Sujata Massey

LEVERAGE IN DEATH by J. D. Robb

BRING ME BACK by B. A. Paris

THE BROKEN GIRLS
by Simone St. James

THE LAST TIME I LIED
by Riley Sager

JANE DOE by Victoria Helen Stone

WRECKED by Joe Ide

BookMarks' Best Reviewed Mystery, Crime, Thriller 2018

GIVE ME YOUR HAND
by Megan Abbott

THE WITCH ELM by Tana French

THE PERFECT NANNY
by Leila Slimani

NOVEMBER ROAD by Lou Berney

SUNBURN by Laura Lippman

TANGERINE by Christine Mangan

GREEKS BEARING GIFTS
by Philip Kerr

MY SISTER, THE SERIAL KILLER
by Oyinkan Braithwaite

SOCIAL CREATURE by Tara Isabella

Book Depository

LONDON RULES by Mick Herron

BEARSKIN by James A. McLaughlin

THE DEATH OF MRS WESTAWAY
by Ruth Ware

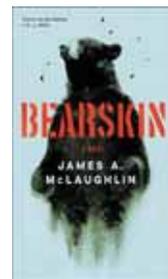
TOMBLAND by C. J. Sansom

THIRT3EN by Steve Cavanagh

THE CHALK MAN by C. J. Tudor

DARK SACRED NIGHT
by Michael Connelly

LETHAL WHITE
by Robert Galbraith (J.K. Rowling)



What's New in the U.K.



THE SCENT OF DEATH by Simon Beckett (Bantam Press, April, 2019). A call comes from an old associate: a body has been found, and she'd like Dr. David Hunter to take a look. The empty shell of St Jude's Hospital now stands awaiting demolition, its only visitors society's outcasts, addicts and dealers. A partially mummified corpse has been discovered in the hospital's cavernous loft, but not even Hunter can say how long it's been there. All he knows for sure is that it's the body of a young woman. And that she was pregnant. But the collapse of the loft floor reveals another of the hospital's secrets. A sealed-off chamber, still with beds inside. Some of them occupied..

THREE BULLETS by R. J. Ellory (Orion, March, 2019). It Was the Shot Heard Around the World. On 22nd November 1963, John F. Kennedy's presidential motorcade rode through Dealey Plaza. He and his wife Jackie greeted the crowds on a glorious Friday afternoon in Dallas, Texas. But What If it Missed? Mitch Newman is a photojournalist based out of Washington, D.C. His phone never rings. When it does, a voice he hasn't heard in years will tell him his former fiancée Jean has taken her

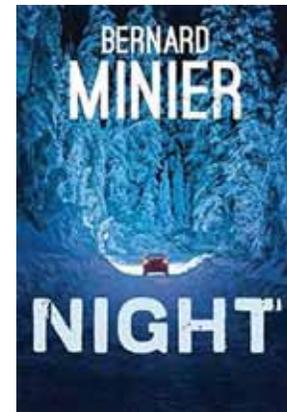
own life. When the Truth Is Bigger than All the Lies. Jean was an investigative reporter working the case of a lifetime. Somewhere in the shreds of her investigation is the truth behind her murder. Who Would Believe It? For Mitch, piecing together the clues will become a dangerous obsession: one that will lead him to the dark heart of his country - and into the crossfire of a conspiracy.

THE LONELY HOUR by Christopher Fowler (Doubleday, £16.99, March, 2019). On a rainy winter night outside a run-down nightclub in the wrong part of London, four strangers meet for the first time at 4:00am. A few weeks later the body of an Indian textile worker is found hanging upside down inside a willow tree on Hampstead Heath. The Peculiar Crimes Unit is called in to investigate. The victim was found surrounded by the paraphernalia of black magic, and so Arthur Bryant and John May set off to question experts in the field. But the case is not what it appears. When another victim seemingly commits suicide, it becomes clear that in the London night is a killer who knows what people fear most. And he always strikes at 4:00am.

ONE FALSE MOVE by Robert Goddard (Bantam Press, £18.99, February, 2019). How Joe Roberts does what he does is a mystery. He has a brain that seems able to outperform a computer. To a games company like Venstrom that promises big profits if his abilities can be properly exploited. So they send Nicole Nevinson to track him down and make him an offer too good to refuse. But Venstrom aren't the only people interested in Joe. His current boss, a shady businessman, is already making serious money out of Joe's talents and isn't going to let him go without a fight. And then there are other forces, with still darker

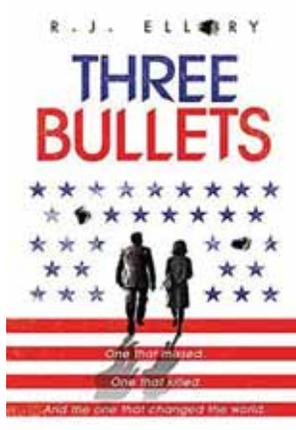
intentions, who have their own plans for him.

COLD BONES by David Mark (Mulholland, January, 2019). It's the coldest winter in Hull for years. When McAvoy is told by a concerned stranger that an elderly woman hasn't been seen for a few days, he goes to check on her - only to find her in the bath, encased in ice: the heating off; the windows open; the whole house frozen over. It could be a macabre accident, but McAvoy senses murder. Someone watched her die. As he starts to uncover the victim's story and her connections to a lost fishing trawler, his boss Trish is half a world away, investigating a mysterious death in Iceland. Hull and Iceland have traditionally been united by fishing - in this case, they are linked by a secret concealed for half a century, and a series of brutal killings that have never been connected. Until now.

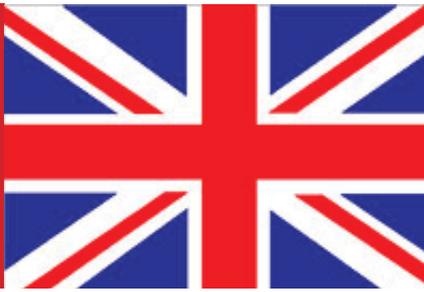


NIGHT by Bernard Minier (Mulholland, £14.99, February, 2019). A woman murdered in a church in Norway. A collection of photographs on an oil rig in the North Sea. A young boy in a picturesque Austrian village. The three clues that suggest a serial killer has returned . . .

Detective Kirsten Nigaard believes the signs point to none other than Julian Hirtmann, a serial murderer on the run. She turns to Toulouse cop Martin Servaz, who has a painful personal history with Hirtmann. Servaz hunted the elusive killer for many years until the trail went cold. Now they have a chance to bring him to justice at last. But soon the pair find themselves in a terrifying cat-and-mouse chase.



Reviews from the U.K.



Jeff Pople Reviews

MR CAMPION'S WAR by Mike Ripley (Severn House, £20.99). **Rating: A** This is the fifth book in Mike Ripley's marvellous continuance of the Albert Campion novels by Margery Allingham. Set in 1970 it finds Campion and his family and friends, and some odd foreigners, gathered together for his seventieth birthday party at the distinguished Dorchester Hotel in London. There is interest amongst his family and close friends over the attendance of some of the foreigners, about whom they know very little. In typical fashion, Campion distracts attention by recounting details of his wartime experiences in Vichy France, a topic which he has never talked about before.

In smooth fashion, the story switches between 1970, told in the third person, and 1942 and Campion's secret mission to Vichy France, told in the first person. It is an effective device with the suspense of the wartime mission carrying the 1970 storyline along at a good pace. As the details of Campion's mission gradually unfold, the relationships between the various guests at the party becomes clearer and there is a growing suspicion that there is more to the gathering than just a birthday celebration. In Ripley's capable hands the suspense mounts in both storylines and the book builds to a tense, reflective ending.

Central to the novel is Campion's mission to Marseille, which is essentially a clever and surprising spy story that provides some fresh twists to the traditional wartime thriller plot. It involves a scheme to rescue a Jewish accountant who has incriminating details about some senior Nazi figures and illicit bank accounts and also involves gangsters

and spies. It is an interesting concept and Ripley makes good use of the Vichy France setting to bring it alive.

As usual, Ripley's charming narrative style and dollops of wry humour keeps the reader happily engaged throughout the book. Campion's reflections are especially amusing, particularly those from 1970:

"The BBC, Campion was sure, was bound to be accepted sooner or later as a cultural institution, despite its diversification into television, a popular drug which really ought to be available only on prescription."

The pacing is good and there is a nice thoughtful feel to the story, as the characters reflect on their wartime experiences and the effect of the war on them and others. Ripley also seamlessly weaves in interesting historical detail to give some flesh to the two historical periods, and does a particularly good job of capturing the small details that make his recreation of 1970 convincing, and amusing.

In all, this is a very entertaining read and is highly recommended.

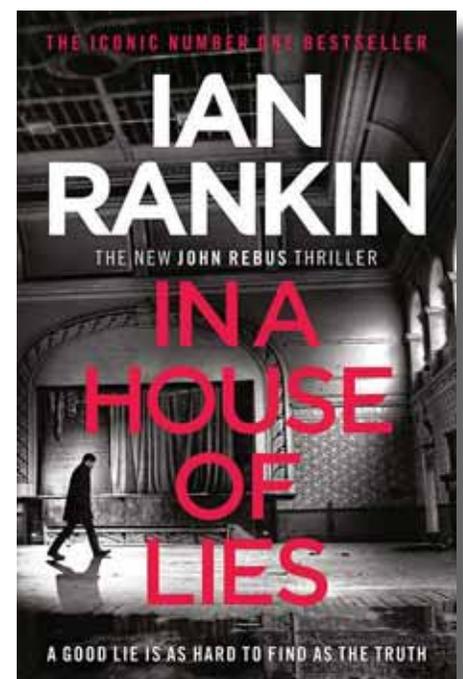
COLD, COLD HEART by A. J. Cross (Severn House, £20.99). **Rating: B+** This is the first of A. J. Cross's books that I have read, and I thought that was a good enjoyable police detective novel underpinned by some interesting forensic psychology.

