

Midmonth BookNotes

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Happy Holidays

Festive Reading

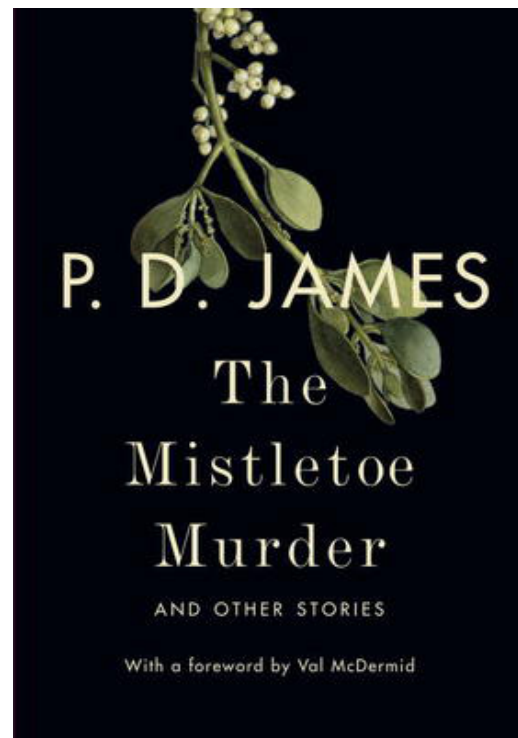
The holidays are almost upon us, but it isn't too late to sneak in one last reading treat!



Allen, Louise et al. [Once Upon a Regency Christmas](#) (Harlequin \$6.50)

This trio of holiday-themed novellas is tailor-made for Regency romance readers. In Louise Allen's "On a Winter's Eve" Lady Julia Chalcott has just returned home to England after her husband's death in India when she meets up with Captain Giles Markham on a snowy road home. Inviting the Captain to stay with her and her stepdaughter seems like the charitable thing to do, but Julia never expected she might fall for Giles. Sophie James pairs up threatened

businesswoman Christine Howard with American William Miller who takes on the job of acting as her bodyguard during the Christmas season in "Marriage Made at Christmas." And in "Cinderella's Perfect Christmas" by Annie Burrows housemaid Alice Waverly is looking forward to spending a quiet Christmas with just the scullery maid and the boot boy when Captain Jack Grayling and his two children turn up at the door seeking shelter from a devastating snow-storm.



James, P.D. [The Mistletoe Murder and other Stories](#) (Knopf \$24)

This stellar quartet of short stories from James is perfect reading during the holidays (or any time of the year really) for any fan of traditional mys

teries. In “The Mistletoe Murder,” a young widow hoping to have a quiet Christmas in order to process her grief accepts an invitation from her estranged maternal grandmother to spend the holidays with her. Once the narrator arrives there, the woman finds herself involved in a murder when a smarmy cousin is found in the stately home’s library with his head bashed in on Christmas morning. “The Boxdale Inheritance” and “The Twelve Clues of Christmas” both feature James’ classic sleuth Adam Dalgliesh while “A Very Commonplace Murder” showcases James’ darker side as a writer. All of the tales feature James’ elegant prose and flair for characterization, and as an added bonus, there are two concise yet insightful introductions: one written by Val McDermid and the other by James herself.

New Fiction

Berg, Janet Lee. [Rembrandt’s Shadow](#) (\$15)

October 20, 1942. Benjamin Katz and his six-year-old daughter Sylvie stand with their frightened family at a train station in occupied Holland, unsure if the train would take them to their freedom—or to a death camp. Hitler and his henchmen have long had their eye on the art collection of Benjamin and his brother, which includes Rembrandt’s “Portrait of Raman.” Now the brothers are faced with the ultimate choice—part with the art, or suffer the consequences. Berg based her powerful, intense novel on real-life events that happened to her father’s grandfather and his brother, art dealers who were targeted by Hitler two years before the German occupation. If you found yourself fascinated by Anne-Marie O’Connor’s *The Lady in Gold* or B.A. Shapiro’s *The Muralist*, this debut should prove be equally entertaining.

