

BOOKNEWS from

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A Happy Holiday Season to All

Opening Hours M-Sat 10 AM-6 PM; Sun 12-5 PM

Note: Event times are Mountain Standard Time

Watch these virtual events on [Facebook Live](#) or on our [YouTube](#) channel and any time thereafter at a time that suits you. You don't have to belong to Facebook to click in.
You also can listen to our [Podcasts](#) on [Google Music](#), [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), and other popular podcast sites.

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 1 1:00 PM

Robert Lloyd with Lee Child

Lloyd discusses [The Bloodless Boy](#) (Melville \$29.99)

An astonishing historical mystery debut by an author living in Wales

One of *PW*'s Best Mysteries of 2021 and a *NY Times* Holiday Book Pick

Signed bookplates available

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 1 6:00 0PM

Meg Waite Clayton discusses [The Postmistress of Paris](#) (Harper \$27.99)

A WWII story

Signed books in stock

THURSDAY DECEMBER 2 7:00 PM

Matt Coyle and Maegan Beaumont

Beaumont discusses [The Darkwater Girls](#) (Bookouuvre \$15.99).

Coyle discusses [Last Redemption](#) (Oceanview \$26.95)

Signed books in stock for Coyle

MONDAY DECEMBER 6 7:00 PM

Paige Shelton discusses [Dark Night](#) (St Martins \$26.99)

An Alaska Wild mystery

Signed books in stock

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 8 5:00 PM

SJ Rozan discusses [Family Business](#) (Pegasus \$25.95)

A Lydia Chen and Bill Smith PI novel

Signed books in stock

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 8 6:30 PM

Stephen Spotswood discusses [Murder Under Her Skin](#) (Knopf \$27)

A Pentecost and Parker 1946 mystery

Signed books available

THURSDAY DECEMBER 9 12:30 PM

Ted Bell and Luke McCallin

Bell discusses [Sea Hawke](#) (Berkley \$28)

An Alex Hawke thriller

McCallin discusses [From a Dark Horizon](#) (Penguin \$28)

Lt. Gregory Reinhardt WWI Thriller

THURSDAY DECEMBER 9 5:00 PM

Jungle Reds Christmas Cheer Celebration

Rhys Bowen, Lucy Burdette, Deborah Crombie, Hallie

Ephron, Jenn McKinlay Hank Phillippi Ryan, Julia Spencer-

Fleming

FRIDAY DECEMBER 10 6:30 PM Live

Kevin Hearne Party

Bring your books to a meet and greet with Hearne

SATURDAY DECEMBER 11 5:00 PM

Croak & Dagger Discussion Club Christmas Party

The Club discusses Rhys Bowen's [The Twelve Clues of Christmas](#) (\$7.99)

MONDAY DECEMBER 13 6:15 PM

Jane Cleland discusses [Jane Austen's Lost Letters](#) (St Martins \$26.99)

A Josie Prescott Antiques mystery

Signed books available

THURSDAY DECEMBER 16 7:00 PM

Hardboiled Crime discusses William Boyle's [Gravesend](#)

(\$16.95)

Attendees may want to discuss Boyle's November release [Shoot the Moonlight Out](#) (\$25.95 Signed) as well

FRIDAY DECEMBER 17 7:00 PM

SciFi Friday discusses CL Polk's [Witchmark](#) (\$15.99)

AND JOIN US LIVE JANUARY 4 7:00 PM

James Rollins discusses [The Starless Crown](#) (Tor \$28.99)

Moon Fall #1, Epic Fantasy

SIGNED BOOKS, Tip-ins, Signed Bookplates

Ashley, Kristen. [Dream Keeper](#) (\$8.99). The entertaining stand-alone that wraps up the Dream Team series is a solid example of bestseller Ashley’s ability to combine tense action with steamy but heartfelt relationship building. Though single mom Pepper has seen many of her fellow Denver exotic dancers couple off with the members of a local team of security expert “commandos,” she’s focused on providing a safe, stable environment for her eight-year-old daughter, Juno, and resolutely ignores her attraction to Commando Auggie Hero—even after she realizes Juno is playing matchmaker in the background. Pepper tries to leave Auggie out of it when she asks his commando team for help finding her estranged brother and figuring out why everyone at her parent’s church is acting increasingly odd. But Auggie inserts himself into the investigation as he and the team uncover much more than religious fanaticism driving the strange behavior. As the action ramps up, Pepper and Auggie overcome their hesitation and sweetly commit to each other. Meanwhile Ashley weaves in enough slightly younger commandos to spin off into her next set of romantic thrillers and delightfully redeems the shady Cisco, a baddie from earlier in the series who here turns Juno’s guardian angel.

Clayton, Meg Waite. [The Postmistress of Paris](#) (Harper \$27.99) is a novel about an American woman in the French Resistance—an evocative love story layered with heroism and intrigue — the film *Casablanca* if Rick had an artsy bent”—*SF Chronicle*. In 1938, Nanée Gold lives in an artist community in Paris when the Nazis invade. Chronicling her experiences aiding the resistance—she works with Varian Fry at one point, and focuses on providing assistance to artists and refugees escaping Paris. She eventually falls in love with one of the people she’s helping, a photographer named Edouard Moss, who escapes from an internment camp. With their romance set against the backdrop of the ever-present threat of the encroaching German forces, Clayton’s novel is a “sterling portrait of a complex woman” that “stands head and shoulders above most contemporary WWII fiction.”

The December Indie Next Pick adds, “This is a beautifully written story filled with nuanced and compelling characters. Clayton draws the reader into the harrowing world of a young American woman determined to help artists and others flee Vichy France.” **Perfect for fans of Kristin Hannah and Kate Quinn and our Suggested December Notable New Fiction Book of the Month.**

Cleland, Jane K. [Jane Austen’s Lost Letters](#) (St Martins \$26.99). As Josie Prescott is taking a break from her TV show at Prescott’s Antiques and Auctions, she’s summoned to meet an older woman, Veronica Sutton. And greatly disconcerted when the woman claims she was a good friend of Josie’s late father as she hands over a package, then abruptly drives away. Inside the package is a box containing a handwritten note to Josie from her father and two letters, one dated 1811, the other 1814, signed by Jane Austen. Josie, who believed herself to be very close to her father, who died some twenty years ago, is rattled by the note and a sense that the woman must have been closely connected to her dad even though dad never mentioned her name. As Josie shakily

goes about filming her show about antiques, running her business, and hiring consultants to authenticate the letters, Josie digs into Veronica’s identity and her own history with her dad while wondering who a mysterious male intruder might be. And soon the murder of a consultant present to discuss authenticating signatures ups the pressure as well as the personal and professional jeopardy. I have to say that a good mystery makes you mourn the victim and Cleland does that in spades. And reminds us that we might not know our loved ones as well as we think...or examine ourselves closely. Which reflects Austen, no?

Coyle, Matt. [Last Redemption](#) (Oceanview \$26.95). The violence in Rick Cahill’s past has left him with possible brain damage that could result in dementia and early death. He hasn’t told his fiancée, Leah, though, because her miracle pregnancy offers them hope of a family life together. The last thing he needs is a case that could demand physical exertion—yet he privately admits that he needs the rush of real detective work. So he agrees to help his best friend, fellow PI Moira MacFarlane, make sure her 24-year-old computer whiz son, Luke, isn’t violating a restraining order from Luke’s girlfriend. What starts as a simple surveillance case becomes a lot more complicated after Luke’s boss is found murdered in his office—and Luke vanishes. The stakes rise after Rick is savagely beaten by two hardened ex-military thugs, who warn him to stop probing. It gets worse for everyone from there in a timely plot. Cheer for Rick as he pushes on, fighting episodes of disorientation. And consider that if you were Leah you’d want to kill him yourself.

☒ Faye, Lyndsay. [Observations by Gaslight: Stories from the World of Sherlock Holmes](#) (Mysterious Press \$25.95). Joy, what better Holiday Gift than a ticket to enter this realm? Faye, a two-time Edgar Award nominee (who can forget her amazing Jane Steele riff on *Jayne Eyre*?) and the Holmes pastiche *Dust and Shadow* (pitting Holmes against Jack the Ripper), has a wonderful time here with stories and novellas “narrated by those who knew the Great Detective.” So, Irene Adler. Inspector Lestrade with a moving backstory. Mrs. Hudson. Baker Street Irregular Henry Wiggins. The Yard’s Stanley Hopkins. A. Davenport Lomax, the sub-librarian. Faye deploys diaries, telegrams, event grocery lists to show you Holmes and Watson in new guises. “As with her traditional pastiches, Faye pushes the envelope judiciously, providing depth to the iconic sleuth without transforming him beyond recognition...“The Adventure of the Stopped Clocks,” narrated by Irene Adler, the one woman who bested Holmes, fleshes out his admiration for her intellect, and explores the impact on the sleuth of Watson’s marriage and move out of Baker Street, all within the context of an ingenious take on an untold case centered on why all the clocks in a man’s home have stopped”

☒ Herron, Mick. [Dolphin Junction](#) (Murray \$40). This terrific gift is highly recommended by me and the *NYTBR*: “Spy fiction is a genre that, done poorly, can lurch toward humorlessness. Mick Herron has for years avoided this pitfall with his dryly entertaining Slough House series — a new one will be published next year, o frabjous day — while taking occasional turns

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Heughan, Sam/Graham McTavish. [Clanlands Almanac](#) (Mobius \$19.99). **Signed by Diana Gabaldon with a bookplate signed by Sam and Graham for the first 990 orders. This title will not be available signed until January although it publishes on November 23. We are too backed up, as is Diana, to deliver**

it sooner. We recommend you get on the waiting list. One per customer for the signed bookplate.

If *Clanlands* was a gentle road trip through Scotland, this almanac is a top down, pedal to the metal up and down odyssey through the many byways of a Scottish year. An invitation to anyone who picks up the book to join us on a crazy camper van exploration over 12 glorious, whisky fueled months. Mountains, battles, famous (and infamous) Scots, the alarming competitiveness of *Men in Kilts*, clans, feuds, flora, fauna, with a healthy sprinkling of embarrassing personal reminiscences thrown in. Much is explored, all is shared. It is a camper van cornucopia of all things Alba. From First Footing to Samhain, Fringe Festival follies to whisky lore, Sam & Graham guide readers through a year of Scottish legends, traditions, historical and contemporary events, sharing personal stories and tips as only these two chalk-and-cheese friends can.

Kells, Claire. [Vanishing Edge](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). This offbeat series launch from Kells introduces a crimefighting team working in our National Parks that will appeal to Nevada Barr and Scott Graham readers. It is our suggested **Crime Book of the Month for December** —meaning club members too need to order it.

Curmudgeonly chief ranger Rick Corrigan has what he calls a situation at an abandoned luxury campsite perched above a lake in California's Sequoia National Park. To look into the case, Corrigan teams Felicity Harland, a fledgling agent with the Investigations Services Bureau (in essence the FBI for the National Parks), with Ferdinand “Hux” Huxley, the ranger who discovered the abandoned Glampist campsite. When the body of TV star Tatum Delancey turns up in the lake, Felicity and Hux begin searching for Tatum's male camping companion—not her husband—and try to determine whether she fell or was pushed to her death. As they hike through difficult terrain, they encounter a daunting number of false clues and may have a clue about a menace to campers called the Woodsman. Along the way, Felicity learns to rely on Hux's talent for finding people, while he respects how she's pushing herself to recover from a broken back and a long rehabilitation not fully completed. Sharply drawn characters and striking descriptions of park scenery are a plus, although you may cavil at the solution to Tatum's murder.

Kernick, Simon. [Good Cop, Bad Cop](#) (Headline \$39).