Professor Kate Hanson, a forensic psychologist, and the team at the Unsolved Crime Unit (UCU) are given a controversial crime to solve. Ten years ago, David Lockman, a famous author, was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Della Harrington. After persistent efforts by his legal team, Lockman has now been set free and the original verdict declared unsafe. The members of the UCU have been tasked

with reviewing the original evidence and finding out who the murderer might be if it was not Lockman. They soon find problems with the original evidence and identify three new suspects, but Kate is uncertain that they are heading in the right direction.

This is a very ably plotted mystery novel that smoothly goes through its paces and keeps the reader happily engaged until the surprising outcome. The suspects are nicely sketched and interesting, but I thought that Kate and her colleagues were a little bland and found it difficult to differentiate between the two police detectives. I also thought that Kate's actions were a little unlikely at times. Nevertheless, the story was clever and enjoyable, and the author does a good job of keeping the reader guessing as to who the killer is. It would make a good television show.

IN A HOUSE OF LIES by Ian Rankin (Orion, £20). **Rating: A** A new Rankin novel is always a delight and his latest is a great example of a crime writer at the peak of their ability. John Rebus may be retired from the police force, but he has not lost his interest in Edinburgh's underbelly. When the body of a private detective is found in the boot of a car deep in the woods, he knows it is linked to an unsolved case he investigated ten years and that it is



likely to cast suspicion on him and others. The old case was marked by sloppy handling and possible corruption and Rebus knows that his actions were also not totally pure. The current crew looking into the case do not want Rebus too closely involved and there are a couple of crooked cops from the old days who are also anxious for Rebus not to stick his nose in or dig too deeply. Of course, in the background revitalised Edinburgh underworld figure Ger Cafferty is also using the discovery to further his hold on his corrupt business interests.

This well-crafted mystery contains the usual Rankin trademarks of musical references, sharp social commentary, gritty characters and a wry sense of dark humour. Rebus and Cafferty steal the limelight every time they are on the page, but Rankin's supporting cast of Siobhan Clarke and Malcolm Fox also continue to develop interestingly. In all, a terrific novel with a touch of melancholy to it. **THE GIRL WITHOUT SKIN** by Mads Peder Nordbo (Text, £10.99). **Rating: B+**

Fans of Nordic crime novels will welcome this latest addition to the genre, set on the coast of Greenland.

When a possible mummified Viking corpse is discovered on an isolated ice sheet in Greenland, Danish journalist Matthew Cave thinks that he has stumbled on the story of his career. His elation is short lived, however, when the corpse disappears and is replaced by the flayed body of the policeman who was guarding it. All the photographic evidence of the original mummified corpse is also stolen, and Cave is forced to look elsewhere for a story. Encouraged by his editor he starts investigating a series of murders from the 1970s, also involving flaying. The earlier murders are somehow linked to the current killing and as Cave investigates, he becomes targeted by the killer.

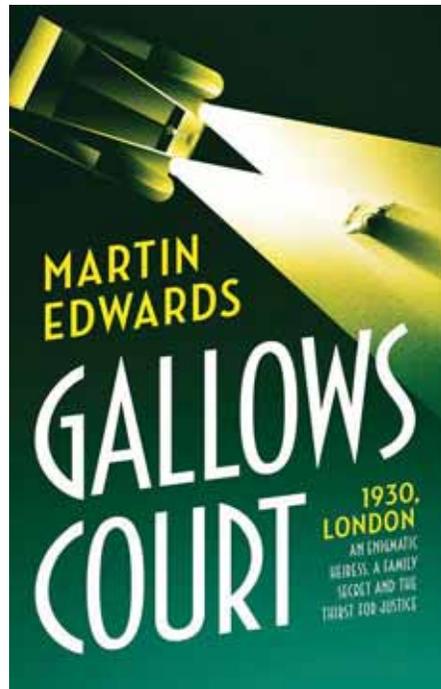
This intricate crime novel mixes a grisly plot with interesting insights into Greenland's history and culture and the strained relationship with Denmark. Nordbo handles the dual storylines set in the 1970s and the present and the book builds to a good conclusion. The

pace is a little uneven at times, but overall this is a good addition to the growing number of Arctic thrillers.

Ali Karim Review

GALLOWS COURT by Martin Edwards (Head of Zeus, £18.99).

I would not allow the 1930s London backdrop to fool you, for Martin Edwards' departure in his narrative fiction is far from a comforting historical novel portrayed by its cover. Gallows Court is a very dark thriller, in fact so dark, it is obsidian, with sharp edges that make one think deeply about those that surround us.



It starts with a terse diary entry from 1919, from a girl living beside the Irish Sea; reporting the loss of her parents, allegedly from the Spanish Influenza epidemic. Though, little is as it seems on the island amusingly named Gaunt, and placed between Ireland and the British mainland. Juliet Brentano's diary entry also names a girl; a woman who becomes the enigma at the centre of this dark thriller, Ms. Rachel Savernake. This name, this character I feel will become better known as the years pass, for as a character, she embodies the enigmatic nature of 'being', for it is often hard to

determine if she is a good person, or someone we should fear.

As Rachel Savernake's foil we have the young and ambitious reporter Jacob Flint who works for London's *The Clarion*. The young Jacob is soon promoted to head the crime-desk when Tom Betts is taken seriously ill after a car accident; one that is as unexpected as well as fortunate (or unfortunate), for Jacob Flint's future career in journalism.

There are a series of murders in London, terrible crimes as well as what appears to be crimes of karma, where some very bad people have met their maker. Mingled at the epicentre of the narrative is Rachel Savernake, the femme fatale, or is she? Daughter of a senior Judge, one who was feared as well as respected within a London establishment, until he became exiled on that island named Gaunt. Was it a mental breakdown, a suicide attempt or the pressures of heading the Gambit Club that was housed in Edwards' eponymously titled Gallows Court? Or was it related to his whispered moniker *The Hanging Judge*?

Now an enigmatic figure in the cloisters of the London establishment, Rachel is living off her late Father's inheritance, transforming herself into an amateur sleuth of sorts – one that is often found a little too close to her chosen quarry. She has also become a little troublesome for the forces of law, with her deductive abilities (are they real or disguised) solving crimes that the police failed to unravel.

Soon, Jacob Flint's trajectory brings him toward Rachel, like a Moth attracted to the luminosity of a candle flame, and so starts this extraordinarily dark journey one that is as violent as it is insightful into the darkest edges of human nature.

The power of this novel should come as no surprise as its author is a multiple award-winning writer who explores with rare insight into (what we term), the Golden Age of Crime Fiction. He's also Editor of the British Library's Crime Fiction Classics of that era, the Golden Age, as well as a senior official of The Detection Club and The Crime Writers Association.

Though his fiction writing has always been evocative, with those early Harry Devlin legal thrillers, the Lake District mysteries – little can prepare the reader for the dark revelations contained within **GALLOWS COURT**. I was delighted when I heard from Head of Zeus, that there is a follow-up novel currently being penned by Martin Edwards, and I am reliably informed that Ms Rachel Savernake may well feature again; because like many of us, we have good as well as bad parts to the facets that make us who we are, or more importantly who we portray to others in our fiction and in our reality.

GALLOWS COURT is a thought-provoking and violent crime-fiction narrative that explores [with a contemporary eye], the dark-side of human nature; but trapped within an evocatively realised historical thriller, like a black widow spider, encased in obsidian.

George Easter Reviews

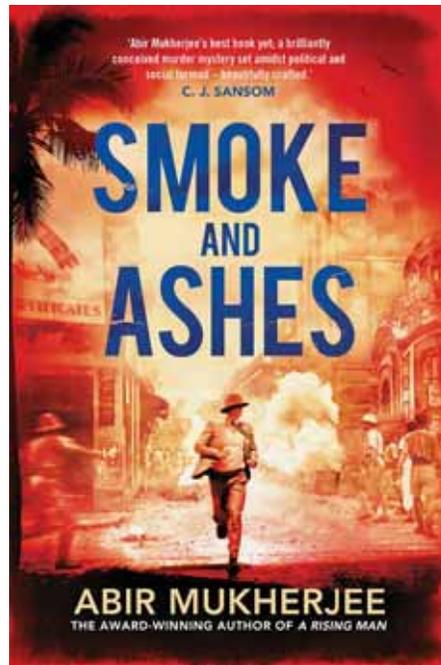
LAST MAN STANDING by Stephen Leather (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99, January, 2019). **Rating:** B+ SAS trooper Matt Standing was a secondary character in Stephen Leather's last Spider Shepherd thriller, **TALL ORDER**. Now they trade places, with Standing taking the lead in **LAST MAN STANDING** and Spider only making short cameo appearances.

Standing spent some time embedded with a U.S. Navy Seal team in Afghanistan and the opening chapter describes a harrowing attack that he survives thanks to the bravery of Navy Seal Bobby Ray Barnes. Because of injuries sustained in the attack, Bobby Ray was forced to leave the Navy and has been earning a living as a bodyguard to important/rich clients. But things go sideways when Bobby Ray's Russian oligarch client is murdered and he is suspect number one. He's on the run and calls his sister to tell her to get in touch with Miles Standing and ask him for help. Miles takes leave from his unit and flies to Los Angeles. When he meets up with the sister, they drive to the motel where Bobby Ray has

been staying only to find two dead FBI agents and no Bobby Ray. Then they are attacked.