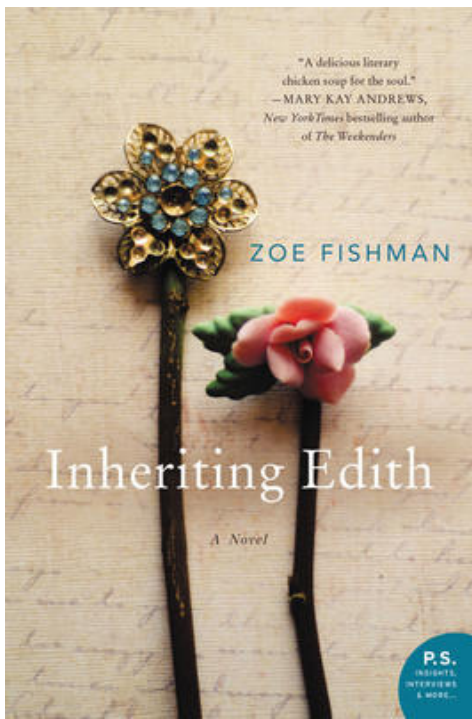
Binchy, Maeve. [A Week in Winter](#) (\$8.99)

Stoneybridge is a small town on the west coast of Ireland where all the families know one another. When Chicky Starr decides to take an old, decaying mansion set high on the cliffs overlooking the windswept Atlantic Ocean and turn it into a

restful place for a holiday by the sea, everyone thinks she is crazy. Helped by Rigger (a bad boy turned good who is handy around the house) and Orla, her niece (a whiz at business), Chicky is finally ready to welcome the first guests to Stone House’s big warm kitchen, log fires, and understated elegant bedrooms. John, the American movie star, thinks he has arrived incognito; Winnie and Lillian are forced into taking a holiday together; Nicola and Henry, husband and wife, have been shaken by seeing too much death practicing medicine; Anders hates his father’s business, but has a real talent for music; Miss Nell Howe, a retired schoolteacher, criticizes everything and leaves a day early, much to everyone’s relief; the Walls are disappointed to have won this second-prize holiday in a contest where first prize was Paris; and Freda, the librarian, is afraid of her own psychic visions. Binchy’s endearing, warm-hearted books are the perfect cozy comfort reads.

Chang, Janie. [Dragon Springs Road](#) (Morrow \$15.99)

In the past, Jialing’s mother had always come back, but this time it was different. Jialing waited patiently for several days in their home in the western residence, but when it finally became clear that her mother would not be returning, Jialing ventured out into the central residence. There Jialing meets Anjuin, the daughter of the Yang family, who own the three courtyard homes in Shanghai. Taken in the family’s matriarch as a bond servant, Jialing begins a new life struggling to fit into Chinese society as a *zazhong*: an Eurasian. Chang’s latest evocative historical novel is set in the early 20th century and it immediately transports readers to China as it attempts to make the transition from centuries of imperial rule to a modern country. The author incorporates a generous measure of fantasy and Chinese myth into the storyline as Jialing finds her life and fate tied up with that of the Fox spirit, who has lived in the courtyard for centuries, but it works beautifully. If you loved Amy Tan’s *One Hundred Secret Senses* or Lisa See’s *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, you will definitely fall under the spell of Chang’s equally mesmerizing novel.



Fishman, Zoe. [Inheriting Edith](#) (Morrow \$15.99)

Maggie Sheets knows there has to be a catch. It has been four years since she even spoke with Liza Brennan so why on earth would Liza leave Maggie her fabulous home in Sag Harbor? Once Maggie meets with Liza's lawyer, she realizes she is right to suspect something when the man informs her that Liza's home comes with an unexpected additional feature: Liza's eighty-two-year-old mother Edith. Having been recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's, Edith needs someone around who can watch over her. Maggie already has an energetic two-year-old daughter Lucy, who keeps her very busy. So the last thing Maggie needs is another person to take care of. But Maggie really can't afford to turn down the bequest, which means she must find some way of striking a domestic truce with the curmudgeonly old lady. Fishman's latest emotionally engaging novel is told from the alternating viewpoints of both Maggie and Edith. The end result is a poignant and unforgettable book about friendship, family, and love that is at different times humorous, heartbreaking, hopeful, and heartwarming.

Jeffries, Sabrina. [The Danger of Desire](#) (Pocket \$7.99)

To find the cardsharp who cheated her brother and caused him to take his own life, Delia Trevor has disguised herself as a young man and has

begun haunting London's gaming hells. However, when Delia encounters notorious rogue Warren Corry, the Marquess of Knightford at the tables at the St. George's Club one night, her plan for revenge takes an unexpected turn. If your idea of reading heaven is smartly written, splendidly sexy Regency historical romances, Jeffries has got you covered.