Undercover cop Chris Sketty became a hero when he almost died trying to stop the most brutal terror attack in UK history. With the suspects either dead or missing, the real motive remains a mystery. But someone is convinced Sketty is a liar. A criminal mastermind. A murderer. Blackmailed into revealing the truth, Sketty will share a twisting tale of betrayal, deception and murder...with a revelation so shocking that nothing will be the same again... Kernick is a fine writer and I remain baffled as to why he has no US publisher.

Lloyd, Robert J. [The Bloodless Boy](#) (McSweeney \$29.99). **Our copies come with signed bookplates. This is the first in a trilogy, and it arrives in a stunning package with cover effects, endpapers, deckled edges, and a lavish page layout.** It is also one of the Best Mysteries of 2021 as rated by *Publishers Weekly* (*PW*), a *NY Times* Holiday Book and *Washington Post* Best of 2021, and gets a rave from Lee Child who plans to join me in a conversation with Lloyd, who lives in Wales, on December 1.

Part *Wolf Hall*, part *Name of the Rose*, this rip-snoiting thriller is set in Restoration London, 1678, with a cast of real

historic figures, set against actual historic events and intrigues of the returned king and his court. And introducing two detectives for this the start of a series: Robert Hooke, the Curator of Experiments at the just-formed Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge, and his assistant Harry Hunt, who've just been called in to investigate when the body of a three-year-old boy drained of his blood is discovered on the snowy bank of the Fleet River. The corpse had four puncture wounds, each with neat writing next to it. Hunt learns that another boy was found in similar circumstances a week earlier and must determine the deaths' possible connection to the suicide of Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of the Royal Society; a rumored Catholic plot to assassinate the king; and messages employing the Red Cipher, last used during the English Civil Wars. "Evocative prose, subtle characterizations, and an ingenious solution to a legendary real-life unsolved murder elevate this above most other historical mysteries. Fans of Iain Pears' *An Instance of the Fingerpost* will be enthralled."

Lloyd writes, "When doing my MA degree in the History of Ideas, I stumbled on Hooke's diary. He was the most extraordinary man, the first to observe microorganisms and coined the term cell. He discovered oxygen, although he didn't name it. He believed fossils were evidence of ancient animals, against the accepted interpretation of the Scriptures. How does somebody of average intelligence portray a genius? That took me some working out. 17th justice constantly shocks. One crime that's worth mentioning, as it touches on the plot, was "spiriting." Children were stolen and taken to the Colonies by "spirits." This was a lucrative business, benefiting those who invested in and ran the Colonies. Although the crime of spiriting was made punishable by death in 1670, actually this was rarely applied, small fines being imposed instead. Spiriting was part of the plantation enterprise. It was people trafficking on a grand scale. What were murder investigations like at the time? Medical jurisprudence emerged in the 1600s, courts asking physicians and surgeons for their opinions in legal proceedings." I add that medicine was in a truly experimental stage as well facing doubts similar to those circulating today about vaccines.

Lyle, D P. [The OC](#) (Oceanview \$26.95). I really enjoyed this good-natured narrative with a clever concept. Test your wits and see if you crack it before Lyle reveals it. Most mysteries and thrillers are centered on murder or some grand conspiracy. Lyle chose to tackle celebrity stalking, which is a big issue in California specifically, but is really pretty much universal. Trouble always seems to find Jake, even when it's the last thing he's looking for. And there goes Jake's hope for a few weeks of fun with longtime girlfriend Nicole Jamison in Orange County, California—The OC—when he learns that Nicole's friend, a popular local TV reporter, is being followed. Just like that, Jake and Nicole are thrown into the dark world of celebrity stalking. When the stalker increases the harassment, Jake calls in the cavalry, his father Ray, an investigator, and tech genius Pancake. "Lyle admits that Jake is mostly a doofus. A lovable one but still a doofus.... So Jake is a reluctant PI because regardless of how much he may protest, he repeatedly gets stuck in investigations." The banter between Jake and Nicole underscores their affection (and the sex is good but discreetly pursued off the page).

Patterson, James. [The Paris Detective](#) (Grand Central \$31). **Bookplate Signed by Patterson.** Here are three cases worked by "the most revered detective in Paris, Luc Moncrief," who has

rebooted his career in New York. **The Christmas Mystery:** In the heart of the holiday season, priceless paintings have vanished from a Park Avenue murder scene. Now, the dashing Moncrief must become a quick study in the art of the steal—before a cold-blooded killer paints the town red. Merry Christmas, Detective. **French Twist:** Gorgeous women are dropping dead at upscale department stores in New York City. Moncrief and Detective Katherine Burke are close to solving the mystery, but.... And it opens with **French Kiss**, Moncrief's debut at the NPD

Rollins, James. [The Starless Crown](#) (Forge \$28.99). Our copies will be Signed at The Pen by Rollins January 4 and there is some swag to go with some copies. Details to come in the New Year's *Booknews*.

Here is a letter to you from Rollins: Welcome to *The Starless Crown*. While this new fantasy saga might seem like a departure for a writer of scientific thrillers, I assure you it's not. In fact, it marks the return to my *roots*. For the first decade of my career, I wrote fantasy novels (under the pen name James Clemens) alongside my thrillers. Yet, more than simply returning to those roots, this novel is a wholly new creation. It marks the amalgam of my two personalities as a writer. For those Rollins' readers, you'll discover a fast-paced thrill ride, one steeped in history, science, and adventure. For those Clemens fans, you'll be introduced to a harsh world full of wonders and horrors, a landscape as fantastical as ever. To craft his world, its peoples, its creatures, I consulted with evolutionary biologists, with anatomists, with astrophysicists, and even leaned on my own background as a veterinarian. It's why I describe this series as a *scientific* fantasy. It's a fusion of all that I love to read—and to write. Come join me on these first steps into this new world.

Roza, SJ. [Family Business](#) (Pegasus \$25.95). Readers like me of the Edgar-winning, long-running Lydia Chin/Bill Smith PI series have spent some time with Lydia's family, especially her autocratic, traditional Chinese mother with whom Lydia lives—and who disapproves of Bill, the more so as the duo has evolved into a romantic as well as professional relationship. Here the unexpected death of NY tong leader Big Brother Choi kicks off a plot involving family and crime cadre loyalties and betrayals, succession politics, and New York real estate. Roza, an architect and dedicated New Yorker, really knows her stuff. Here's the *PW* Starred Review:

"In Edgar winner Roza's superb 14th mystery...several people jockey to succeed tong leader Big Brother Choi after he dies of a heart attack. Meanwhile, Jackson Ting, a Chinese American real estate developer, wants to buy the headquarters of Choi's tong, housed in a historic building in Manhattan's Chinatown, and construct a 20-story apartment building on the site, a project Chinatown residents fear will further gentrify their community. Lydia is asked for help by Choi's surprise heir, his niece Mel Wu, a real estate attorney devoted to housing justice who's opposed to the project. But when Lydia accompanies Mel to the building to learn a secret Choi confided in his lieutenant, Chang Yao-Zu, they find Chang's stabbed corpse instead. Blackmail and an attempted murder ensue amid rumors of hidden treasure. Roza evokes the milieu perfectly, while smoothly integrating current debates over neighborhood development into an intricate plot. This is another triumph for this talented author." And it delivers a real surprise ending!!

Shelton, Paige. [Dark Night](#) (St Martins \$26.99). “Beth is known to the rest of the world under her pseudonym, Elizabeth Fairchild, but after an abduction and skin-of-the-teeth escape, she’s retreated to this remote hamlet to live quietly and anonymously: only the local police chief of Benedict, Alaska, knows who she really is. With winter closing in and a few friends kept at arm’s distance, Beth tries to heal from the trauma and go on with her writing, hoping to hear that her abductor will eventually be caught. Instead, her mother turns up unexpectedly. Mill Rivers is a loose cannon, on the run from the law herself—and she may be Beth’s best hope at finding peace and finally feeling safe again. A local murder, of course, spices things up.... Beth’s relationship with local law enforcement (and Benedict’s unconventional boundaries in this regard) allow her to act as an unofficial investigator... The librarian is a special-ops dark horse, and the local dog sledder and tow truck driver may have a checkered history of his own. Beth is a by-choice tenant at a halfway house for female felons; the list of eccentrics lengthens from here. “Like [Thin Ice](#) and [Cold Wind](#) (\$7.99 each), this installment offers intrigue in a cozy package.” Hmm...I am not convinced this is a cozy series but the weather mirrors December as we conceive of it, even as the world warms.

Spotswood, Stephen. [Murder Under Her Skin](#) (Knopf \$27). Set in the summer of 1946, Spotswood’s twisty follow-up to 2020’s First Mystery Book of the Month [Fortune Favors the Dead](#) (\$16) sends New York PIs Lillian Pentecost and Lillian’s assistant, Willowjean Parker, to a traveling circus performing in rural Stoppard, Virginia, where Ruby Donner, the tattooed lady, has been murdered. The case is a personal one for Parker, who not only worked in the same circus before landing a job with Pentecost but considers many of the performers as family. Parker credits Ruby with saving her life and vows to find her killer.

Sarah Weinman reviews in the *NYTBR*: “I’m a sucker for reworkings of Rex Stout’s classic Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin novels, especially when they play with gender, sexuality and power while staying true to the American midcentury setting — like Stephen Spotswood’s 2020 debut. The follow-up is even more of a delight. It vaults Parker back into her past life as a teenage member of Hart & Halloway’s Traveling Circus and Sideshow, which she left for an apprenticeship with Pentecost. This time out, the women need to uncover who killed Ruby Donner, the “Amazing Tattooed Woman,” who was “an impossible landscape of roses and sailor girls, hearts and mermaids and pirate ships.” Parker’s former mentor Valentin Kalishenko — “knife-thrower, sword-swallower, fire eater” — is the prime suspect. Pentecost and Parker, of course, know better. It’s a pleasure to watch them arrive at that knowledge after sifting through red herrings and peeling secrets back like layers of an onion, all while revealing even more of themselves without guilt or shame. Just like his mystery-writing ancestor, Spotswood understands that the detective story should be sound, but spending time with unforgettable characters is paramount.”

And Library Reads agrees with my take: “These fun throwback hard-boiled mysteries feature two female sleuths in the post-war 1940s... Their second case involves a murder at Will’s former circus, and is perfect for readers of Rex Stout and Agatha Christie.”

✂ Westerson, Jeri. [The Deadliest Sin](#) (Severn \$28.99). **Signed Bookplates. And the first 6 to order will get a free copy of Westerson’s *Deadly Rising, a Book of the Hidden*.**

Here is the final medieval noir for disgraced nobleman Crispin Guest, eking out a living as a detective or “Tracker” after he treasonously supported the Duke of Lancaster over a young Richard II, and his apprentice, Jack Tucker. It’s 1399 London. Henry Bolingbroke, now the Duke in exile, poses a threat to the reign of Richard. As Crispin waits to see what the conflict means for his future, Prioress Drueta summons him after two of the nuns under her care are killed in bizarre ways. One had food stuffed down her throat, and the second was smothered by a pillow wrapped in all the blankets of her sister nuns. Crispin agrees to investigate. When a third nun is found murdered with coins in her mouth, Crispin realizes that each murder illustrates one of the seven deadly sins. With access to part of the priory deemed off-limits because he’s a man and an outsider, he recruits an old friend to go undercover into St. Frideswide as a nun. Fans will be pleased that various series’ threads wrap up as Plantagenet line gives way to Lancaster. If you read Anya Seton’s wonderful [Katherine](#) (\$17.99), one of my favorite historicals, you’d be up to speed on the whole drama running from Edward III to Henry VII.