With the help of friends such as Spider Shepherd, Standing goes in search of the truth. But he doesn't know whom he can trust, other than his instincts, which prove very reliable.

LAST MAN STANDING has just what I've come to expect from an action-packed Stephen Leather thriller: chases, danger at every turn, high body count and terrific pacing. If you like male action thrillers and haven't tried Stephen Leather, you're in for a treat.



SMOKE AND ASHES by Abir Mukherjee (HarvillSecker, £12.99). **Rating:** A The third book in this marvelous British Raj series starts out with a bang. Captain Sam Wyndham is still under the spell of opium addiction (he became addicted when he received strong pain-killing medicines to treat the serious injuries he suffered in the Great War) and getting his latest fix at a Calcutta opium den, when the police raid the place. He narrowly escapes, thus saving his career. But during his exodus he comes across a body that has had its eyes gouged out and two large stab wounds in its chest. His instincts as a homicide detective are to start

working the case, but that would bring into question why he is on the roof of an opium den in the middle of the night. So he leaves the body, but returns the next day to find that it is gone. He notices that a neighboring building houses a mortuary and he breaks into it and discovers the corpse in one of its holding drawers. But no one has reported the murder to the police. ???

Then a new homicide case comes in with the victim being a nurse at a nearby military hospital. When he inspects the body, he discovers that her eyes have been gouged out and that there are two prominent stab wounds in her chest. He's sure that the two murders are by the same perpetrator, but cannot reveal anything about the first one.

As a backdrop to his investigations, the city of Calcutta is experiencing a lot of social strife as a result of demonstrations and strikes by the populace, spurred on by the nationalistic, anti-British peaceful obstruction under Mahatma Ghandi's direction. The police are short-handed because many of its native Indian staff have quit in protest. So an impending royal visit by the Prince of Wales is seen by Wyndham and his superiors as a disaster waiting to happen.

Among other interesting subplots is his very on-again, off-again (mostly off) relationship with Anne, a beautiful mixed race Calcutta native whom he met in the first book. She seems to have acquired a rich American beau and Sam is not amused. Also of great interest is the dilemma that Sam's sidekick is experiencing. "Surrender-Not" Bannerjee is caught between loyalty to the police force (a job that he loves doing and is very good at) and loyalty to his family and friends who all support the removal of British rule from India.

Abir Mukherjee is in the highest echelons of historical mystery/thriller writers. I can't think of any such writer I would prefer to read. He is just so good at bringing a period of history alive and in such an interesting way.

The next in the series, **DEATH IN THE EAST** will be out in the U.K. in June, 2019.

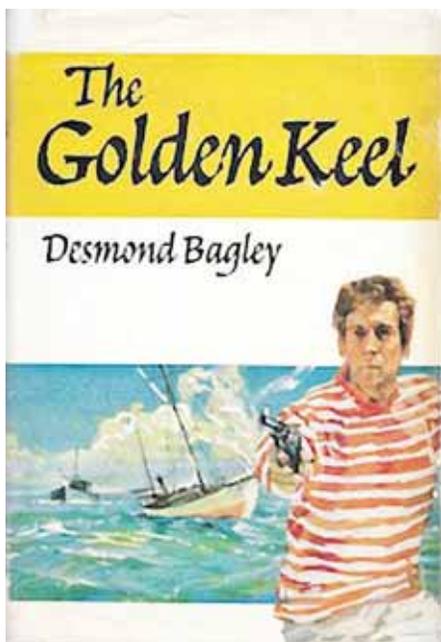
Getting Away With Murder

by Mike Ripley



Better Late than Never

There was a time, in the 1960s and '70s when the appearance of a new Desmond Bagley thriller in paperback prompted a run on the bookshops almost entirely fueled, in those pre-internet days, by word of mouth recommendation from fellow fans. I was, in my youth, one of the first in the queue when a new Bagley appeared in Fontana paperback and I still have the copy of his 1963 debut **THE GOLDEN KEEL** which I bought in 1965. Waiting up to two years for the paperback edition was an important consideration as hardbacks were between five and six times more expensive and this keen reader was still at school and without an income. Indeed, I had never actually seen a hardback copy of that initial Bagley thriller until last month when I treated myself, 53 years on, to a first edition as an early Christmas present.



It was an amazing (and genuine) coincidence that the day after my copy of

THE GOLDEN KEEL arrived, thanks to a victorious eBay auction, an advance proof copy of Desmond Bagley's *new thriller, DOMINO ISLAND* arrived courtesy of publishers HarperCollins.

And yes, you read that right. More than thirty-five years after the death of Desmond Bagley, a previously unpublished novel will finally see the light of day. It was a novel which started out as a 'classic whodunit' under the working title **BECAUSE SALTON DIED**, and its long journey to publication involved a fair amount of detective work by researcher Philip Eastwood who runs www.thebagleybrief.com, editor Michael Davies and publisher David Brawn, all of whom, needless to say, are Bagley fans.

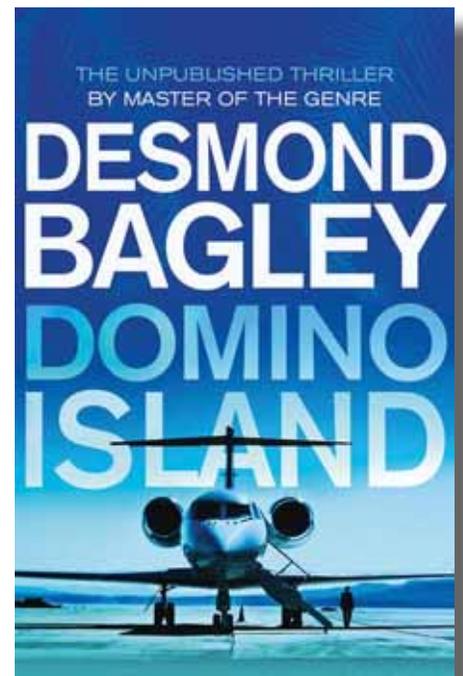
Philip Eastwood discovered the first draft manuscript of **BECAUSE SALTON DIED** among the Bagley papers deposited in the Howard Gotlieb Archive at Boston University in America and, on the title page, a plea from the author: 'if you can think of a better [title], please do'.

It was written in 1971 following a period of "writer's block" not helped by a brief, but salutary experience in Hollywood where he was invited to write a screenplay of one of his most popular thrillers, **RUNNING BLIND**. He was to say later that 'Everything you have read about Hollywood is true' and that it had been 'a poor experience'. Possibly to exorcise his Hollywood demons, Bagley opted to write a whodunit rather than one of his trademark adventure thrillers, but thankfully you cannot keep a good thriller-writer down and the basic mystery plot of how and why property magnate David Salton died on the formerly British Caribbean island of Campanilla develops into a vintage Bagley scenario of siege, jeopardy and

explosive action.

Michael Davies has done an excellent job as 'curator' of that initial first draft, with its themes of political corruption and a rich elite living on what should be an island paradise but is in fact floating on a sea of casino money attracting organised crime, incorporating Bagley's own notes for a second draft and providing a new (better) title.

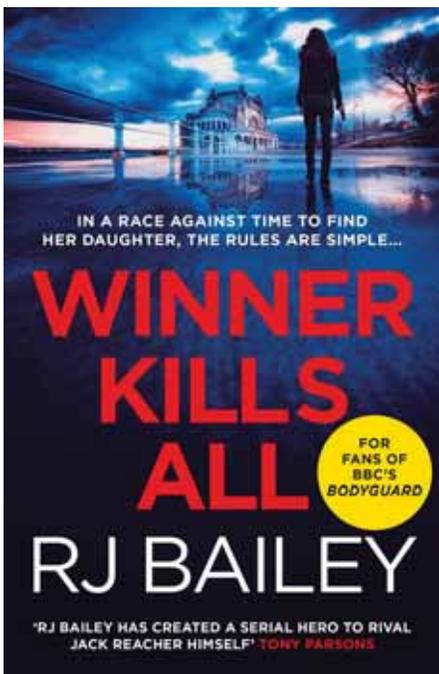
DOMINO ISLAND will be published in May and will not disappoint hard-core Bagley fans. It will bring new readers who appreciate straightforward, honest story-telling, to his backlist. And dare I say that there are some contemporary thriller writers who could benefit from learning how one of the masters did it half a century ago?



Resolutions Blown

I really don't know why I bother making New Year's Resolutions. I was firm in my resolve to turn a blind eye to any book which used the 'girl walking away' motif on its cover and almost as solid was my vow to ignore any new thriller promoted with the rhetorical question *How far would you go?* In addition, I am instinctively suspicious of any novel being compared to the over-rated television series *The Bodyguard*.

However, I cannot resist **WINNER**



KILLS ALL, out this month from Simon & Schuster, despite its female walking-away cover (albeit an armed female rather than a vulnerable young girl), the publisher's insistence that this is "for fans of BBC's *Bodyguard*" and the fact that the first sentence of the Prologue is *How far would you go to save a loved one?*

I have immediately abandoned the few principles I claimed to have on the basis that the authors behind the name R.J. Bailey are none other than husband-and-wife writing team Rob and Deb Ryan, which is usually a mark of quality, and because the novel mentions the wartime career of actor Sir Anthony Quayle, who was an SOE agent in Albania (something I am sure I have read in an authoritative 'reader's history' of British thrillers). The action of **WINNER KILLS ALL** moves rapidly from Albania to Bali and south-east Asia and features former Personal Protection Officer Sam Wylde, who kicks ass and employs an impressive selection of weaponry in her freelance work, which runs alongside a very personal quest for her missing daughter.