Klassen, Julie. [The Innkeeper of Ivy Hill](#) (Berkley \$14.99)

When the innkeeper at Ivy Hill's coaching inn, The Bell, dies suddenly, his genteel wife, Jane, initially resists becoming involved in the business by letting her brother-in-law take over the day-to-day details of running The Bell. However, after Jane discovers her late husband had taken out a considerable loan from the local bank that is fast coming due. Now in order to keep the inn from closing, Jane reluctantly accepts help from her prickly mother-in-law Thora, who knows a thing or two about running a successful inn. Rita and Christie award-winning Klassen sets the first in her new Tales from Ivy Hill series in a wonderfully realized small English village in the early 1800s. With its charming cast of characters and hints of romance to come for more than one resident of Ivy Hill, this is perfect reading for anyone, who enjoyed the books (or television series) *Lark Rise to Candleford* or *Cranford*.

Krentz, Jayne Ann. [Secret Sisters](#) (\$7.99)

Best friends Madeline and Daphne knew his name, the man who tried to brutally attack twelve-year-old Madeline in her grandmother's hotel. They thought they knew his fate. He wouldn't be bothering them anymore...ever. Still their lives would never be the same. Now nearly two decades later, Madeline has returned to Washington after her grandmother's mysterious death. And at the old, abandoned hotel—a place she never wanted to see again—a dying man's last words convey a warning: the secrets she and Daphne believed buried forever have been discovered.

Moyes, Jojo. [After You](#) (\$9.99)

If you missed the opportunity to read this sequel to *Me Before You* when it first came out in hardcover, now is your chance to catch Moyes' latest tearjerker in paperback in which Lou, in the wake of an accident that leaves her back at home and in a support group, meets paramedic Sam Fielding, a man who might finally understand her, but then Lou is forced to change her plans when someone from her past reappears. Stock up on Kleenex now!

Noble, Kate. [The Dare and the Doctor](#) (Pocket \$7.99)

Dr. Rhys Gray and Miss Margaret Babcock are friends—strictly friends. But over the course of the year, as they exchange dozens of letters, they share personal details that put them on the path to something more. When Dr. Gray helps Margaret realize her dearest dream and she comes to his defense in the uproar that follows, it seems that their connection cannot be denied. But can their relationship stand the scruples of society and jealous romantic rivals, or are they destined to be only friends, and nothing more?

Rollins, James. [Seventh Plague](#) (Morrow \$27.99)

What if the plagues recorded in the Bible really happened? What is even worse, what if they are about to occur again? That is the premise behind Rollin's latest adrenaline-fueled Sigma Force novel when British archeologist Harold McCabe, who has spent his professional life searching for proof of the Biblical plagues, stumbles out of the

Sudanese desert two years after he disappeared only to die before he can tell anyone what happened to his expedition. What is even more bizarre is that when McCabe's body is autopsied, he is discovered to be partially mummified. Now a strange, deadly disease reminiscent of the seventh plague recorded in the Bible has begun killing residents of Cairo and it isn't long before the threat of a global pandemic is in the works. Can Painter Crowe and his crew discover what McCabe found in the desert and more importantly find a way to stop it before the whole world is danger of dying? Rollins books are the equivalent of the Indiana Jones movies: featuring larger-than-life characters and plots packed with nonstop action and adventure with some fascinating historical details thrown in for good measure.

Cozy Corner

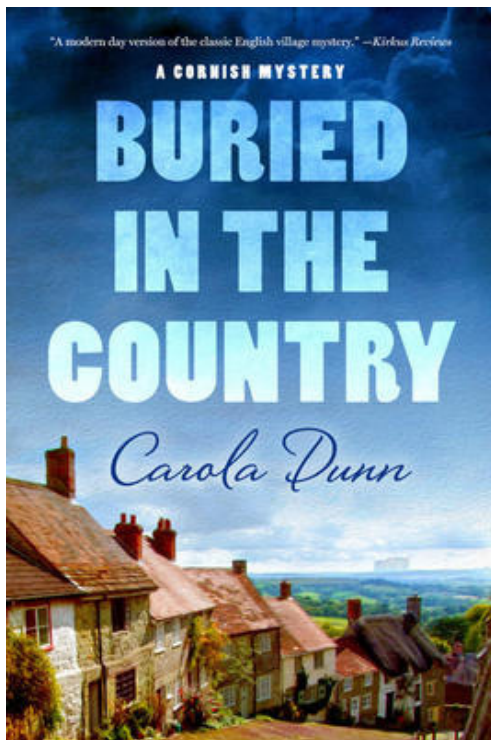
Childs, Laura. [Egg Drop Dead](#) (Berkley \$26)