UNSIGNED EVENT BOOKS

Beaumont, Maegan. [The Darkwater Girls](#) (Bookouvure \$15.99). In the start of a new crime series, Georgia Fell, fresh out of the Military Police, has returned to her remote Michigan island hometown a decade after she ran away from her foster parents’ home after their golden boy son Lincoln McNamara appeared to have gotten another of the family’s fostered daughters pregnant. And Georgia returns as the heir to property. Fulfilling a promise made all those years ago to the other fostered children, she is summoned to meet the younger Rachel at a bar on the isolated tip of the isle. Late, she arrives to her worst nightmare: Rachel dead, purple bruises around her slim, beautiful neck. When the police rule out murder, Georgia knows it can’t be true. Reluctantly, she must turn to the person she’s been avoiding since she came home. Georgia can’t forgive single dad Lincoln, but he has an in with the dangerous crew operating out of the roadhouse where Rachel was killed. The question is, can she trust him? But before she can convince Lincoln to help her, another local girl goes missing....

Bell, Ted. [Sea Hawke](#) (Berkley \$28). Here is one of two books out this month where Bermuda! is a kind of spy’s playground (see our December Large Paperback Picks for the other). Here it is a haven for Lord Alex Hawke, whom I can best describe as a fusion of James Bond with Dirk Pitt as if written by H. Rider Haggard. It’s great fun and completely over the top with exuberant prose to match. Hawke’s plans for a little downtime with his eight-year-old son get derailed when his boss (think M), Lord David Trulove, dispatches him to Cuba to wreak havoc on a newly formed alliance of “all the Communist and socialist nations on earth,” which are plotting an attack on the West. Soon, the ageless hero is fighting sharks with his bare hands, organizing prison breaks, and sinking a troopship full of ISIS fighters, as well as a Chinese nuclear-powered submarine. Hawke does most of the damage from the deck of his armored yacht, which is equipped with a special laser-beam weapon designed by Tesla founder Elon Musk. Then, it’s down to the Amazon, where Hawke targets a huge enemy encampment deep upriver. And then.... It’s back to Bermuda in this swashbuckler.

McCallin, Luke. [From a Dark Horizon](#) (Penguin \$28). A high-stakes whodunit features German military intelligence officer Gregor Reinhardt, a dark prequel set in 1918 France that spares

nothing of the grimness of the trenches. One morning on the Western Front, Reinhardt, then a lieutenant in the German army, learns that one of the men under his command is accused of an atrocity. Private Willy Sattler is believed to have killed three German officers by blowing up a house where the officers were holding a secret meeting. Sattler apparently died by suicide shortly after the bombing, having been found “with a gunshot wound to his head and a pistol in his hand.” There’s plenty of reason to suspect Sattler, an explosives expert who planted a bomb with a delayed-action fuse in a Russian bunker the year before. Furthermore, Sattler had been demoted from the rank of sergeant after being charged with a variety of offenses, including assaulting a superior (Reinhardt himself), reckless endangerment of his own troops, and consorting with the enemy. Despite the mass of incriminating evidence, Reinhardt believes something more complicated is going on and investigates at great personal risk. McCallin paints the challenges of detection on the battlefield plausible, and tells it from the German point of view as it was losing the war.

A FEW GIFT IDEAS

We offer free gift wrap, [gift cards](#) mailed or digital, and usually, but this year delivery will be slow, international shipping

We have a large selection of [jigsaw puzzles](#) for gifting or your own fun

Aucoin, Matthew. [The Impossible Art: Adventures in Opera](#) (Farrar \$28). I have been a lover of opera since I was 12 and taken to Chicago’s Lyric Opera for my birthday to see Renata Tebaldi sing *La Traviata* in a dress strewn with fresh camellias. I have never recovered and continue to travel to opera venues. So naturally I am a sucker for this book which star soprano Renee Fleming describes thus: “Triple threat Matthew Aucoin: conductor, librettist, and composer, and now writer and thought leader. *The Impossible Art* sheds new light on the musicology, history, and personalities that bring opera to life, with a poet’s appreciation of the importance of the libretto, often overlooked. Personal, witty, and well-researched, it will have you rushing to recordings of works you know well, and ones you have never heard, to listen with Aucoin’s provocative insights in mind.”

Doughty, Todd. [Little Pieces of Hope: Happy-Making Things in a Difficult World](#) (Penguin \$16). Doughty began this as Instagram posts coincident with the pandemic onset, and has now turned the concept into a delightful book of everyday items and musings, with whimsical illustrations. His lists are eclectic: Old card catalogs. Someone believing in you. The whistle of a train. Bacon. Roger Angell writing about baseball. The smell of a cut lemon. David Sedaris’ recording of *Santaland Diaries*. National treasures John Lewis and Edna Lewis. “Let’s make it a true Daily Double.” A starry night. Lingering over that one last drink after the check arrives. Doughty advises readers to “Hug a little tighter. Take a moment.... Today is a good day.” Live with attention, gratitude, curiosity.”

Downton Abbey. [Downton Abbey 2: The Official Film Companion](#) (Weidenfeld \$40).

Hacker, Marilyn/Karthika Naïr. [A Different Distance: A Renga](#) (Milkweed \$16). Besides Amanda Gorman’s poetry releases, Indie Next recommends this: “Friends, poets, and Paris residents Marilyn Hacker and Karthika Naïr wrote a *renga* (a linked poem) over the course of a year, from March 2020 to March 2021 during

the full lockdown. Reading this collection is a lovely, lovely experience.”

Jordan, Tina/Noor Qasim, eds. [The New York Times Book Review: 125 Years of Literary History](#) (Clarkson Potter \$50). Editor Jordan and editing fellow Qasim collect the *Book Review*’s hits from more than 6,000 issues in this meticulously crafted celebration of the written word. The newspaper’s foray into covering literary news began on Sept. 18, 1851, though it wasn’t until Adolph S. Ochs became publisher in 1896 that the *NYTBR* first appeared as a stand-alone, eight-page supplement, which included reviews, plus information on the lives, deaths, and marriages of famous authors. Essays, interviews, reviews, and letters to the editor dating back to that year feature here and make for a sweeping summary of a century of literary tastes and trends: in 1900, the *Book Review* “rail[ed] against heroines who smoke in novels,” and in 1922, Jordan and Qasim write, “T. S. Eliot publishes *The Waste Land*. The Book Review pays no attention.” There are essays on literary scandals (such as “The Brouhaha over Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*” from 1905) and old advertisements (one from 1927 features a man impressing his date with his poetry knowledge). Each chapter is full of entertaining reviews and book covers (“Californians are not going to like this angry novel,” one reviewer wrote of *The Grapes of Wrath*), plus delightful photos. Literature lovers are in for a treat.

✎ Keating, HRF, ed. [Agatha Christie: First Lady of Crime](#) (Pegasus \$26.95). Back in print, a valuable and browsable collection of literary tributes to the Dame, published the year after her death and, this edition, with a bracing Introduction by Sophie Hannah. Christie is having a big Moment along with other Golden Age authors during the COVID years. Readers of today’s crime fiction reading masters of the past will gain extra fun in seeing how classic forms and subgenres are reimagined. Very big is the [And Then There Were None](#) construct, for example. John Sandford used *The ABC Murders* construct in Virgil Flowers’ thriller [Holy Ghost](#) in 2018.

Kilmeade, Brian. [The President and the Freedom Fighter](#) (Penguin \$28). Abraham Lincoln an Frederick Douglass: two American heroes, one white, one black, neither formally educated, moved from strong disagreement to friendship, and in the process changed the entire course of history.

King, Stephen. [Short Fiction: Boxed Set](#) (Scribner \$52). Now in one stunning collection, four of Stephen King’s most well-loved horror stories: *The Mist*, *Apt Pupil*, *The Body*, and *The Sun Dog*. Each standalone story is a riveting master class in short fiction from “the reigning King of American popular literature” (*Los Angeles Daily News*).

Patchett, Ann. [These Precious Days](#) (Harper \$26.99). In the opening piece, “Three Fathers,” a photograph captures the author with her biological father and two stepfathers. Patchett’s father recalls that Mike, her aspiring-writer stepfather, said to the other two men, “You know what she’s doing, don’t you? She’s going to wait until the three of us are dead and then she’s going to write about us. This is the picture that will run with the piece.” The entire collection of 22 essays, written in the throes of the pandemic, and thus contemplating humanity’s fleeting time on earth, brims with humor and humility. “How to Practice,” an essay about letting go of things no longer essential (“I had miscalcu-

lated the tools of adulthood when I was young, or I had miscalculated the kind of adult I would be”) ties into Patchett’s treasured typewriters “Patchett captures a spectrum of emotions brought on by the pandemic.”—Jennifer M. Brown. Note: We had some Signed copies but are down to a few which will probably be gone when you read this, but the Webstore listing will tell you.

McCartney, Paul. [The Lyrics](#) (Liveright \$100). As this celebration of the creative life of McCartney through 154 of his “most meaningful songs” is the Barnes & Noble Book of the Year, **it is unsurprisingly out of stock everywhere and presumably reprinting**. Whether in time for Christmas I can’t say. I also note that B&N is not discounting this expensive book. We have a replacement order in so all we can do is wait and see. Do watch the Peter Jackson documentary “The Beatles: Get Back” while you are waiting.

We do have a biography of another musical genius, the legendary B.B. King (1925-2015), to offer you: [King of the Blues: The Rise and Reign of B.B. King](#) (Grove \$30) by Daniel DeVise. “He is without a doubt the most important artist the blues has ever produced.”—Eric Clapton

Sapkowski, Andrzej. [The Last Wish Illustrated Edition](#) (Orbit \$40). Here is a deluxe hardcover edition of *The Last Wish*, the book that launched Andrzej Sapkowski’s groundbreaking epic fantasy series, introduced the world to the iconic monster hunter Geralt of Rivia; his beloved ward and the prophesied savior of the world, Ciri; and his ally and true love, the powerful sorceress Yennefer—and they took the world by storm. It features seven gorgeous new illustrations by seven award-winning artists. Since its first publication in Poland almost three decades ago, *The Witcher* series has become a *New York Times* and international bestseller, has inspired a hit Netflix show and multiple blockbuster video games, and has transported millions of fans to an epic world of magic and adventure. This is a stunning gift idea.

Slaght, Jonathan C. [Owls of the Eastern Ice](#) (\$18). I loved this book, such powerful nature writing, and was pleased it was nominated for several awards. You can [watch our zoom event with Slaght](#) which has a nifty slide show illustrating the book.

From the very first pages, Slaght, the Russia and North-east Asian Coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society, grips readers with vivid language and tight storytelling. His many months trekking through the icy wilderness to find and track rare fish owls—the largest owl on Earth—inform a narrative that blends field research, personal journey, and adventure writing. Part of the book’s success lies in the author’s ability to present the stakes and draw out the tension therein, making what could be a dry tale of bird-watching a compelling story of the necessity of conservation. In this case, the stakes include the owls’ disappearing habitat but also Slaght’s livelihood. “Fieldwork is often regular repetition of challenging or unpleasant activities,” writes the author, “an application of persistent pressure to a question until the answer finally emerges.” In the bitter cold terrain of eastern Russia, it’s that much more difficult. Throughout the book, Slaght lives up to his rugged-conservationist persona as he writes of helter-skelter snowmobile trips circumnavigating rushing rivers of ice, vodka-soaked encounters with village locals, and solitary, achingly beautiful nights observing the majestic owls firsthand. He is an engaging writer who imbues each scene with an intimate sense of place.