As an added bonus to the turbo-charged story, in case anyone doubts the premise of female personal protection officers, the authors supply a wonderful coda in the form of an article

they wrote for *The Times* on how they researched the subject and discovered, as is often the case, that the fact is stranger than the fiction. I particularly liked the story of the female protection officer assigned to former Prime Minister Tony Blair whose cover was blown when she left her Glock pistol in the lavatory of a Starbucks.

Crime Down Under

I have already predicted that the early months of 2019 will highlight crime-writing talent from Australia. First out of the blocks is **SCRUBLANDS** by Chris Hammer (Wildfire), with Jane Harper's much-anticipated third novel **THE LOST MAN** (Little Brown) coming in early February and Christian White's **THE NOWHERE CHILD** (HarperCollins) published in March, although an e-Book version has been available for some time.

SCRUBLANDS is a long (perhaps just a tad too long) debut novel by journo (as they say down under) Chris Hammer, whose hero is, naturally, a journo sent to the dying town of Riversend in New South Wales. The journo, Martin Scarsden, comes with his own experience of PTS syndrome following an assignment in the Gaza Strip and is trying to revive his career with a feature

on Riversend, the scene, a year ago, of a mass shooting in full public view by the local vicar! [Warning: Plot Spoiler Alert re: next two paragraphs]

Scarsden is not an attractive hero, given to considerable introspection about the ethics of journalism and prone to sulking when he cannot get a decent coffee, and quickly becomes part of the story rather than reporting it. Although only there for ten days, ostensibly to find out why the town priest shot five people and then committed 'suicide by cop', he quickly seduces one of the priest's lovers (there were others), rescues a young tearaway from a car crash, helps fight a bushfire and then a fire in the town itself, rescues a baby from the clutches of a psychopath, helps solve the rape and murder of two German back-packers and gets involved in a security service operation against organised crime.

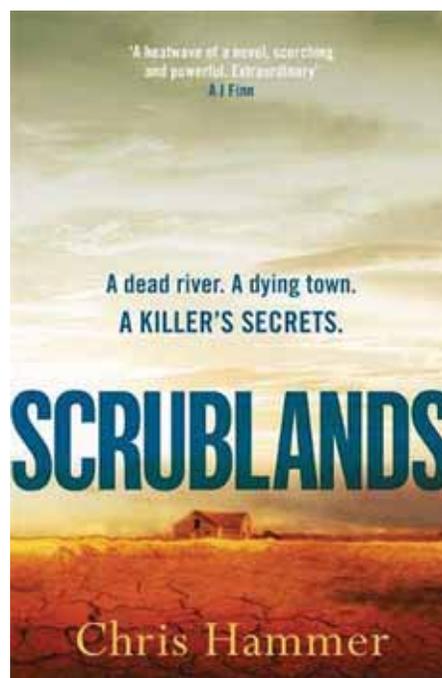
The town of Riversend, suffering from drought and economic depression is a grim place and 'dying on its feet' would not be an expression used lightly as the amount of dying thanks to murders (at least eight) and suicides (two, arguably three?) is considerable, plus there are underlying themes of blackmail, rape, paedophilia, wife-beating, war crimes, false identities and that old stand-by, cheating someone out of an inheritance.

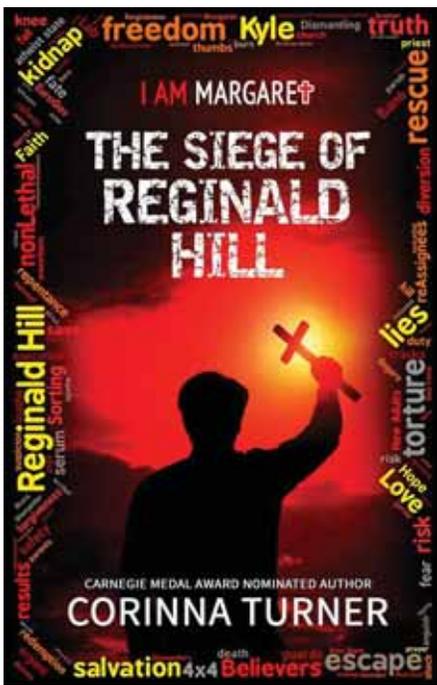
For a debut novel, Hammer has attempted to keep a lot of plot plates spinning but he does successfully tease out the solution to the initial mystery of why a gun-toting priest went on a shooting spree to the very end and provides a riveting read for anyone not planning a back-packing holiday in New South Wales.

All in the Title

Without doubt the book title which jumped out at me in 2018 was **THE SIEGE OF REGINALD HILL** by Corinna Turner, which I believe is a historical fantasy aimed at young adults published by Unseen Books.

I know nothing of the book other than I am sure the title would have amused my old friend Reg Hill and I





can envisage, had he been still with us, that it would have led to a frantic exchange of emails with suggestions for other titles such as **THE TAKING OF RENDELL 123**, **LAST SEEN KEATING** and **LEE CHILD 44**; so on, so forth. It's a game anyone can play but, as usual, there are no prizes.

Books in Prospect

My Boy Scouts' Diary for 2019 is now up and running, with key days already highlighted (i.e. the publication dates of my new novel and no less than five (5!) new paperback editions, which I may conceivably mention in the course of the year) and I have begun to flag up other important points in the publishing calendar.

April, the cruelest month in many ways, will see the publication of the last Bernie Gunther thriller **METROPOLIS** by the late Philip Kerr, a novel I have been anxiously awaiting since I heard – at Philip's funeral last April – that he had completed the manuscript shortly before his untimely death at the age of 62.

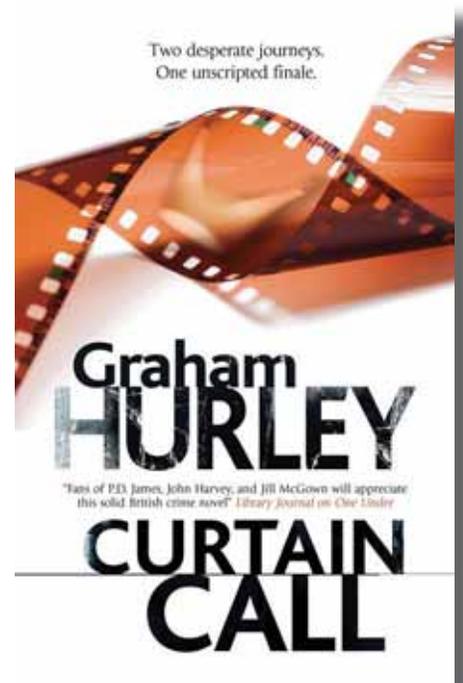
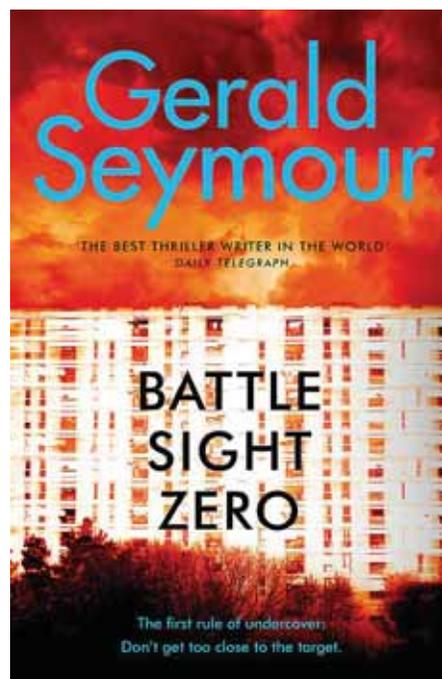
In May, two American heavyweights take centre stage. With his first novel in what must be 14 years, Thomas Harris will no doubt return to the international best seller lists, but as to the subject

matter or the title, I have no idea. Harris will be joined on the review pages by James Ellroy whose delayed (from last September) novel set in 1942 California, **THIS STORM**, will finally appear.

August will see a new Robert Harris novel, which may or may not be titled **THE SECOND SLEEP**, and I have set time aside in October for a new John le Carré thriller, **AGENT RUNNING IN THE FIELD**.

But more immediately, two January titles are taking precedence. Firstly, **BATTLE SIGHT ZERO**, which is, I believe, Gerald Seymour's 35th thriller in a 40-year career since he swapped fame as an ITN reporter covering the world's very hot spots to become a best-selling thriller writer.

Published by Hodder, **BATTLE SIGHT ZERO** follows the history of a particular Kalashnikov assault rifle, from its manufacture in Russia in 1957 to being smuggled into Britain in the 21st century where a terrorist cell plans to make deadly use of it. I am particularly looking forward to this one as it is bang-on up-to-date, the final chapters being set in January 2019, and the locations include Dewsbury in West Yorkshire which admittedly may have changed since I knew it half a century ago, but I do not recall it ever featuring in a thriller before.



Towards the end of January I am sure I will be enjoying **CURTAIN CALL** by Graham Hurley, published by Severn House, as I am a big fan of his recent thrillers set during WWII. **CURTAIN CALL** sounds as if it may be a departure (should that be *another* departure?) for the prolific Graham Hurley who has created a female protagonist (not for the first time) in the shape of Enora Andersson, an Anglo-French actress, who will act as an observer on the state of the British nation just as his much-admired Portsmouth detective Joe Faraday did a decade ago.

I have made myself a promise to read Graham's new novel as quickly as possible as I hear that the follow-up, **SIGHT UNSEEN**, is already written. I told you he was prolific.