When Suzanne name arrives at diary famer Mike Mullen's farm to pick up some wheels of cheese for the Cackleberry Club Café, the last thing she expects to find is Mike's dead body in the barn. Mike was such a nice, gentle person, Suzanne can't figure out who in town name could possibly be angry enough at him to want to see him dead. But whoever it is, Suzanne – with some help from her café co-owners Petra and Toni – intend on serving up a heaping helping of justice to them. In the seventh installment of her Cackleberry Club series, Child dishes up another heaping helping of quirk characters, zany humor, and plenty of mouth-watering recipes that will tempt reader to try them out in their own kitchens.

Duncan, Elizabeth. [Ill Met By Murder](#) (Crippen \$25.99).

It's the most important night of the year for the Catskills Shakespeare Theater Company--the annual fund raising performance at the country estate of the wealthy widow Paula Van Dusen. And this year promises to be even more special as the company will give a moonlight performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as part of the wedding celebrations for Paula's daughter, Belinda Van

Dusen, and her fiancé Adrian. But “the course of true love never did run smooth,” and in the aftermath of a disastrous after party, the stage is set for murder. Hugh Hedley, son of a prominent upstate New York family and Adrian’s rival in the cut-throat world of high end Manhattan real estate, is found murdered with a stolen prop from the play. Mrs. Van Dusen is desperate to keep her daughter’s name out of the paper, so costume mistress Charlotte Fairfax is drawn into yet another murder case amidst her costume design responsibilities and finding a home for the company’s new theater school. Readers in search of a light yet engaging cozy series will find plenty to savor in Duncan’s latest in her Shakespeare in the Catskills. Start with [Untimely Death](#) (\$15.95).



Dunn, Carola. [Buried in the Country](#) (St Martins \$25.99)

After many years working around the world for an international charity in the late 1960s, Eleanor Trewynn has retired to the relative quiet of a small town in Cornwall. But her quiet life is short-lived when, due to her experience, the Commonwealth Relations Office reaches out to her to assist in a secret conference that is to take place in a small hotel outside the historical village of Tintagel. Meanwhile, her niece, Detective Sargent Megan Pencarrow, is investigating the disappearance of a local solicitor when she is

assigned to help provide security for the conference. When a raging storm traps everyone in the hotel, the stage is set for murder, and it’s up to Eleanor and Megan to uncover the truth before more lives are lost. I have enjoyed Dunn’s 1920s series featuring Daisy Dalrymple but this is the first time for me reading one of her Cornish mystery series featuring Eleanor Trewynn. In some ways the book’s heroine reminds me a bit of Dorothy Gilman’s Mrs. Pollifax (another wonderfully intrepid sixty something sleuth). Readers who enjoy traditional British mysteries served up with plenty of old-fashioned charm and a splendidly realized English setting will definitely want to explore Dunn’s Cornish series.

Flower, Amanda. [Prose and Cons](#) (Berkley \$7.99)

Violet Waverly is just settling into her new life in Cascade Springs working with her grandmother Daisy at Charming Books when she finds herself once again tangled up in another murder investigation. Anastasia Faber, one of the members of the writers’ group that meets at the bookstore, is found dead right before she is scheduled to read at the first annual Poe-try Reading. At first, everyone believes Anastasia’s death to be an accident, but then police chief David Rainwater charges Violet’s friend Sadie with the crime, leaving Violet no choice but to find the real killer. This is the second in Agatha award-winning Flower’s charming (yes, just like the bookstore in the novels) series, which with the light touch of magic and dusting of romance neatly folded into the plots make these books excellent choices for fans of Nancy Atherton’s equally winsome mysteries.