Symes, Sally. [Britannica’s First Big Book of Why](#) (\$25). For the ages 4-8 set, a fabulous collection of questions and answers, and a fabulous gift idea. The questions make it interactive with parents or older kids with lavishly illustrations and over 100 questions for kids about how the world works. Why does popcorn pop? Why does my tummy rumble? Why can’t penguins fly?

Then for fun, nudge this same group into an imaginary world with David Biedrzycki’s [Invasion of the Unicorns](#) (Charlesbridge \$16.99). Special Agent Bubble07 is undercover on planet earth, posing as a stuffed animal. His mission? To decide if his team of alien unicorns should invade the planet? To accomplish it he infiltrates the home of an Earthling girl. Will he lose it when encountering dog slobber, tea parties, and show and tell, and call for backup? Or will his alien heart be won over by snow days, story times, and snuggles?

GIFTS FOR TRAVELERS

Fiennes, Peter. [A Thing of Beauty: Travels in Mythical and Modern Greece](#) (Oneworld \$27.95). “I really enjoyed this mashup of travel writing, musings on Greek mythology, and thoughts about climate change and its effect on our world. Fiennes drew me in with his study of Lord Byron and from there I was happy to pop in on his travels.” I worry this book may be slow to arrive at The Pen

Hutt, Richard. [The Secret City: A Spy’s Guide to London](#) (Herb Lester Assoc. \$14). First, love the cover art, so old school, so perfect. This is a different kind of travel guide: The world’s great powers have waged discreet war in London’s streets. This conflict has played out across the city, often in plain sight, in leafy parks, tube stations, office blocks, bars and even chain restaurants. The Secret City charts locations where the course of history has been altered, from the early 20th century to the present day.

Share, Amber. [Subpar Parks](#) (Plume \$22). This guide to America’s National Parks has something for everyone: humor, history and travel tips. Amber Share’s funny, smart and majestically illustrated *Subpar Parks: America’s Most Extraordinary National Parks and Their Least Impressed Visitors* grew out of her awe in these natural spaces of grandeur, and her incredulous reaction to others’ complete irreverence toward them. Each entry offers a chance for Share to illustrate a park’s beauty and, in her hand-lettered type, to highlight a single tone-deaf one-star review. Her entries for 77 parks, organized by the National Park Service’s seven geographic regions, are as entertaining as they are informative. The Grand Canyon, the site that ignited a then 10-year-old Share’s passion for the great outdoors, garnered this one-star review—“A hole. A very, very large hole.” A review of Arches National Park—“Looks nothing like the license plate”—set off the light bulb for this project. Share attempts throughout to “include information about the indigenous history and relationships with these lands,” which held sacred meaning for the nations who resided there. I really enjoyed this book both as a committed visitor to our National Parks but as one marveling at my fellows.

Stone, George. [1000 Perfect Weekends: Great Getaways Around the Globe](#) (National Geographic \$40) is a beautiful, photo-packed offering sure to expand anyone’s bucket list. Destinations are grouped into 18 chapters, including beaches, mountains, cities, small towns, wildlife and nature themes, family-friendliness and off-grid options. Explore “kayaks like floating La-Z-Boy

recliners” on the Delaware River, coffee tours in Panama and a bee farm in the Philippines, alongside references to UNESCO sites, architecture, dining, adventures and a delightful ode to libraries in the chapter on “Historical Explorations.” Entries are short, punchy and accompanied by mouthwatering photographs and frequent, inspiring top-10 lists (sporting events, theme parks, spas). Adrenaline-fueled, enabled and accessible, pet-friendly: there is a perfect weekend for everyone in this tantalizing book, an obvious choice for the frequent flier and the armchair traveler alike.

Taylor, Rob/Samantha Brown. [The Road Trip Survival Guide](#) (Tiller \$17.99). Taylor, the creator of the 2TravelDads blog, is a friendly and informative travel guide perfect for both experienced road-trippers and novice voyagers alike. With five practical sections—Planning, Packing, Road Trip Food, Safety and Itineraries—Taylor has every aspect of road-tripping covered. He’s thought of everything, providing recipes for road-friendly snacks, items to buy to keep kids happier in the car, the best way to clean your car before the trip begins and amazing itinerary options. He also includes tips for making travel greener and seeking out restaurants and lodgings that support local economies, making it a perfect gift for the eco-conscious traveler.

COZY CRIMES

Adams, Ellery. [Ink and Shadows: A Witty & Page-Turning Southern Cozy](#) (\$15.95). Known for her window displays, Nora Pennington decides to showcase fictional heroines like Roald Dahl’s Matilda and Madeline Miller’s Circe for Halloween. But a family-values group disapproves of the magical themes and wastes no time launching a modern-day witch hunt. Suddenly, former friends and customers are targeting not only Nora and Miracle Books, but a new shopkeeper, Celeste, who’s been selling CBD oil products. Nora and her friends in the Secret, Book, and Scone Society are doing their best to put an end to the strife—but then someone puts an end to a life. Declared an accident, the ruling can’t explain the old book page covered with strange symbols and disturbing drawings left under Nora’s doormat. It’s up to Nora and the Secret, Book, and Scone Society to sort out the clues before more bodies turn up along with Celeste’s secrets.... This one is a bit late for Halloween but still fun. Or save it until next October on your bookshelf.

Burns, VM. [Killer Words](#) (Kensington \$15.95). Samantha Washington, owner of a mystery bookshop in North Harbor, Michigan, is eagerly awaiting copies of her newly published debut novel, *Murder at Wickfield Lodge*, a historical cozy set in England. Meanwhile, Detective Bradley Pitt of the North Harbor PD becomes suspect number one in the murder of mayoral candidate John Cloverton, who had accused him of police brutality. Even though Stinky has been a constant thorn in Samantha’s side for years, she, her grandma, and “the girls” from Shady Acres Retirement Village nonetheless step up to find the real killer. The geriatric detectives sort through local gossip while Samantha, who has a “knack for solving murder,” does the hands-on investigation. Whenever the case gets tricky, she takes refuge in her writing, treating readers to a parallel mystery for Lady Clara, her amateur sleuth, to solve. Change seems to be the theme in both Samantha’s “real” life and in her work-in-progress novel. Newcomers will have fun, while established fans will relish the evolution of the characters in the Mystery Bookshop mysteries and welcome Samantha’s bright new future.

Byrne, MV. [Isabel Puddles Investigates](#) (Kensington \$15.95). Isabel Puddles, formerly a hairdresser in Gull Harbor, Michigan, a summer resort town with a small year-round population, takes on her first case as a licensed PI. When Randolph “Trey” Bachmeier III, who has “the reputation of being an entitled and arrogant playboy,” disappears from a Great Lakes ferry before reaching Gull Harbor, his reclusive beer heiress aunt, Abigail Bachmeier, hires Isabel to investigate. While Isabel is still searching for Trey, Abigail asks her to find yet another missing relative. What Isabel discovers suggests the possibility that “three generations of Bachmeier men had all been murdered.” Some endearing characters and the appealing setting compensate in part for the many digressions, such as the chapter devoted to a jilting Abigail suffered 50 years earlier. This second in series promises a good fit for *Murder She Wrote* Fans with its small town Michigan setting and senior womensleuths. Or stretch these Mitten State Mysteries which began with [Meet Isabel Puddles](#) (\$15.95) to analogs of Garrison Keillor’s Lake Wobegone tales

Delany, Vicki. [A Curious Incident](#) (\$16.99). Lauren Tierney, is a little girl who comes to the Sherlock Holmes Bookshop and Emporium to beg Gemma Doyle to find her missing cat, Snowball. Gemma succeeds, only to have Lauren return with a new assignment. With ten dollars in hand, Lauren wants a consulting detective for a far bigger job: Her mother has been accused of murdering her garden club rival. Sheila Tierney’s garden, which everyone said was the one to beat for the West London Garden Club trophy, had been vandalized the night before the club’s early summer tour. Sheila confronted her former friend and gardening partner Anna Wentworth in a towering rage, and the women nearly came to blows. Later that night, after having won the trophy for best garden, Anna is found murdered and Sheila Tierney is the police’s prime suspect. Despite herself, and despite the disapproval of her police detective boyfriend Ryan Ashburton, the game is once again afoot.

Fox, Sarah. [Claret and Present Danger](#) (Kensington \$26). Shady Creek, Vermont, is the latest stop for the Trueheart Renaissance Faire and Circus in Fox’s charming fourth Literary Pub mystery. Pretending to step back in time is only part of the attraction, and pub owner Sadie Coleman is eager to see the circus. Initially, Sadie can’t get admission for the main attraction, illusionist Ozzie Stone, until one evening he walks into her pub and they discover they both grew up in Knoxville, Tenn., and he offers her a pair of tickets. Later, at the performance, Ozzie drops dead on stage, and the results of a toxicology test show he was poisoned. Sadie soon realizes Ozzie was not well-liked by his fellow performers, including a juggler and a soothsayer, among a plethora of potential suspects. When the detective investigating the case focuses on Sadie’s employee Damien Keys, who made a mysterious visit to the faire, she and her boyfriend, craft brewery owner Grayson Blake, set out to exonerate Damien. The tension rises with a second death.

Flower, Amanda. [Verse and Vengeance](#) (\$16.99). A bicycle race is not Charming Books proprietor Violet Waverly’s idea of a pleasant pastime. But police chief David Rainwater wheelie wants them to enter the Tour de Cascade as a couple, so she reluctantly consents. The Tour de Cascade is the brainchild of Violet’s Grandma Daisy. The race is a fundraiser to build the Cascade Springs Underground Railroad Museum. But not everyone in this Niagara Region village supports the race. As if

the bike race weren't tiring enough, pesky private investigator Joel Redding is snooping around Charming Books. It takes all of Violet's and Grandma Daisy's ingenuity to keep Redding from discovering the shop's magical essence—which communicates with Violet through books. When Redding perishes in an accident during the race, David discovers that the brake line of the private eye's bike was cut. Worse, Violet tops his list of suspects. As Emerson the tuxedo cat and resident crow Faulkner look on, Charming Books steers Violet to the works of Walt Whitman to solve the crime....

Gilbert, Victoria. [Renewed for Murder](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). This Blue Ridge Library mystery finds library director Amy Webber Muir and her dancer/choreographer husband preparing for a weekend arts festival at Leeland High School in Taylorsford, Virginia. Among those attending are former members of the school's chamber choir, who are gathering for a 50th reunion performance. When an unknown woman turns up shot to death in the gazebo of Zelda Shoemaker, a former choir member, Chief Deputy Brad Tucker views Zelda with suspicion, since the victim was seen visiting Zelda the day before and Zelda doesn't want to talk about her visitor. A blackmail letter found in the victim's pocket also points to Zelda's culpability. Amy and her Aunt Lydia, who's been a friend of Zelda's since elementary school, are determined to clear her name. Tenacious Amy uses her library research skills to delve into Zelda's past, but what she uncovers only makes her question Zelda's innocence,

Kuhn, Cynthia. [How to Book a Murder](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99) is a series launch from Agatha Award winner Kuhn and introduces sisters Lucy and Emma Starrs. Lucy took over running the Starlit Bookshop in Silvercrest, Colorado, after their parents' untimely death, and is now assisted by Emma, who despite a PhD in English has forsaken an academic career. With the bookstore on the verge of closing, Emma organizes an Edgar Allan Poe-themed mystery party to help raise money to save it. Emma's willing to do so even though the party is in honor of wealthy Tabitha Baxter, her high school nemesis. The party takes a macabre turn when Tabitha's husband, who's dressed as Poe's detective C. Auguste Dupin, turns up murdered. Matters go from bad to worse when the clues point to Emma as the killer, and handsome Det. Jake Hollister, who investigates, unsettles Emma just as much as he did when they were in high school. The tension rises as the sisters and their mystery writer aunt set out at their peril to solve their own whodunit. Cozy fans will look forward to seeing more of the Starrs sisters

Lush, Tara. [Cold Brew Corpse: A Coffee Lover's Mystery](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). In the sequel to 2020's [Grounds for Murder](#) (\$26.99), Lana Lewis, a former Miami crime reporter who has returned home to Devil's Beach, Fla., can't resist the chance to do some freelance work for the local newspaper by looking into the disappearance of Raina Rose, the owner of Dante's Inferno, the yoga studio next door to Perkatory, Lana's coffee shop. Lana's search for answers leads to conflict with the paper's newly hired and extremely flirtatious photographer, Cody Graves, and, more importantly, with Lana's hunky love interest, the Devil's Beach police chief. When Raina's body turns up in a nature preserve, Lana discovers a host of murder suspects connected to Dante's Inferno, including Raina's boyfriend, who helped run the studio.