Last Laugh

I was highly amused to learn that the most popular crime drama in Denmark is not one of their badly-lit, multi-strand Scandi-noirs, but dear old **Midsomer Murders** which has been slaughtering England's rural middle-class and straining the suspension bridge of disbelief of viewers since 1997. Shortly to embark on its 21st series, **Midsomer Murders** enjoys far greater viewing figures in Denmark than such home-grown products

as *The Killing* or *The Bridge*.

I wonder if that has been taken into consideration in negotiating trade deals post Brexit?

Bad News Year

2018 was a bad, sad year which saw the loss of Philip Kerr, Reg Gadney, Anthony Lejeune and Jessica Mann, and a memorial service for Colin Dexter. I considered most of them as good friends and respected them all.

It was also another year for the 'Girls' in that I spotted at least ten new crime novels with *Girl* in the title and I must certainly have missed (or ignored) many more.

And the use of the 'girl from behind' (please do not Google that) image for covers remains sadly ubiquitous despite my cries in the wilderness for the last two years or more....

Not a Thorny Problem

A new paperback imprint, Blackthorn, is to be launched on an unsuspecting crime fiction reading world in May 2019. A division of Canongate Publishing, Blackthorn has recently released its first catalogue, which can be viewed on line at <https://tinyurl.com/yco93kl2>

Among authors to feature in the first seven months are: David Hewson, Simon Brett, Caro Ramsay, Paul Doherty and Michael Jecks. Oh yes, and me, just in time for next Christmas.

Recent Books

Just when you were thinking that the Scandi-crime bubble may have burst, along comes another 'Swedish crime sensation' to brighten the long dark evenings with the tale of a missing girl and a Stockholm police detective who equates bouts of binge drinking to 'self-medication'.

FOR THE MISSING is a debut novel by Lina Bengtsson and is published here by Orion although it has already been a bestseller in Scandinavia and parts of Europe under the title **ANNA-BELLE** (the girl who goes missing on

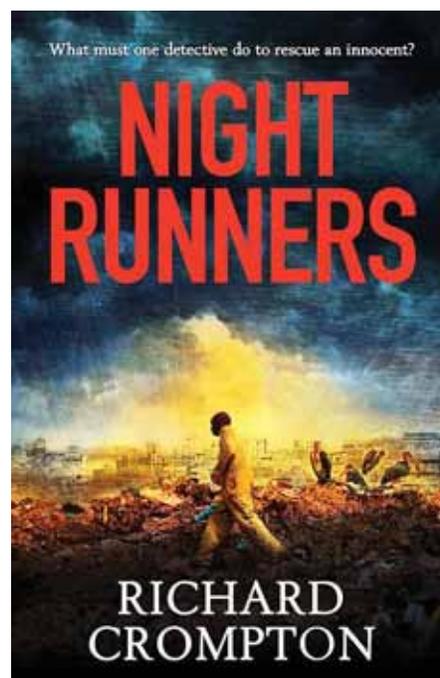
page one).

It is a well-paced thriller with an interesting female police detective called (remember the binge drinking) Charlie Lager and it is, as far as I can tell from a very sketchy knowledge of **OLD NORSE**, smoothly and inventively translated by Harvard academic Agnes Broomé.

For a complete change of scene, how about Kenya, specifically the slums of Nairobi where making a bonfire out of a passing vehicle is a social gathering?

NIGHT RUNNERS, published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, is the third novel by former BBC correspondent Richard Crompton to feature his Maasai policeman Detective Mollel. In **NIGHT RUNNERS** Mollel makes his entrance in dramatic fashion in the middle of a violent protection/extortion racket run by local gangs against the drivers of the *mutatu* mini-buses which provide much of the public transport in Nairobi (and don't have Route Numbers, but titles, such as Arsenal, God Knows and Beyonce).

Mollel is fascinating hero, pitted against crime, political corruption and tribal rivalries; the sights, smells and customs of Kenya are colourfully described, and the writing is brisk and controlled. If I have a qualm it is because I am very old and set in my



ways and it relates to the way dialogue is indicated by en-dashes rather than inverted commas. There was something of a craze for reporting speech (in crime fiction) this way some years ago; I even did a novel myself in this style in 2002. Whilst recommending **NIGHT RUNNERS** most heartily, I hope other crime writers do not follow Richard Crompton's example. I have only just got used to 'single' inverted commas replacing "doubles" as speech marks. I am not sure I would survive another seismic change in punctuation.

Pick of the Year

It's that time of year again, where we are afforded the luxury of looking back and deciding which books have given us the most pleasure this year, and though I find myself using the royal "we" I do, of course, mean purely myself.

John Lawton's **FRIENDS AND TRAITORS** (Grove Atlantic) was the best novel I bought this year (and I have the receipt to prove it). Surely there can be no higher praise. It really was a hypnotic guide through several decades of treachery within the British establishment, European politics and Lawton's fictional Troy family, a far from dysfunctional family of immigrants when it comes to adapting to British society. Lawton also manages to slip in a trademark reference to a favourite character borrowed from Margery Allingham.

Graham Hurley's **ESTOCADA** (Head of Zeus) was a compulsive, convoluted thriller set in the Europe of 1937-38 with a young *Luftwaffe* ace and a reluctant British spy pursue different paths to the realisation that war is inevitable. This is part of Hurley's outstanding 'Wars Within Wars' series, which really do set a benchmark for 20th-century historical thriller fiction.

Manda Scott's **A TREACHERY OF SPIES** (Bantam) is another excellent thriller with a WWII setting, or rather a wartime backstory, for the story begins with a gruesome case of murder in Orleans for French police detective Ines Picaut. Her investigation revolves around what happened in Occupied

France in the 1940s, when the Maquis, aided by Britain's Special Operations Executive, fought many enemies, some of them the occupying Germans. Terrifically exciting.

Peter Morfoot's **BAG OF BONES** (Titan) was the third outing for Captain Paul Darac, the jazz-loving Nice (as in France, not as in 'naughty but') policeman who has, without doubt, become my favourite foreign detective created by a Brit since the late Michael Dibdin gave us Aurelio Zen. Darac's adventures celebrate the smells, sounds, food and music of southern France, the plots are satisfyingly complex, the violence suitably shocking and the jazz is, of course, wonderful.

Jane Harper's **FORCE OF NATURE** (Little Brown) is a second novel which proves the author's debut – **THE DRY** – was no fluke. A team-building exercise in the unforgiving Australian outback goes horribly wrong when five women back-pack their way into the bush but only four come out. Atmospherically tense, claustrophobic and guaranteed to convince the casual tourist to stay on the highway and never get out of the 4 x 4.

Collector's Corner

I am not a book collector as such – I acquire a lot of books and keep the ones I like – and certainly not a 'completist' but I do have a soft spot for vintage paperbacks with interesting artwork covers and have been known to buy old editions of thrillers I already possess.

Although I have owned at least three different copies over the years, I simply could not resist buying Gavin Lyall's debut thriller **THE WRONG SIDE OF THE SKY** in what I believe was its first incarnation in paperback.

I had never seen this edition, published in 1963 by Hodder, two years after the original hardback, with a wonderful endorsement from the *Daily Express* emblazoned across the cover: "Best new thriller in Fleming-Ambler vein since Fleming and Ambler."

And most unusually for a paperback nowadays (though not fifty years ago),

there is a picture of the author on the back cover, in this case the young Gavin in full flying kit (he had served in RAF and worked as aviation correspondent for the *Sunday Times*).

Several of his early thrillers featured flying and pilots not averse to a bit of smuggling on the side; and one reviewer in *The Spectator* said he was a "jet-age author" who got "the same sort of romance out of beaten-up old Dakotas and their disillusioned pilots as steam-age Robert Louis Stevenson did from a schooner and its pirate crew."

Only available in electronic form for many years, I believe **THE WRONG SIDE OF THE SKY** is now back in paperback from the Bloomsbury Reader imprint, at a price more than double that I paid for my vintage edition, without a picture of the author and, in my not-so-humble opinion, with a cover which no one will get excited about in fifty years' time.

Self-Explanatory

Publisher Vintage has utilised not so much a Spoiler Alert as a prophetic statement to promote the reissue of Fletcher Knebel's 1965 thriller **NIGHT OF CAMP DAVID**, even though the very thought of an American President going of his trolley is surely venturing into the realm of science-fiction, isn't it? (*Please say it is...*)

Top Notch Revivals

At the height of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, a British army officer called Harry goes undercover in Belfast to unravel a conspiracy involving a Protestant paramilitary force and a Marxist splinter group of the IRA, Betrayal, deception, gun-running and assassination are the order of the day and Harry realises he has been set up as the ultimate fall-guy. Sound familiar? You're probably thinking of Gerald Seymour's 1975 trail-blazer **HARRY'S GAME** but in fact **IN CONNECTION WITH KILSHAW** by Peter Driscoll came out the year before, in 1974, and is now reissued as a Top Notch Thriller

and an eBook for the first time.

It really is a cracking thriller, which that leading Irish *noirista* Ken Bruen has described as: '*One of the great under-valued thrillers of the 70's, a wonderfully fast paced narrative that literally has you holding your breath. The passage of time demonstrates that great writing, great story never age. It is a brilliant edge of the seat novel.*'

Alongside **IN CONNECTION WITH KILSHAW**, Top Notch have also republished Peter Driscoll's breakthrough South African thriller, **THE WILBY CONSPIRACY**, which first appeared in 1973 and was quickly filmed starring Michael Caine and Sidney Poitier.