Oust, Gail. [Curried Away](#) (Minotaur \$26.99)

Everyone in Brandywine Creek is thrilled that a local production of *Steel Magnolias* is scheduled to debut at the town’s Opera House until the residents of the small Georgia town get to know the play’s director Sandy Granger better. With her constant changes in deciding who plays what role and her insistence on holding rehearsals at the most inconvenient times, Sandy has half the actors crying and the other half seeing red. So it really isn’t that surprising when she is found strangled to death after one of the play’s dreaded late night rehearsals. The problem is that police

chief Wyatt McBride's chief suspect is Piper Prescott's BFF Reba Mae Johnson, which means Piper will once again have to get involved in a murder investigation if she wants to keep Reba Mae from sporting a new outfit: prison blues. Oust's latest – number 4 in the Spice Shop series – is brimming over with plenty of plenty of quirky characters, a wonderfully realized Southern small town setting, and plenty of gentle humor. Even if the identity of the murderer seems to come straight out of left field (at least I thought so), cozy readers will find *Curried Away* to be a tempting treat.

Teen Fiction



Cluess, Jessica. [A Shadow Bright and Burning](#) (Random House \$17.99)

Forced to reveal her powers of spontaneous combustion in order to save a friend, Henrietta Howell, a first female supernatural in centuries, is invited to train as one of Her Majesty's secretive royal sorcerers in fulfillment of a prophecy that she comes to discover is part of a powerful

deception. Readers worried that Cluess' debut novel, which is set in an early Victorian England where magic exists, is just another knockoff of the Harry Potter books can breathe a sigh of relief. Cluess writes with verve and panache leaving readers anxiously awaiting the next in this brilliantly conceived and boldly written dark fantasy series.

Meyer, Marissa. [Heartless](#) (Feiwel & Friends \$19.99)

In this stand-alone prequel to *Alice in Wonderland*, Meyer, the author of the Lunar Chronicles gives readers a glimpse of the Red Queen of Wonderland before she become famous for her catchphrase "off with their heads!" Catherine may be one of the most desired girls in Wonderland, and a favorite of the yet-unmarried King of Hearts, but her interests lie elsewhere. A talented baker, all she wants is to open a shop with her best friend and supply the Kingdom of Hearts with delectable pastries and confections. But according to her mother, such a goal is unthinkable for the young woman who could be the next Queen. At a royal ball where Cath is expected to receive the king's marriage proposal, she meets Jest, the handsome and mysterious court joker. For the first time, she feels the pull of true attraction. At the risk of offending the King and infuriating her parents, she and Jest enter into an intense, secret courtship. Cath is determined to define her own destiny and fall in love on her terms. But in a land thriving with magic, madness, and monsters, fate has other plans.

Shusterman, Neal. [Scythe](#) (Simon and Schuster \$18.99)

In a world where disease has been eliminated, the only way to die is to be randomly killed ("gleaned") by professional reapers ("scythes"). Citra and Rowan are teenagers who have been selected to be scythe's apprentices, and—despite wanting nothing to do with the vocation—they must learn the art of killing and come to understand the necessity of what they do. Only one of them will be chosen as a scythe's apprentice. And when it becomes clear that the winning apprentice's first task will be to glean the loser,

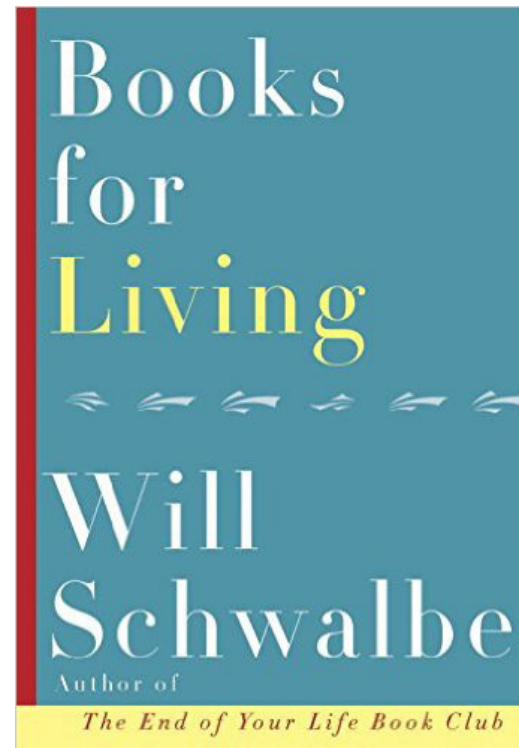
Citra and Rowan are pitted against one another in a fight for their lives. I know this sounds like another popular dystopian series featuring two teens battling it out (hint, hint: *Hunger Games*) but Shusterman, who has written 36 books as well as earning a National Book, delivers the first in a what is promised to be a new series that is every bit as good as that other series. Written with an addictively dark sense of wit and graced with a cast of fascinating characters, this is a thrilling and marvelously unsettling read.