MacRae, Molly. [Heather and Homicide](#) (\$16.95). True crime writer Heather Kilbride arrives in the seacoast town of Inversgail, Scotland, to research a recent murder for her new book. But if that's true, why does she seem more interested in William Clark, a shadowy lawyer with no connection to the murder? Her nosy questions arouse the suspicions of Constable Hobbs, the members of a local writers' group, and Janet Marsh and her crew of amateur sleuths at Yon Bonnie Books. Heather's unconventional research methods prove deadly when Janet discovers her lifeless body. Except the "body" turns out to be a dummy dressed-up to look like Heather. Meanwhile, Heather is sitting at a safe distance observing Janet's reactions. Then Heather is found dead—again—sprawled at the base of an ancient standing stone; and this time it's for real. Clutched in her hand is a valuable miniature book last seen at Yon Bonnie Books, and now the police want to know how Heather, the miniature book, and Janet are all connected in this 4th in a cozy series with a charming Scottish setting.

✦ Maxwell, Alyssa. [A Deadly Endowment](#) (Kensington \$26). In another perceptive look at England between the war, "Maxwell brings it all to the table: colorful characters, a charming Cotswold setting, lots of suspects, a dismissive chief inspector and his kind subordinate, plucky ladies who are smarter than the police, a hidden treasure, and a hint of romance. This is an exemplary cozy," says *PW*. Lady Phoebe Renshaw of Foxwood Hall has convinced her conservative grandparents, Lord and Lady Wroxley, to give house tours in the hope of boosting their faltering bottom line. The first tour group consists of village schoolchildren and members of the Greater Gloucestershire Historical Society. Lady Phoebe and Eva Huntford, her maid and confidante, soon find it difficult to keep the group together and are annoyed by snarky comments and people slipping away. When putative historical society author Arvina Bell is found strangled in the library, the lazy chief inspector ends up arresting her son, but Phoebe and Eva, who've had much experience of murder, are far from convinced that he's the guilty party. Luckily, Eva's boyfriend, constable Miles Brannock, is on their side when the murder of another historical society member confirms their suspicion that some sleuthing is in order.

✦ Shaw, M B. [Murder at the Castle](#) (Pegasus \$26.95). Tilly Bagshawe, writing under a pseudonym, continues her contemporary series harking back to the Golden Age. Portrait painter Iris Grey from London heads to the wilds of Scotland, to paint beautiful, young, and twice divorced American socialite Kathy Miller, who's engaged to gruff, elderly, and immensely wealthy Jock MacKinnon, baron of Pitfeldy Castle. When Iris arrives, she finds the castle's vibe to be "less Downton Abbey and more Scooby Doo," and the loquacious intended bride to be an overflowing fount of gossip. While Iris and Kathy are on a walk, Kathy's two tiny, excitable dogs uncover the skeletal remains of two bodies. DI Stuart Haley investigates, and soon the no-nonsense policeman is asking Iris to help him discover the victims' identities by using her social media platform, which she successfully used in a previous case of hers. A Facebook message from Italy has Iris heading for Venice, where she finds clues to long-buried crimes and corrosive family secrets.

CLASSICS

✦ Carr, John Dickson. [The Eight of Swords](#) (American Mystery Classics \$15.95). Dr. Gideon Fell is an important Golden Age of Mystery figure. And here he, despite the Britishness, is in a welcome American Mystery Classic reissue. “Carr (1906–1977) and his Chestertonian sleuth, Gideon Fell, gets involved in a bizarre murder case after Scotland Yard Chief Inspector Hadley, a close friend, is consulted about the odd behavior of the Bishop of Mappleham. The cleric’s sanity is questioned after he’s spotted sliding down a banister while a guest at the Grange, the country home of Colonel Standish, a partner in the firm publishing Hadley’s memoirs. The bishop also pulls the hair of one of his host’s servants, because he suspects she’s wearing a wig to disguise her true identity of Piccadilly Jane, a notorious thief. Things turn more serious after someone connected to the Grange is fatally shot, with a card with ‘eight swords painted on it’ placed near the victim’s hand. Wry meta elements enhance the fair-play plot. Toward the end, for example, a character advises Fell to minimize talking about the personalities involved because the “public will only glance at this chapter, to make sure it hasn’t been cheated by having evidence withheld.”—*PW*

Carr, John Dickson. [The Corpse in the Waxworks](#) (Poisoned Pen \$14.99). I mentioned this British Library Crime Classic before but here is a sparkling review by Kevin Howell: John Dickson Carr’s deliciously florid 1932 novel begins with the discovery of a young woman, stabbed to death and left floating in the Seine. She was last seen entering a local wax museum but never seen leaving. Henri Bencolin, examining magistrate of the Paris police, and his American assistant, Jeff Marle (who narrates the novel), explore the spooky Grand Guignol-flavored wax museum for clues and discover a second murdered young woman. She’s been stabbed in the back and draped over the arms of the wax figure of the Satyr of the Seine. The two murdered young women, both daughters of former Cabinet ministers, had been best friends. Another clue leads Marle to investigating undercover at a very secretive sex club where its affluent members all wear masks.

Carr (1906-1977) is best known for his impossible crime/locked room mysteries, but *Waxworks* is an atmospheric whodunit bordering on improbable melodrama. Yet what atmosphere! Opening with two Edgar Allan Poe quotes, the rest of the novel is steeped in the same foreboding doom and deliriously overripe descriptions of musty halls of horror and a decadent, creepy sex club. Even with Carr playing fair with clues, few readers will guess the murderer’s identity before the exciting reveal.

Poisoned Pen Press’s reprint includes two excellent bonuses: an insightful introduction by Martin Edwards and the rare 1928 Inspector Bencolin short story “The Murder in Number Four”—a humorous locked-room murder mystery set on a moving train. A Golden Age mystery treat!

✦ Lombard, Nap. [Murder’s a Swine](#) (Poisoned Pen \$14.99). Gordon Neil Stewart (1912–1999) and Pamela Hansford Johnson (1912–1981) make good use of their experiences as WWII air raid wardens in this light whodunit written under the Lombard pseudonym, first published in 1943. To escape the rain, Clem Poppett, an unprepossessing London junior warden with “the face of an adored pet rabbit,” pops into a shelter, where he and Agnes Kinghof, a resident of the building above the shelter, notice a stench emanating from a sandbag. It proves to contain a body

“with a long dead face, phosphorescent, greenish-brown in the torch light, hideously blotched.” The corpse is eventually identified as Reg Coppenstall, the brother of another building resident, Adelaide Sibley, who’d not seen Reg in 30 years. Agnes and her husband, a Royal Artillery captain, investigate. “The puzzle deepens after Adelaide is frightened by a blue pig’s head that appears outside her window, and she receives an ominous note... The Kinghofs’ banter and humor will remind many of Nick and Nora Charles. This exemplifies the *raison d’être* for the British Library Crime Classics Series.”

✦ Medawar, Tony, ed. [Bodies from the Library 4](#) (Harper \$16.99). This annual anthology of rare stories of crime and suspense brings together tales from the Golden Age of Detective Fiction for the first time in book form, including a short novel by Christianna Brand. Here for the first time are three never-before-published mysteries by Edmund Crispin, Ngaio Marsh and Leo Bruce, and two pieces written for radio by Gladys Mitchell and H. C. Bailey—the latter featuring Reggie Fortune, together with a newly unearthed short story by Ethel Lina White that inspired Hitchcock’s *The Lady Vanishes*, and a complete short novel by Christianna Brand. This diverse mix of tales by some of the world’s most popular classic crime writers contains something for everyone including biographies supplied by Medawar.

NEW IN HARDCOVER

Andrews, Brian/Jeffrey Wilson. [WEB Griffin: Rogue Asset](#) (Putnam \$28). Continuing the Griffin franchise, the co-authors of the Tier One series bring back CG “Charley” Castillo when he was an Army Colonel. When secretary of state Frank Malone is kidnapped while attending a Middle East summit in Cairo, President Natalie Cohen responds by reactivating the Presidential Agent program. She calls Castillo, the original Presidential Agent, out of retirement and asks him to take charge of the mission to rescue Malone. The hitch is he’ll be helped by U.S. Marine Corps Captain P.K. “Pick” McCoy Jr., who’s slated to become the next Presidential Agent. Bored with sitting on his front porch, Charley accepts the mission, but he’s less than enthusiastic about his role as trainer to the man who’ll be taking his job. “If the main plot follows predictable lines, Andrews and Wilson supply plenty of credible action in the Griffin mold, while the mentoring subplot provides extra interest.”

Belle, Kimberly. [My Darling Husband](#) (Park Row \$28.99). Library Reads recommends this which also comes in a simultaneous paperback release as noted below in New in Large Paperbacks: “Atlanta restaurateur Cam Lasky seemingly has it all, until a fire at his eatery and a terrifying home invasion threaten to destroy all he holds dear. With multiple perspectives adding to the mystery, this is another clever, fast-paced thriller from Belle. For readers of Lisa Gardner and Chevy Stevens.”

Blanchard, Alice. [The Witching Tree](#) (St Martins \$27.99). Burning Lake, NY, and cop Natalie Lockhart must have a kind of cult following which I have missed. In this her third investigation, one “infusing a procedure with an ambient horror vite,” One Veronica Manes, a “white light wiccan” and leader of the of the town’s two traditional covens, is found murdered, dismembered actually, on the train tracks dressed in a Halloween witch costume. Natalie, blessed with a wealthy and empathetic lover, is about to resign from the cop shop but elects to join Homicide Lt. Luke Pittman (erotic vibes here) in investigating.

We end with loose ends so I recommend you start with [Natalie's first two cases](#).

Burgess, Ann Wolbert/Steven Matthew Constantine. [Killer by Design](#) (Hachette \$28). For you forensics and true crime enthusiasts, a fascinating book. Lurking beneath the progressive activism and sex positivity in the 1970-80s, a dark undercurrent of violence rippled across the American landscape. With reported cases of sexual assault and homicide on the rise, the FBI created a specialized team—the “Mindhunters” better known as the Behavioral Science Unit—to track down the country’s most dangerous criminals. And yet narrowing down a seemingly infinite list of potential suspects seemed daunting at best and impossible at worst—until Dr. Burgess stepped on the scene. She is a forensic researcher who is famous for her pioneering research in assessing and treating trauma in sexual assault victims. She’s also the inspiration for Wendy Carr in the Netflix series *Mindhunter*.