Peter Driscoll (1942-2005) emigrated to South Africa with his parents as a child. He became a journalist on the Rand Daily Mail but returned to London in 1968 to write fiction. **THE WILBY CONSPIRACY**, a classic chase-and-pursuit thriller, was his second novel and received accolades from novelists John Braine and Len Deighton and Eric Ambler called it '*The best chase story I have read for a long time.*'

The novel is notable for its opening scene, an escape from Robben Island, although relatively few in the northern hemisphere were aware of the notorious prison there (or its most famous prisoner) at the time. The cover photograph of the Top Notch edition, showing the road into the High Karoo followed by the fugitives in the novel, was taken by the best-selling South African crime-writer Deon Meyer.

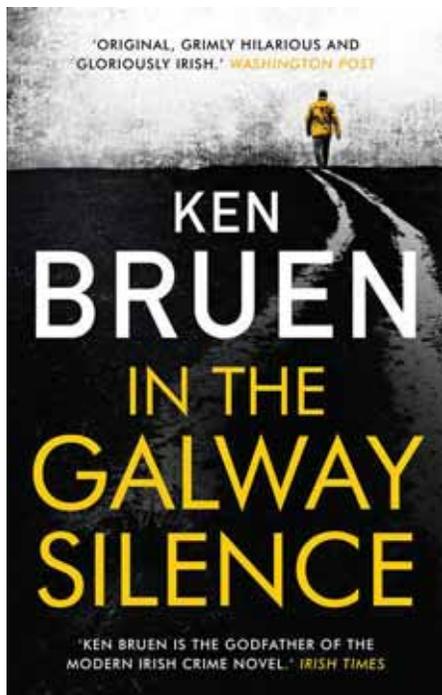
Dear Reader

I have been asked on numerous occasions over the last year when eBook editions of my last two Angel novels – **ANGEL'S SHARE** and **ANGELS UNAWARE** – were likely to appear, mostly (well, entirely) from a reader in Australia, herself an author and clearly a lady of excellent taste. When I was able to announce that electronic versions of the books had gone live (or whatever it is they do), my Australian Angel fan responded simply: *Oh frabjuous day!*

I may not have many readers, but ones like that I value.

Irish (and other) Eyes

Is the private eye novel making a comeback? Has it ever really gone away? Certainly there are some impressive examples around at the moment and leading the pack, as she has been since about 1982, is, of course, Sara Paretsky whose **SHELL GAME** [Hodder] came out last month, the nineteenth novel to feature her detective V. I. Warshawski, as played by the wonderful Kathleen Turner in a rather disappointing film.



Ken Bruen's Jack Taylor may not have been going quite so long, but he's certainly going strong in his latest, **IN THE GALWAY SILENCE** published this month by Head of Zeus, in which, as usual, murder and mayhem as only the Irish can do it, interrupt Jack's serious drinking time. (Breakfast tends to be coffee 'with a base of Jay').

Bruen has a unique voice in hard-boiled fiction, his prose is poetic, scatological and spare to the point of making Hemingway seem verbose and overweight. His hero Taylor is haunted by past failures and relationships, and he has just as much trouble with

the present. At times it as if the reader can hear the radio and television news programmes worming their way into Taylor's brain, fuelling his rage at a world going, if not mad, then certainly downhill.

And then there's Jack Taylor's relationship with organised religion which, in Ireland with a character like Taylor, is never going to be a comfortable one, especially as part of the plot revolves around a paedophile. But even in the grimmest territory, Bruen can turn a wonderful phrase, such as: *The road to hell is paved with well-intentioned nuns.*

To prove that the private eye novel is versatile and its tropes adaptable to virtually location, time period and culture, then I offer **SINS AS SCARLET** by Nicolás Obregón. For legal reasons I missed this when it appeared in hardback earlier this year, but the paperback is now published by Penguin.

Obregón was, I believe, born in Spain, lived in London then Japan and now resides in Los Angeles. He blends all his cosmopolitan experience into **SINS AS SCARLET**, which features his Japanese detective Kosuke Iwata now working as a private eye in Los Angeles, but having brought much of his Japanese mental baggage with him. A specialist in finding missing persons very much in the old school style (knocking on doors, asking questions, calling in favours from police contacts), the stakes are raised when Iwata begins to investigate the murder of a young transgender male.

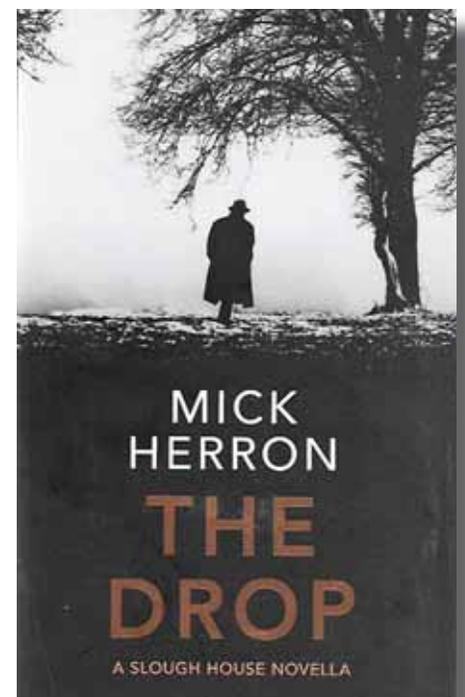
SINS AS SCARLET is intelligently, often delicately, written. Not many private eye novels use words such as 'mimesis' or 'repining' – at least not accurately – and there is a haunting underlying sense of Iwata being a stranger in a very strange land, as is highlighted by a poster of Marilyn Monroe bearing the legend: *Hollywood is a place where they'll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul.*

In Short

I rarely get to read novellas, perhaps there are just not many of them around,

so when two come along in rapid succession I sit up and take notice, especially when they are so good.

I mentioned Deon Meyer's **THE WOMAN IN THE BLUE COAT** last month and now this month comes **THE DROP** by Mick Herron, from John Murray. This is a real nugget of spy fiction, featuring many of Herron's ensemble 'Slough House' cast of misfits, back-stabbers, front-stabbers and washed-up spies. One very washed-up agent features prominently here, as does an old, retired spy who is convinced he has seen a 'drop' take place, but surely such antique tradecraft is no longer practised. Of course it is, and things



get really interesting when the recipient turns out to be a *triple* agent working for the German intelligence service (who are on our side, aren't they?).

With outstanding cheek, Herron has the German 'triple' about to be 'planted' in that repository of sensitive secrets: the Brexit Office!

A Happy and Prosperous 2019

(at least until Brexit) to all and sundry,

The Ripster.

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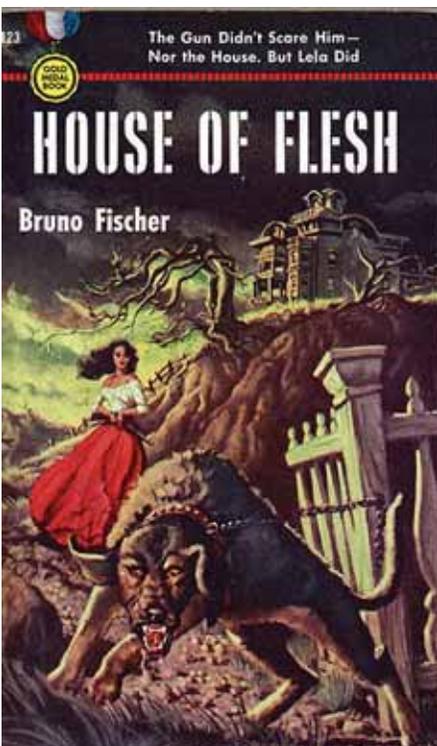
A PAPERBACK CONFIDENTIAL

PROFILE -- Bruno Fischer

by *Brian Ritt*

Bruno Fischer (also wrote as Russell Gray, Harrison Storm, Jason K. Storm). Born in Berlin, Germany in 1908; immigrated to the United States in 1913. Died in Mexico, 1992.

Bruno Fischer came of age during the 1930's, during the thriving era of the pulps. In particular, he made a name for himself writing stories for the "weird menace" pulps, using the pseudonym Russell Gray. These stories were brutal tales of women enduring gruesome acts of torture, often at the hands of mad scientists. Fischer's stories had titles such as "Fresh Fiancés for the Devil's Daughter," "Daughters of Lusting Torment," "Lovely Ladies for the Butcher," and "Girl's Enslaved in Glass"; they appeared in pulps such as *Dime Mystery Magazine*, *Terror Tales*, and *Sinister Stories*. Although many pulp magazines, due to



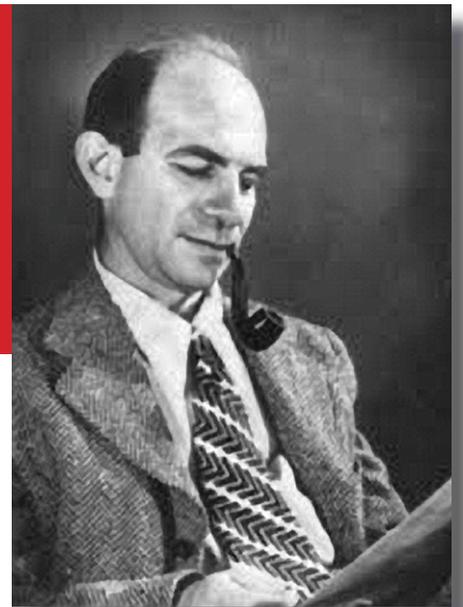
their over-the-top nature, are often viewed as campy by modern readers, the detailed descriptions of torture in the "weird menace" pulps can, even today, be unsettling...

Fischer graduated from the Rand School of Social Sciences, which was established by the American Socialist Party in 1906. He became a sports reporter for the Long Island *Daily Press* (1929-1931), then worked at the *Labor Voice* (1931-32), a socialist newsletter. He went on to edit the *Socialist Call* (1934-36), the official weekly for the Socialist Party.