Nonfiction

Lohman, Sarah. [Eight Flavors](#) (Simon-Schuster \$26.99)

The United States boasts a culturally and ethnically diverse population which makes for a continually changing culinary landscape. But a young historical gastronomist named Sarah Lohman discovered that American food is united by eight flavors: black pepper, vanilla, curry powder, chili powder, soy sauce, garlic, MSG (of which, she is definitely a fan), and Sriracha. In *Eight Flavors*, Lohman sets out to explore how these influential ingredients made their way to the American table.

Moyle, Franny. [Turner](#) (Penguin \$35)
J.M.W. Turner is one of the most important figures in Western art. His visionary work paved the way for a revolution in painting. When Turner entered the Royal Academy in the late eighteenth century, painting was almost solely focused on the exterior world. Over the course of his brilliant career, Turner made both landscape painting and the life of the interior much more prominent in art. Moyle's brilliant, incisive look at Turner – the youngest artist to both exhibit at the Royal Academy as well as the youngest artist inducted into the Academy – not only details his commercial success and his bawdy, colorful personal life, but also explores his efforts to compete with other artists for fame and glory. Moyle's book is perfect for anyone interested in the artist and his era as well as anyone who loved Mike Leigh's superb film *Mr. Turner*.



Schwalbe, Will. [Books for Living](#) (Knopf \$25.95)

"We need to read and to be readers now more than ever." Schwalbe wrote this as the introduction to a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* in which he talks about his newest paean to the power of literature: *Books for Living*. In the book, Schwalbe explores those titles that helped him make sense of the world and to become a better person in the process. The titles Schwalbe delves into include E. B. White's *Stuart Little*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and Paula Hawkins *The Girl on the Train* (you might be surprised by this one!). This is a truly lovely, thoughtful meditation on the importance of books in anyone's love.

Smith, Douglas. [Rasputin](#) (FSG \$35)

At the time he lived, Rasputin was believed to have been some kind of Svengali, who held Tsar Nicholas and Tsarina Alexandra of Russia under a hypnotic spell by "healing" their sickly son thus convincing them to make decisions that ultimately led to the downfall of the Romanovs. A hundred years after his murder, Rasputin continues to excite the popular imagination as the personification of evil. But as the prizewinning historian Douglas Smith shows, the true story of Rasputin's life and death has remained shrouded in myth. This major new work, which

coincides with the centenary of Rasputin's murder, combines probing scholarship and powerful storytelling to provide readers with a thoroughly – some might say exhaustively - detailed account of the life and times of this mystic or madman (depending on whom you ask).

Pearl Harbor 75th Anniversary

December 7, 1941 was a day to live in infamy. Now on the 75th anniversary of that historic event, a number of books have been published exploring the tragic bombing as well as the events that may have precipitated it. The two titles below are excellent introductions to the topic for any reader.

Nelson, Craig. [Pearl Harbor from Infamy to Greatness](#) (Scribner \$32)

The award-winning and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Rocket Men* spent five years researching Pearl Harbor by going through different historical archives and reading first-person account interviews to come to the conclusion that the U.S. really could not have prevented the attack on Pearl Harbor because no one person was really running the Japan in the 1930s. Instead, different parties in the military and the government battled for control of the country ultimately leading to decisions made that launched the attacked on America. Told from the viewpoint of both the Americans and the Japanese, this is a first-rate, even-handed account of this life-changing historical event.

Twomey, Steve. [Countdown to Pearl Harbor](#) (Simon and Schuster \$30)

In his well-researched look at the tragedy, Pulitzer-prize winning reporter Twomey chronicles the twelve days leading up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor by examining the miscommunications, missteps, and misassumptions that may have led America to fail to safeguard against the tragedy