Here Burgess reveals how her pioneering research on sexual assault and trauma caught the attention of the FBI, and steered her right into the middle of a chilling serial murder investigation in Nebraska. Over the course of the next two decades, she helped the budding unit identify, interview, and track down dozens of notoriously violent offenders, including Ed Kemper (“The Co-Ed Killer”), Dennis Rader (“BTK”), Henry Wallace (“The Taco Bell Strangler”), Jon Barry Simonis (“The Ski-Mask Rapist”), and many others. As one of the first women trailblazers within the FBI’s hallowed halls, Burgess knew many were expecting her to crack under pressure and recoil in horror—but she was determined to protect future victims at any cost. This book pulls us directly into the investigations as she experienced them, interweaving never-before-seen interview transcripts and crime scene drawings alongside her own vivid recollections to provide unprecedented insight into the minds of deranged criminals and the victims they left behind. Along the way, Burgess also paints a revealing portrait of a formidable institution on the brink of a seismic scientific and cultural reckoning—and how criminal profiling has developed over the years.

I add that if you read true crime, especially stories of cults, try Sylvie Perry’s novel [The Hawthorne School](#) (Crooked Lane \$25.99), wherein a single mom raising an unruly four year old son enrolls him in a school that boasts an atypical teaching style. And it truly has one!

✦ Clements, Oliver. [The Queen’s Men](#) (Atria \$27). As she travels through Waltham Forest, Queen Elizabeth I is ambushed by masked gunmen who leave her carriage riddled with holes before disappearing into the night. The Queen’s Private Secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham, is tasked with finding the perpetrators, about whom they know precious little. But someone alerted the gunman to the route of the Queen’s carriage, and Walsingham knows that the assassins will not stop until she’s dead. While Queen Elizabeth’s Privy Council debates how to best secure the throne in the wake of the attack and Catholic Spain’s further intrusion into the Low Countries, the queen herself searches for the ultimate weapon to protect her country and throne: Greek fire, the recipe of which disappeared with the collapse of the Byzantine Empire. She orders her friend John Dee—scientist, philosopher, and spy—to rediscover this vital secret, despite his misgivings. For he understands that in a world fraught with coded messages, ruthless adversaries, and deadly plot, his mission to secure his nation’s future may prove impossible without good

intelligence. See Fiona Buckley’s new Large Paperback below for more Elizabethan spy drama.

✦ Cornwell, Bernard. [Sharpe’s Assassin](#) (Harper \$27.99). “Last seen in 2007’s *Sharpe’s Fury*, the indestructible Richard Sharpe has one more battle to fight in bestseller Cornwell’s rousing 24th novel featuring the English rifleman. Born in the gutter to a London prostitute, Sharpe has risen in the ranks through his bravery and now, as a lieutenant colonel, leads a battalion headed for Paris after Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo. His benefactor, the Duke of Wellington, has a mission for him in the city—to rescue a British spy who’s keen on returning the artwork the French have looted from the rest of Europe to its rightful owners. He must also track down a rumored faction of Frenchmen determined to continue resistance and contend with a cowardly English major who flogged him for no reason years before when he was an ordinary soldier. Banter between Sharpe and his Irish sidekick, Sergeant Patrick Harper, adds humor. The action builds to a high-stakes sword fight between Sharpe and a French officer that’s resolved in an unexpected and satisfying way. Series fans will be pleased to see Sharpe retire from the army on a high note.”—*PW*

Diliberto, Gioia. [Coco at the Ritz](#) (Pegasus \$25.95). Biographer and novelist Diliberto uses the scant pieces of historical evidence about Coco’s wartime years to imagine her personal and professional motivations, offering glimpses into her childhood and rise from poverty to fashion royalty and her deep need for male companionship. Diliberto reveals that Coco’s complex temperament and intricate web of relationships defy easy categorization. She was talented and powerful, but also vain and manipulative, and strongly anti-Semitic. Recommend to fans of Marie Benedict, Melanie Benjamin, and Jennifer Chiaverini.

Dovalpage, Teresa. [Death Under the Perseids](#) (Soho \$27.95). Dovalpage continues to bring contemporary Cuba into her mysteries which here embraces Mercedes Spivey, a Cuban woman who has made some questionable choices in her romantic partners. Her husband Nolan who divorced his wife to marry her has lost his job at a conservative college in Gainesville, Florida, where they settled. Mercedes is working part-time at a pet-grooming salon owned by her best girlfriend. When the couple wins a five-day short cruise to Cuba it seems like a change to reboot their marriage and lives, even if the prize seems suspiciously fortunate. So they sail away, and so the prize proves to be suspicious. What happened is revealed at the end rather than Mercedes or any one in law enforcement solving it. Go with the flow for the atmosphere and the food.

Ernshaw, Shea. [A History of Wild Places](#) (Atria \$27). Travis has a gift: when he touches something, he experiences the memories associated with it. His path to find a missing author leads him to a remote commune [called Pastoral]. Then he too disappears. When one of the residents of that commune finds his truck years later, he realizes that the darkness they fled may already be in Pastoral.... Read this one for the pace, not the credibility. The obvious analog is Kelly Armstrong’s Casey Duncan series set in an isolated community in the Klondike.

The Indie Next Pick proves credibility matters more to mystery fans than to general readers: “This twisty thriller gave me similar vibes to *The Village* and absolutely kept me on my toes! YA author Shea Ernshaw really hit it out of the park with this brilliant adult debut.”

✎ Fowler, Christopher. [London Bridge is Falling Down](#) (Random \$28.99). When ninety-one-year-old Amelia Hoffman dies in her top-floor flat on a busy London road, it's considered an example of what has gone wrong with modern society: she slipped through the cracks in a failing system. But detectives Arthur Bryant and John May of the Peculiar Crimes Unit have their doubts. Mrs. Hoffman was once a government security expert, though no one can quite remember her. When a link emerges between the old lady and a diplomat trying to flee the country, it seems that an impossible murder has been committed. Mrs. Hoffman wasn't the only one at risk. Bryant is convinced that other forgotten women with hidden talents are also in danger. And, curiously, they all own models of London Bridge. With the help of some of their more certifiable informants, the detectives follow the strangest of clues in an investigation that will lead them through forgotten alleyways to the city's oldest bridge in search of a desperate killer.

You fans of the Peculiar Crimes Unit's marvelous, quirky, clever mysteries, like me, will be sad to read this note from Fowler: "I'd planned to write one murder mystery, not this series of 20 books, particularly as I was writing standalone fiction and nonfiction at the same time. During the pandemic, I went for a Covid test, and was diagnosed instead with terminal cancer. Mortality concentrates the mind wonderfully, and so I've become extremely productive lately. Still, it played a big part in the decision to end the series." When asked why London has surprised him over the decades of writing the series, he adds: "Its incredible resilience and consistency. You think certain things have gone for good, and it turns out they haven't at all. Much has stayed the same, and London characters continue to evolve. Their strangeness is still there; now it's just a different kind of strangeness. A major theme of the books is that our national problem is not race but class—something our government has done nothing to dispel."

✎ Glenconner, Lady Anne. [A Haunting at Holkham](#) (Mobius \$26.99). It's Christmas 1943 and Lady Anne Coke has returned to Holkham Hall from Scotland. But her home is now an army base, with large sections out of bounds. And 11-year-old Anne is in the care of a new governess, whom she hates and believes to be hiding something. At least her beloved grandfather is there with her, to share stories and keep her entertained. But even though she's been told to stay away from certain parts of the house, Anne knows secrets about the hall that others do not; the passageways and the cellars that allow her to move around unnoticed, watching. And when mysterious events lead to a murder and disappearance, Anne is determined to uncover the truth. For our final **British Crime Book of the Month for 2021, carrying over from November**, a country house murder at Christmas seems just right... Think *Downton Abbey* crossed with Agatha Christie's [Hercule Poirot's Christmas](#)....

✎ Griffiths, Elly. [The Midnight Hour](#) (Harper \$25). September, 1965. Brighton Police Constable Meg Connolly, DI Bob Willis, and PIs Emma Holmes and Sam Collins look into the poisoning of theatrical impresario Bert Billington in nearby Rottingdean, Sussex. Finding a long history of serial affairs and abuses of power, they also encounter hints that Billington's murder may be connected to the deaths of two performers and a child. Possible suspects include Billington's widow, Verity Malone, and his sons; actor Max Mephisto, who had an affair with Verity; Eric Prentice, who was a musical performer in variety; and Alma Saunders,

who served as Verity's dresser when Verity was a music hall star. An additional death and mysterious figures seen in a graveyard and at murder locales add complications. Sober themes on the oppression of women and the achievement of justice even after many years provide a touching complexity. This is for Griffiths fans and new readers alike. Note: We have 3 [Signed UK editions](#) left (\$46).

Hannibal, James R. [Wolf Soldier: Lightraider Academy Series #1](#) (Enclave Escape \$22.99). A bookseller writes about the fate of the dragons at play. "Reading *Wolf Soldier* felt to me what it must have been like for others to read the debut Harry Potter or Wheel of Time entry. This seminal young adult effort is that good. The action involves an ancient order a long time ago in a world far, far away. Much like the Jedi of the Star Wars saga, the Light-raider Order vanished generations ago. But new threats to this old world requires their return in the form of five young knight initiates, led by the typical predestined hero from modest means, Connor Enarian. It will ultimately fall on young Connor to thwart an invasion by an especially venal enemy threatening his entire world. *Wolf Soldier* echoes Orson Scott Card's Ender series in all the right ways. Hannibal handles genre tropes with skill and aplomb, managing to make a well-worn form seem fresh and new. This exquisite adventure is a great read for kids of all ages," but is specifically aimed at teens.

Higashino, Keigo. [Silent Parade](#) (St Martins \$27.99). Postponed from October, a new investigation for Detective Galileo. I repeat the Starred Review for an author Rob enthusiastically devours: "In Higashino's stellar fourth mystery translated into English featuring physics professor Manabu Yukawa, the Tokyo police call in Yukawa to consult on a baffling case. The remains of Saori Namiki, a budding singing star who disappeared at age 19 three years earlier, have been found in a burned-down house. The house also contained the body of the stepmother of Kanichi Hasunuma, the prime suspect in the murder of a 12-year-old girl 23 years earlier. Charges were brought against Hasunuma, but were ultimately dismissed, leaving him free, and possibly the killer of Namiki as well. The challenge of finding more than circumstantial evidence against Hasunuma intrigues Yukawa, who must also crack a new homicide whose victim may have been killed in a sealed room. Higashino never allows plot to overwhelm his characterizations and explores the unintended consequences of law enforcement reliance on confessions to obtain convictions. In addition to brilliant twists, he provides shout-outs to impossible crime fiction classics. Golden age fans will welcome this flawless blend of police procedural and fair-play detection." Japan is producing some superior crime fiction; it's a big market there.

Imrie, Celia. [Orphans of the Storm](#) (Bloomsbury \$27). "This is a reconstruction, based on exhaustive mining of musty records more than a century old, of how two French toddlers, a 2-year-old and a 4-year-old, wound up on a *Titanic* lifeboat. An afterword by writer Fidelis Morgan, Imrie's researcher and fellow actress, reveals that this painstaking investigation also removes blame from the little boys' mother, Marcella Navratil, where history had assigned it, and places it squarely on the shoulders of their father, couturier Michael Navratil. Fleeing divorce, a custody battle, and bankruptcy in Nice, with more than 30,000 embezzled francs, Michael kidnaps the boys and, impersonating a business associate, boards the *RMS Titanic*, where his fateful comeuppance awaits. Meanwhile, New York socialite Margaret Hays is touring

Europe with friends. Bored with travel and wanting to go home, she books her passage to New York on the magnificent new ocean liner. At sea, the three characters' arcs collide."—*Kirkus Reviews*. The first half of this novel drags but gains momentum as the ocean liner sails.