Fischer published his first novel, **SO MUCH BLOOD**, in 1939. He found his biggest success during the 1950's, writing paperback originals—**HOUSE OF FLESH** (1950), a story about a man's encounter with a femme fatale and her brood of savage dogs, sold nearly two million copies. Another notable book is **SO WICKED MY LOVE** (1954), a story about a man who gets involved with a murderous sexpot. Fischer has described his most typical novels as being about "ordinary people in extraordinary situations."

Fischer wrote a series featuring Ben Helm, a private detective who works as a criminologist when he's not investigating. The Helm novels are: **THE DEAD MEN GRIN** (1945), **MORE DEATHS THAN ONE** (1947), **THE RESTLESS HANDS** (1949), **THE SILENT DUST** (1950) and **THE PAPER CIRCLE** (1951).

Fischer's life was far removed from the brutality of his fiction. Politically active, he held memberships in the Social Democrats and the Workmen's Circle (the Jewish socialist fraternity). He also corresponded with Dr. Hannah Arendt, the famous political philosopher,



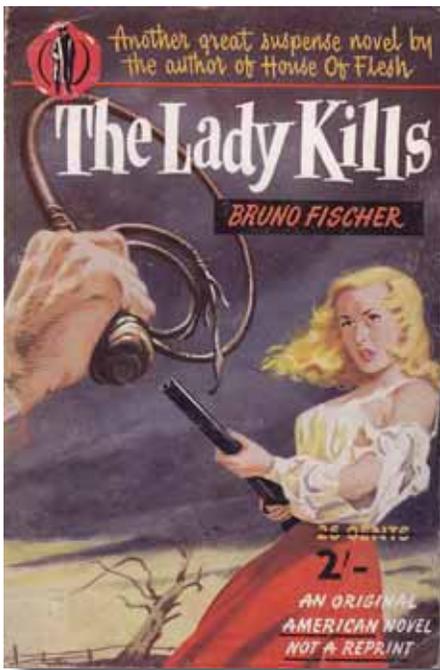
on various Jewish relief organizations. Fischer even ran as a Socialist candidate for the New York state senate in 1938. When not writing his own books, he served editorial stints at Macmillan's Collier Books (a paperback house) and Arco Publishing Company (a textbook house).

He spent his later years living at Camp Three Arrows, a socialist cooperative in Putnam County, New York.

Further Reading:

Ben Helm series (complete):

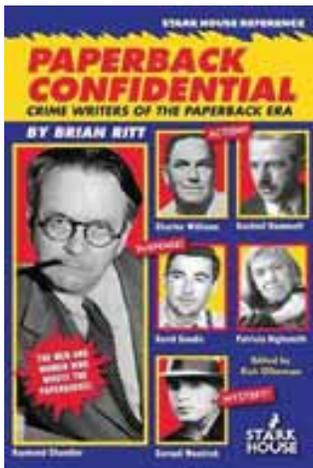
- THE DEAD MEN GRIN** (1945)
- MORE DEATHS THAN ONE** (1947)
- THE RESTLESS HANDS** (1949)
- THE SILENT DUST** (1950)
- THE PAPER CIRCLE** (1951, as **STRIPPED FOR MURDER**, 1953)
- THE HORNET'S NEST** (1944)
- QUOTH THE RAVEN** (1944, as **THE FINGERED MAN**, 1953)
- THE PIGSKIN BAG** (1946)
- KILL TO FIT** (1946)
- THE BLEEDING SCISSORS** (1948)
- HOUSE OF FLESH** (1950)
- FOOLS WALK IN** (1951)
- THE LADY KILLS** (1951)
- THE FAST BUCK** (1952)
- RUN FOR YOUR LIFE** (1953)
- SO WICKED MY LOVE** (1954)
- MURDER IN THE RAW** (1957)
- SECOND-HAND NUDE** (1959)
- THE GIRL BETWEEN** (1960)
- THE EVIL DAYS** (1974)



As Russell Gray

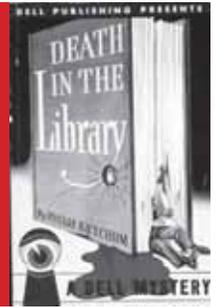
THE LUSTFUL APE (1950, published as by Bruno Fischer, 1959)

If you like Bruno Fischer, you might like: Paul Cain, Gil Brewer, Day Keene



*This is the sixth in a series of articles about the crime writers from the 1940s to the 1960s, as found in **PAPERBACK CONFIDENTIAL** by Brian Ritt (Stark House, \$19.95, 2013). Reprinted by permission of Stark House and the author. This reference book is highly recommended to collectors of vintage crime paperbacks.*

Recent Paperbacks of Note



Softboiled to Mediumboiled

- Bartlett, Lorraine with Gayle Leeson, **YULE BE DEAD** (Berley, \$7.99).
 Bradford, Laura, **JUST PLAIN MURDER** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Carlisle, Kate, **A WRENCH IN THE WORKS** (Berkley, \$7.99).
 Durham, Laura, **MARRY AND BRIGHT** (Broadmoor, \$7.99).
 Eaton, J. C., **BOTCHED 4 MURDER** (Kensington, \$7.99).
 Goldstein, Debra H., **ONE TASTE TOO MANY** (Kensington, \$7.99).
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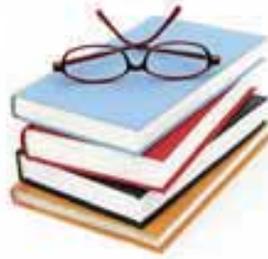
- Dunsmore, Helen, **BIRDCAGE WALK** (Grove Atlantic, \$17.00).
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 Rhys, Rachel, **DANGEROUS CROSSING** (Washington Square, \$17.00).

Sneak Previews

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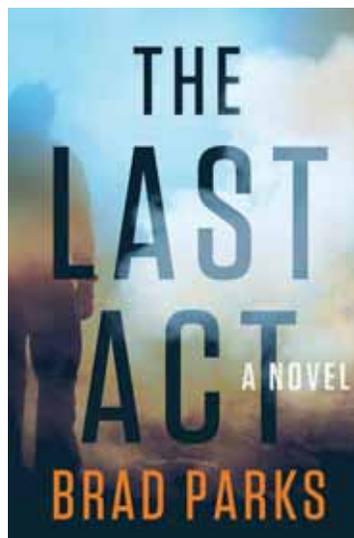


February, 2019

- 5 James Grippando, **THE GIRL IN THE GLASS BOX** (Jack Swyteck)
- 5 Charles Todd, **THE BLACK ASCOT** (Ian Rutledge)
- 5 Lars Kepler, **STALKER** (Joona Linna)
- 5 Mike Lawson, **HOUSE ARREST** (Joe DeMarco)
- 5 Boris Akunin, **THE CORONATION** (Fandorin)
- 5 Jonathan de Shalit, **A SPY IN EXILE**
- 5 Jane Harper, **THE LOST MAN**
- 5 C. J. Tudor, **THE HIDING PLACE**
- 5 Ian Hamilton, **FATE: The Lost Decades of Uncle Chow Tung**
- 12 David Swinson, **TRIGGER** (Frank Marr)
- 12 Peter Robinson, **CARELESS LOVE** (Banks)
- 12 Ausma Zehanat Khan, **A SOLITUDE OF BLOOD** (Getty & Khattak)
- 12 Charles Cumming, **THE MOROCCAN GIRL**
- 12 Lee Goldberg, **KILLER THRILLER** (Ian Ludlow)
- 12 Yrsa Sigurdardottir, **THE RECKONING** (Huldar & Freyja)
- 12 Jenny Rogneby, **ANY MEANS NECES SARY** (Leona Lindberg)
- 12 Rhys Bowen, **THE VICTORY GARDEN**
- 19 Mark Greaney, **MISSION CRITICAL** (Gray Man)
- 19 Bill Crider, **THAT OLD SCOUNDREL DEATH** (Dan Rhodes)
- 19 Charles Finch, **THE VANISHING MAN** (Charles Lenox prequel)
- 19 Sophie Hannah, **THE NEXT TO DIE**
- 19 Alan Hruska, **THE INGLORIOUS ARTS** (Alec Brno)
- 26 Marc Cameron, **OPEN CARRY** (Arliss Cutter)
- 26 Michele W. Miller, **WIDOWS-IN-LAW**
- 26 Don Winslow, **THE BORDER**
- 26 Rick Mofina, **MISSING DAUGHTER**
- 26 Helene Tursten, **HUNTING GAME**
- 27 Joanne Fluke, **RASPBERRY DANISH MURDER** (Hannah Swensen)

March, 2019

- 5 Phillip Margolin, **THE PERFECT ALIBI**
- 5 T. J. Martinson, **THE REIGN OF THE KINGFISHER**
- 5 Dana Haynes, **ST. NICHOLAS SALVAGE & WRECKING**
- 5 Abir Mukherjee, **SMOKE AND ASHES** (Sam Wyndham)
- 5 William Boyle, **A FRIEND IS A GIFT YOU GIVE YOURSELF**
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- 5 Elly Griffiths, **THE STRANGER DIARIES**
- 5 Peter Swanson, **BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM**
- 5 Sara Blaedel, **HER FATHER'S SECRET** (Family Secrets)
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- 5 Gioacchino Criaco, **BLACK SOULS**
- 5 Peter May, **THE MAN WITH NO FACE**
- 6 Clive Cussler, & Graham Brown, **SEA OF GREED** (NUMA)
- 12 Joel C. Rosenberg, **THE PERSIAN GAMBLE** (Marcus Ryker)
- 12 Brad Parks, **THE LAST ACT**
- 12 C. J. Box, **WOLF PACK** (Joe Pickett)
- 12 Glen Erik Hamilton, **MERCY**