Jay, Gerald. [The Hanged Man's Tale](#) (NAL \$25.95). At the start of Jay's excellent sequel to 2011's [The Paris Directive](#) (\$15), completed by his wife, son, and grandson after his death in 2020, the Paris authorities are on high alert during the 2002 Bastille Day parade, whose theme is Franco-American friendship in the wake of 9/11. While President Jacques Chirac is riding in an open car on the Champs Élysées, Police Commandant Paul Mazarelle foils an assassin trying to shoot Chirac. A few days later, the body of PI Alain Berthaud is found hanging upside down in a Paris canal tunnel with a tarot card in his jacket bearing the sign of the Hanged Man. Mazarelle investigates, and other similar murders, with the victim strangled and a tarot card of the Hanged Man left behind, follow. When he hears rumors of a major probe of police corruption, Mazarelle begins to think the case is more complex than it initially seemed. Eventually, he looks into the possibility of a link to the assassination attempt on Chirac. Combining rational twists with sophisticated characterizations, Jay (the pseudonym of Gerald Jay Goldberg) and his collaborators never sacrifice plausibility for plot surprises. Note that Jay's family plans to continue the series.

Kapelke-Dale, Rachel. [The Ballerinas](#) (St Martins \$27.99) is "a debut novel set in the hothouse atmosphere of the Paris Opera Ballet academy as three students grow up, compete, forge friendships and embark on a trail of destruction. For the longest time, despite Delphine Léger's offhandedly declaring herself a killer on the very first page, I struggled to classify this as a crime novel. But Kapelke-Dale has thought through the larger picture, and examined how trauma and asymmetries of power derail so many dancers. There's often a personal — and, in this case, criminal — price to pay for success."—*NYTBR*.

This thriller gets a December Indie Next Pick: "Female friendship and betrayal set against the intriguing milieu of ballet — where ambition is set against a ticking clock. *The Ballerinas* is a glittering story with compelling characters and an unexpected yet satisfactory twist." Library Reads makes it a Pick for December too: "Delphine is returning to Paris to choreograph her own ballet. Here she meets up with her lifelong friends and fellow dancers Margaux and Lindsay. This absorbing and thrilling character-driven novel explores the world of ballet and its mysteries and secrets. Give to fans of *Luster*, *Trust Exercise*, and *My Dark Vanessa*."

Keegan, Claire. [Small Things Like These](#) (Grove \$20). During the weeks leading up to Christmas, Bill Furlong, a coal merchant and family man, works his busiest season. Early one morning, while delivering an order to the local convent, Bill makes a discovery which forces him to confront both his past and the complicit silences of a town controlled by the church. Here is the #1 Indie Next Pick for December: "Claire Keegan works magic in this small novel about a truly good man in 1985 Ireland, and the difficult decision he faces at Christmastime. Keegan captures the extraordinary courage required to live an ordinary life with honor."

Lee, Fonda. [Jade Legacy](#) (Orbit \$30). In the epic finale to Lee's Green Bone Saga series following [Jade City and Jade War](#), the rival clans of No Peak and the Mountain continue their multi-generational struggle for dominance over their island home of Kekon. The No Peak Kaul and Mountain Ayt families are locked in a bitter decades-long blood feud fueled by honor and the bioenergetic jade that grants users phenomenal abilities. While the war between their clans plays out in myriad ways—from economic manipulation and political intrigue to vicious street duels—the far-flung family members and their allies find time for more personal and intimate dramas. As the older generation slows down, retires, or dies, younger representatives look for a way to end the conflict once and for all. "Sprawling, complex, and steeped in Asian culture and sensibilities, this impressive contemporary fantasy slowly unwinds over many years, capturing the feel of time passing and eras changing even as it lingers in the most pivotal moments. Lee expertly balances conflict and growth on both individual and societal levels, giving this massive story weight, as every decision can potentially change the world."

✦ Malliet, G M. [Death in Cornwall](#) (Severn \$28.99). To celebrate their engagement, DCI Arthur St. Just and Portia De'Ath visit the quiet village of Maidsfell in Cornwall. Upon arriving they find the villagers in an uproar over plans to redevelop the local seafront. The fishermen want to build a new slipway to aid their business, but many residents worry it will spoil the view for the tourists who help drive the economy. After a heated village meeting on the issue, St. Just overhears an argument involving Lord Bodwally—an unpopular aristocrat staunchly opposed to the plans. Later, Bodwally's lifeless body is discovered. It's murder. Although Bodwally was disliked, who'd go so far as to kill him? St. Just, although an outsider from Cambridge, feels compelled to help local authorities investigate. Is Bodwally's death linked to the seafront, his suspect business dealings, or a secret from the past? One thing is certain, the fallout threatens to change Maidsfell forever.... The first entry in the DCI St. Just series, *Death of a Cozy Writer*, no longer in print, won the Agatha Award for Best First Novel and was nominated for Macavity and Anthony Awards. This one is charming and full of local color although I do think the wrap up falls somewhat apart. But then is the plot the thing? **This is my Suggested British Crime Club Book of the Month for December.**

Natsukawa, Sosuke. [The Cat Who Saved Books](#) (Harper \$24.99). From the #1 bestselling author in Japan comes Natsukawa's charming English-language debut, wherein a talking tabby shows a shut-in teen that his love of books is his superpower, as they undergo labyrinthine literary adventures. Cats have long appeared in Japanese fiction, especially popularized in *I Am a Cat* (1906) by the father of modern Japanese literature, Natsume Soseki. Joining recent 21st-century mega-successes—[The Travelling Cat Chronicles](#) by Hiro Arikawa, for example—we meet high school student Rintaro Natsuki, already an orphan, who has now lost his beloved grandfather. Rintaro is a *hikikomori*—a shut-in, only comfortable in grandpa's secondhand bookstore—unable even to go to school. He's supposed to be packing up in preparation for living with an aunt he barely knows. But over the 10 days before the moving van is scheduled to arrive, Rintaro will prove to himself that he is stronger than he ever thought, thanks to a talking ginger tabby cat named Tiger.

Library Reads sums this gem up for you: “A used bookstore, a grieving teen with an appreciation of reading, and a talking cat! What more could you ask of a fantasy? Throw in a mission to free lost and damaged books and a bit of readers’ advisory, and you have a thoughtful exploration of the truths behind the pleasures of reading. For fans of author Roselle Lim and *The Little Paris Bookshop*.”

Nellums, Eliza. [The Bone Cay](#) (Crooked Lane \$27.99). This atmospheric story will give you a preview of how destructive the rising wind and waters will be to Key West, Florida, where the Whimbrel Estate, home to revered poet Isobel Reyes, a kind of cross between Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath, lived a short reclusive life ended by her suicide. Her father reported she walked straight off the dock and drowned back in 1918. Magda Trudell is the estate’s manager and determined to raise Isobel’s reputation to a higher level despite short funds. So when a monster hurricane demands evacuation, she sits tight. A mistake. Especially when a young girl and her father, a sometime local handyman, also take refuge. It spins out from there. Nellums explores culture and celebrity as well as caregiving which overcome a so-so thriller plot. I liked visiting Key West with her.

Ramisetti, Kirithana. [Dava Shastri’s Last Day](#) (Grand Central \$28). The Indie Next Pick: “I’m a fan of obituaries — a life whittled down to a handful of words reveals a great deal. In *Dava Shastri’s Last Day*, we see the glorious backfire of secretly outliving your deepest secrets. Intriguing, fast-paced, thought provoking.” Indeed this excellent novel is. Widow Dava, uber rich, at age 70 still head of a business empire and a clan of four adult children, summons them to her private island to break two pieces of news: she has a terminal brain cancer and has arranged her own death; ever curious and valuing her reputation for philanthropy, the arts, and empowering women, she has also arranged for her obituary to run early so she can read its various iterations. She believes she is in control, but it doesn’t work out like that. In its way this is structured like a Christie country-house murder, with its cast and their secrets exposed, but there is no crime. Ramisetti does a fine job depicting celebrity culture along with resentments, traumas, love, and really, redemption. **Highly recommended to members of our Notable New Fiction Book of the Month Club.**

✦ Ripley, Mike. Mr. [Campion’s Wings](#) (Severn \$28.99). British gentleman sleuth Albert Campion has a deeply personal mystery to solve. In 1965, Campion is anticipating a triumphant day for his wife, Amanda, who’s slated to receive an honorary doctorate of science from Cambridge University for her work in aeronautical engineering. The occasion is marred when Amanda’s nabbed at the post-ceremony reception by the Special Branch and taken into custody on suspicion that she violated the Official Secrets Act. The charges stem from her role in a secret program to design a new military aircraft, the Goshawk Project, and Campion sets about probing who actually leaked sensitive information about it, possibly to Soviet military intelligence, at a time when the Kim Philby defection to Moscow is still an open sore. The puzzle deepens after one of the other people working on Goshawk dies in a suspicious accident at the project’s base. Ripley again marries a crafty plotline with a persuasive evocation of Allingham’s style and characterizations

Rubin, Ada. [Gladys the Magic Chicken](#) (Putnam \$18.99). Illustrated by Adam Rex. A perfect combination of silly and profound. Is Gladys magic, or do the humans who believe in her make their own magic? Follow Gladys’s roundabout journey through a slightly less than historical version of ancient times and no matter what your age, you will believe, or just have a good time. For young readers, a holiday treat.

✦ Saunders, Kate. [The Mystery of the Sorrowful Maiden](#) (Bloomsbury \$26). Set in 1853, this well written and absorbing third Laetitia Rodd mystery finds Laetitia, genteel London private investigator, an archdeacon’s widow, and the very epitome of respectability, considering taking on the case of Sarah Transome. Sarah’s husband, celebrated actor-manager Thomas Transome, seems set on expelling his wife, who’s the mother of his three grown daughters, from their home. Laetitia decides to accept, as she puts it, “one of the saddest cases I have ever encountered, though it was not sad to begin with. In true theatrical style, the programme commenced with a farce and ended with a tragedy.” While visiting the theater district, Laetitia encounters Inspector Thomas Blackbeard of the Metropolitan Police, who has come to investigate a body found beneath the long abandoned, burnt-out shell of the King’s Theatre, once the home to Transome’s company and now being restored for a new venture. While Laetitia looks into this decade-old death, the Transome family and company dynamics really spin out of control. This is an interesting take on celebrity culture in the Victorian age as well as an intricate plot for its bitterly entangled cast of characters.

Simpson, Rosemary. [The Dead Cry Justice](#) (Kensington \$26). In “A reminder that detection’s golden age was golden only for the well-to-do, and not always for them,” Prudence MacKenzie and Blossom the dog are enjoying a spring day in Washington Square Park, pondering whether Prudence should go to a law school just opened to women, when a desperate urchin steals her sandwich. The pair tracks him to a filthy cellar, where they find him with a wounded, unconscious girl whom Prudence and her cabman friend, Danny Dennis, take to a clinic run by Quakers. Not only has the victim been beaten and violated, but someone has removed her lashes and eyebrows and tattooed her to look like a doll. The urchin, her brother, stays by her side, but soon they both vanish back into the mean streets. Prudence’s partner, a former Pinkerton agent, is recovering from bullet wounds but pitches in to help in an investigation which soon uncovers moral horrors in the highest reaches of society. Someone has been kidnapping young women, some of them quite wealthy, and turning them into prostitutes for a circle of men as influential as they are deprived. Ignoring danger, Prudence once again puts herself at risk. We may have signed copies of this in January.