- RIVER** (Van Shaw)
- 14 Dean Koontz, **THE NIGHT WIDOW** (Jane Hawk)
- 15 Diane Les Becquets, **THE LAST WOMAN IN THE FOREST**
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- 26 Jacqueline Winspear, **THE AMERICAN AGENT** (Maisie Dobbs)
- 26 Eliot Pattison, **BONES OF THE EARTH** (Shan Tao Yun)

April, 2019

- 1 Paul Doherty, **THE GODLESS**
- 1 Robin Blake, **ROUGH MUSIC** (Cragg/Fidelis)
- 1 Peter Turnbull, **COLD WRATH** (Hennessey/Yellich)
- 2 Jeff Abbott, **THE THREE SISTERS**
- 2 S. A. Lelchuk, **SAVE ME FROM DANGEROUS MEN**
- 2 Parnell Hall, **LIGHTS! CAMERA! PUZZLES!** (Puzzle Lady)
- 2 Jack Carr, **TRUE BELIEVER** (James Reece)
- 2 J.A. Jance, **THE A LIST** (Ali Reynolds)
- 2 David Downing, **DIARY OF A DEAD MAN ON LEAVE**
- 9 Anne Hillerman, **THE TALE TELLER** (Leaphorn, Chee & Manuelito)
- 9 Philip Kerr, **METROPOLIS** (Bernie Gunther)
- 9 Lisa Scottoline, **SOMEONE KNOWS**
- 9 Frances Brody, **A SNAPSHOT OF MURDER** (Kate Shackleton)
- 9 Nancy Herriman, **A FALL OF SHADOWS** (Bess Ellyott)
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- 16 Ilaria Tuti, **FLOWERS OVER THE INFERNO**
- 16 David Baldacci, **REDEMPTION** (Memory Man)
- 23 John Sandford, **NEON PREY** (Lucas Davenport)
- 30 Brian Panowich, **LIKE LIONS** (Clayton Burroughs)
- 30 Susanna Calkins, **MURDER KNOCKS TWICE**

May, 2019

- 1 Sarah R. Shaber, **LOUISE'S CROSSING**
- 1 Graham Hurlley, **CURTAIN CALL**
- 1 Bill James, **HITMEN I HAVE KNOWN** (Harpur/Iles)
- 7 Deon Meyer, **THE WOMAN IN THE BLUE CLOAK** (Benny Griessel)
- 7 Elly Griffiths, **THE STONE CIRCLE** (Ruth Galloway)
- 7 Katherine Hall Page, **THE BODY IN THE WAKE** (Faith Fairchild)
- 7 Chris Pavone, **THE PARIS DIVERSION**
- 7 Benet Brandeth, **THE ASSASSIN OF VERONA** (William Shakespeare)
- 7 Liv Constantine, **THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU**
- 7 Kylie Logan, **THE SCENT OF MURDER**
- 7 James Runcie, **THE ROAD TO GRANTCHESTER**
- 14 Dervla McTiernan, **THE SCHOLAR** (Cormac Reilly)
- 14 Sujata Massey, **THE SATAPUR MOON STONE** (Perveen Mistry)
- 14 Michael Koryta, **IF SHE WAKES**
- 14 Carolyn Haines, **GAME OF BONES** (Sarah Booth Delaney)
- 14 Eva Dolan, **THIS IS HOW IT ENDS**
- 21 David Housewright, **DEAD MAN'S MISTRESS** (Mac McKenzie)
- 21 Ragnar Jonasson, **THE ISLAND** (Hulda Hermannsdottir)
- 21 Agnete Friis, **THE SUMMER OF ELLEN**
- 28 Clive Cussler & Robin Burcell, **THE ORACLE** (Fargo)
- 28 Patrick Lee, **DARK SITE** (Sam Dryden)

June, 2019

- 4 Martin Walker, **THE BODY IN THE CASTLE WELL** (Bruno)
- 4 Stuart Woods & Parnell Hall, **SKIN GAME** (Teddy Fay)
- 4 David Ricciardi, **ROGUE STRIKE** (Jake Keller)
- 4 Anthony Horowitz, **THE SENTENCE IS DEATH** (Daniel Hawthorne)
- 4 James Ellroy, **THIS STORM**
- 4 Cara Black, **MURDER IN BEL-AIR** (Aimee Leduc)
- 4 Allison Montclair, **THE RIGHT SORT OF MAN**
- 4 Mark Billingham, **THEIR LITTLE SECRET** (Tom Thorne)
- 4 Becky Masterman, **WE WERE KILLERS ONCE** (Brigid Quinn)
- 4 Allison Montclair, **THE RIGHT SORT OF MAN**
- 11 Mike Madden, **TOM CLANCY: ENEMY CONTACT** (Jack Ryan, Jr.)
- 11 Mick Herron, **JOE COUNTRY** (Slough House)
- 11 Brad Thor, **BACKLASH** (Scot Harvath)

- 11 Sandie Jones, **THE FIRST MISTAKE**
- 11 Leonare Goldberg, **THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ALISTAIR AINSWORTH** (Sherlock Holmes Daughter)
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- 18 Kate Mosse, **THE BURNING CHAMBERS**
- 18 Nancy Atherton, **AUNT DIMITY AND THE HEART OF GOLD**
- 20 Robert Crais, **A DANGEROUS MAN** (Cole & Pike)
- 25 Lori Roy, **GONE TOO LONG**
- 25 Denise Mina, **CONVICTION**
- 25 Kelley Armstrong, **WHEREVER SHE GOES**

July, 2019

- 2 Caz Frear, **STONE COLD HEART** (Kat Kinsella)
- 2 Alison Gaylin, **NEVER LOOK BACK**
- 2 Riley Sager, **LOCK EVERY DOOR**
- 2 Matthew Betley, **RULES OF WAR** (Logan West)
- 2 S. J. Rozan, **PAPER SON** (Lydia Chin/Bill Smith)
- 2 Caitie Dolan-Leach, **WE WENT TO THE WOODS**
- 2 Paul Doiron, **ALMOST MIDNIGHT** (Mike Bowditch)
- 6 David Gordon, **THE HARD STUFF** (Joe the Bouncer)
- 9 Peter Lovesey, **KILLING WITH CONFETTI** (Diamond)
- 9 Ace Atkins, **THE SHAMELESS** (Quinn Colson)
- 9 Jo Nesbo, **KNIFE** (Harry Hole)
- 9 Keith McCafferty, **A DEATH IN EDEN** (Sean Stranahan)
- 9 Adrian McKinty, **THE CHAIN**
- 9 Sheila Connolly, **KILLER IN THE CARRIAGE HOUSE**
- 9 Kristen Lepionka, **THE STORIES YOU TELL** (Roxane Weary)
- 16 J. Todd Scott, **THIS SIDE OF NIGHT** (Chris Cherry)
- 16 David Rosenfelt, **BARK OF NIGHT** (Andy Carpenter)
- 16 Linda Castillo, **SHAMED** (Kate Burkholder)
- 16 Ellison Cooper, **BURIED**
- 26 Mark Greaney & Rip Rawlings, **RED METAL**
- 30 Stephen Hunter, **GAME OF SNIPERS** (Bob Lee Swagger)
- 30 Lisa Gardner, **NEVER TELL**

August, 2019

- 6 Ben Coes, **THE RUSSIAN** (Rob Tacoma)
- 6 Karin Fossum, **THE WHISPERER** (Sejer)
- 6 Robert Pobi, **CITY OF WINDOWS**
- 6 Ruth Ware, **THE TURN OF THE KEY**
- 6 Lindsey Davis, **A CAPITOL DEATH** (Flavia Albia)
- 6 Donna Andrews, **TERNS OF ENDEARMENT** (Meg Langslow)
- 13 William Shaw **PLAY WITH FIRE** (Breen/Tozer)
- 13 Steve Cavanagh, **THIRTE3N** (Eddie Flynn)
- 13 Howard Michael Gould, **BELOW THE LINE** (Charlie Waldo)
- 13 T. Jefferson Parker, **THE LAST GOOD GUY** (Roland Ford)
- 13 C. J. Box, **BITTERROOTS**
- 13 Ellen Hart, **TWISTED AT THE ROOT** (Jane Lawless)
- 20 Fred Vargas, **THE POISON WILL REMAIN** (Commissaire Adamsberg)
- 20 David Lagercrantz, **THE GIRL WHO LIVED TWICE** (Lisbeth Salander)
- 20 Julia Keller, **THE COLD WAY HOME** (Bell Elkins)
- 20 Louisa Treger, **THE DRAGON LADY**
- 27 Sara Lovestam, **THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LIE**

September, 2019

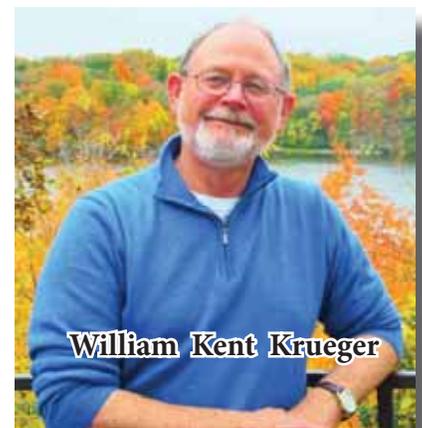
- 10 Reed Farrel Coleman, **THE BITTEREST PILL** (Jesse Stone)

October, 2019

- 22 Nelson DeMille, **THE DESERTER**

November, 2019

- 12 William Kent Krueger, **THIS TENDER LAND**



William Kent Krueger

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