Straley, John. [So Far and Good](#) (Soho \$27.95). “Shamus Award winner Straley’s gripping eighth Cecil Younger investigation finds the Sitka, Alaska, PI doing prison time for the desperate measures he took to save the life of his teenage daughter, Blossom, in 2018’s [Baby’s First Felony](#). Blossom, meanwhile, seeks his advice on how to help her friend Georgianna Paul. A DNA test George has taken indicates that her parents, Ida and Richard Paul, aren’t her biological parents, and she’s in fact the victim of a notorious kidnapping years earlier of a native infant. After Ida and Richard are arrested, efforts are made to reunite

George with her birth parents, but something isn't quite right with her new family. Ida's subsequent prison suicide may have been something more sinister, and there's a growing sense that the original kidnapping might not have been all that it seemed. Events take a deadly turn when Blossom disappears while trying to help George, forcing Cecil to make use of his new prison connections and, once again, take desperate measures on his own. Memorable characters match the vividly realized Alaskan settings."—*PW*

Thompson, Victoria. [City of Shadows](#) (Berkley \$26). In this latest entry in the Counterfeit Lady series, now that she's married socialite lawyer Gideon Bates, Elizabeth Miles has taken an elevated place in New York's post-World War I society. Her former life as a grifter is a closely held family secret. But sometimes she uses her skills, and those of others in her father's network, for a good cause. When a dear friend in straitened circumstances reveals that her mother has been spending money they can't afford on thrice weekly visits to the medium Madame Ophelia, Elizabeth, musing that conning another con artist might be fun, enlists her brother, Jake, and her father in a plan to expose the medium and recover at least some of the money she and her confederates have collected through their nefarious schemes. Unsurprisingly, the medium's clients refuse to believe she is a fake....

Verble, Margaret. [When Two Feathers Fell from the Sky](#) (Mariner Books \$27). In this richly imagined historical from Pulitzer finalist Verble, a young Cherokee woman performs as a horse-diver at an amusement park in Nashville, Tenn. It's 1926, and automobiles and movies are starting to make electric streetcars and live-entertainment venues obsolete, but Two Feathers's novelty act is still a big draw at Glendale Park, built at the end of a trolley line. One day, as Two Feathers and her horse are performing, a giant sinkhole opens up and swallows them. Two's beloved mare, Ocher, dies in the fall, and Two's leg is broken. With her act no longer possible and her future uncertain, Two recuperates in her dormitory. Her friends rally to her side, notably Hank Crawford, the descendant of enslaved people and a plantation owner. But owning land and having light skin don't guarantee protection from the deadly dangers of Jim Crow, and Verble shows how Crawford takes various matters into his own hands rather than go to the racist police. Visions of the departed haunt many of these characters, and the dead have an impact on the present. When a hippo dies and a beloved bear cub is found dead, Two discerns how and why they were killed, and, later, after a man is found scalped, prejudice leads some to suspect Two of the murder. Verble beautifully weaves period details with the cast's histories, and enthralls with the supernatural elements, which are made as real for the reader as they are for the characters.

✦ Wilde, Darcie. [A Counterfeit Suitor](#) (Kensington \$26). This Regency era mystery strikes mostly right notes although Wilde should know that no one addresses a Countess as Your Grace, which is reserved for Duchesses. We once again meet Rosalind Thorne, daughter of the disgraced Sir Reginald, a drunk and wastrel, who has forged a precarious but respectable living by discreetly helps society ladies with delicate issues. Along the way she keeps solving actual crimes rather than quashing scandals. Here she's been hired by London Society newcomer, wealthy Mrs. Valentina Walford, with organizing a charity ball while

quietly investigating the suitability of Mrs. Walford's daughter's unsavory new beau, who was involved in an 1814 stock fraud. Rosalind's task is complicated when Sir Reginald, escaping confinement in Bath, shows up in London as the "guest" of the evil Russell Fullerton, and promptly makes an embarrassing public scene. Attempting to figure out what Fullerton has up his sleeve at the same time she's trying to help Mrs. Walford, Rosalind uncovers plot upon plot—blackmail, political intrigue, faithlessness, family drama—and every question answered inevitably leads to another as tangled as the first. "A plot as complex as a Chinese puzzle box" develops the complex cast of characters, a kind of mystery *Bridgerton* ensemble. I especially like seeing what Rosalind's complicated elder sister Charlotte is up to and wondering where next?

Woods, Stuart. [Criminal Mischief](#) (Putnam \$28). Ta da. Here is the 60th Stone Barrington. After a dangerous adventure has him traveling up and down the coast, he is looking forward to some down time at his luxurious Manhattan abode. But when an acquaintance alerts him to a hinky plot being hatched across the city, he finds himself eager to pursue justice. After the mastermind behind it all proves more evasive than anyone was expecting, Stone sets out on an international chase to places he's never gone before. With the help of old friends—and alluring new ones—Stone is determined to see the pursuit through to the end, whatever the risk.

OUR DECEMBER LARGE PAPERBACK PICKS

Cussler, Clive/Jack DuBrul. [Fast Ice](#) (\$17). Climate expert Cora Emmerson, while doing research in Berlin, comes across references to a 1939 German expedition to Antarctica that discovered a lake heated by geothermal energy containing a strange green algae that seemed to cause water to rapidly freeze. Cora goes to Antarctica, where she collects ice core samples containing the algae. She alerts the National Underwater and Marine Agency, for which she once worked, that she has made a find that has the power to "remake the world." Weeks later, as Cora heads home, a vessel disguised as an iceberg crashes into her ship. Unknown attackers kill the crew and steal Cora's samples. Cora survives to join the subsequent investigation by NUMA's Kurt Austin and sidekick Joe Zavela, which leads them to Ryland Lloyd, an environmentalist who believes climate change actually benefits the planet in the long run. No surprise, Lloyd turns out to have a hidden agenda related to the ice. The suspense builds as the NUMA team races to avert global catastrophe. This is another classic Cussler action thriller and Dirk Cussler just nailed a new one with [The Devil's Sea](#) (\$29 Signed), the 26th Dirk Pitt which is absolutely a knockout.

Edwards, Amber/Justin Scott. [Forty Days and Forty Nights](#) (University of Louisiana at Lafayette \$20). With attention focusing more and more on conservation and water resources, and rivers! here is an exciting thriller plunging you into the management, or not, of the mighty Mississippi, more specifically at the Memphis District of the Army Corps of Engineers operations. Clementine Price grew up on the river's banks, studied hydraulic engineering and river science at West Point, and joins the Corps. Ten years later looming natural disaster precipitated by torrential rains will test the system of levees and banks. And provide a golden opportunity for a technologically savvy and organized white supremacist group, another focus

of our attention today, whose goal is to create an independent republic within the US. Unfortunately, both scenarios are scarily believable. Edwards is a film director and Scott is a well respected author who wrote several thrillers with Clive Cussler. Lee Child finds this thriller to be “Wonderful ...the river—ominous, atmospheric, somehow inevitable—is so much more than just a part of the story...it is the story, in all its might and majesty. Very impressive, and highly recommended.”

✦ Graves, Stephanie. [Olive Bright, Pigeoneer](#) (\$15.95). I enjoyed this debut for the verve in the writing, its fond description of rural village life, and for its exploration of yet another facet of the burgeoning WWII genre: carrier pigeons. These birds, coopted into the war effort, were hardy and amazing heroes, unflinching. Their recruitment and training is highlighted against rural life in a charming English village, the successes and trials of young Olive Bright who longs to contribute to the fight but is stuck helping her dad with his veterinary practice while tending to her much loved racing pigeons. Her best friend George joins the Royal Air Force, leaving her adrift. But she hopes the National Pigeon Service (who knew?) will enlist her Bright’s Loft birds and expertise to deliver critical coded messages. Thus Olive is inadvertently thrust into the heart of a baffling murder while tied to a cover organization.... Praised by Rhys Bowen and Susan Elia MacNeal, and with a sequel in January: [A Valiant Deceit](#) (Kensington \$26 Signed).

✦ Griffiths, Elly. [The Midnight Hour](#) (\$14.99). Edgar winner Griffiths keeps gaining audience which is aces with me as I have thought she was brilliant since her first mystery. The Brighton Mystery series is less well known than the Ruth Galloway Mysteries, but this review will show you why you want to snag a copy of this, the simultaneous paperback to the hardcover. “Police constable Meg Connolly, DI Bob Willis, and PIs Emma Holmes and Sam Collins look into the poisoning of theatrical impresario Bert Billington in Rottingdean, Sussex, in September 1965. Finding a long history of serial affairs and abuses of power, they also encounter hints that Billington’s murder may be connected to the deaths of two performers and a child. Possible suspects include Billington’s widow, Verity Malone, and his sons; actor Max Mephisto, who had an affair with Verity; Eric Prentice, who was a musical performer in variety; and Alma Saunders, who served as Verity’s dresser when Verity was a music hall star. An additional death and mysterious figures seen in a graveyard and at murder locales add complications. Sober themes on the oppression of women and the achievement of justice even after many years provide a touching complexity. Griffiths fans and new readers alike will enjoy their time with the Brighton mysteries crowd.” Griffiths is a terrific plotter with a naturally humorous outlook and style, a double win for you.

Perry, Thomas. [Eddie’s Boy](#) (\$17). While the action begins in and propels us through the present, this is an origin story for the Butcher’s Boy showing us how the orphan informally became the ward of a small-town butcher whose sideline was contract killer. Eddie taught Michael Shaeffer both trades and a set of life skills that has allowed Michael to survive for some 30 years in retirement with his aristocratic English wife. He easily defeats the first wave of hit men, then the second, in England, and on Meg’s advice jets to Australia to work out what is going on. That proves even worse so Michael flies to the States. “In the U.S., he seeks out Justice Department bigwig Elizabeth Waring, who once

used him as an informant, and suggests a trade for info about his hunters. It soon becomes clear that the likely instigator is a Mafia don Michael helped send to prison years earlier by framing him for a murder. An immensely clever cat and mouse game he engineers involving Waring and various mob factions ensues.” Perry won the Best First Novel Edgar for [The Butcher’s Boy](#) (\$17) whom he revisits here for the third time and may yet again.

Quartey, Kwei. [Sleep Well, My Lady](#) (\$16.95). In Quartey’s terrific sequel to 2020’s [The Missing American](#) (\$16.95/\$28.95 Signed), PI Emma Djan takes on a nearly year-old cold case—the murder of high-profile fashion icon Lady Araba in the bedroom of her lush mansion in a gated community known as the Beverly Hills of Accra, Ghana. Lady Araba’s aunt doesn’t believe her niece’s chauffeur, who was convicted for the killing, is guilty. Emma and her colleagues at the Yemo Sowah Agency assume various undercover identities—as housekeeper, cop, construction worker, professor, journalist, interested house buyer—in an effort to narrow the long list of possible culprits, including family members, several lovers, and an alcoholic TV talk show host. Stops at the morgue and a forensic lab, as well as an ongoing search for a unique murder weapon, contribute to the dark atmosphere. Along the way, Quartey skewers Ghanaian politics, religion, and the law. Smooth prose complements the well-wrought plot. This distinctive detective series deserves a long run.” Quartey’s work brings vivid life to his Ghanaian characters and setting, while reminding us that no matter the location, motivations for murder are the same everywhere.

Richards, Bob. [Triangle of Treason](#) (Eco Point Books \$18). Author Richards is Bermuda’s former Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance and is well placed to write this nifty spy story set in WW2 Bermuda which was strategically placed for a dedicated spy for the Third Reich to do his treacherous work. This spy is Captain Rodney Horatio Grant, retired from the Royal Navy after WW1 and in 1929 working in London as a stockbroker. He grew more interested in investment opportunities in Germany, did some favors for a Herr Lindeman weathered the Great Depression well, actually met Hitler, and then became more and more fed up with Britain’s privileged class, and Jews in general. Eventually he emigrated to that corner of the Empire called Bermuda which as war brewed became valuable as the apex of the Bermuda triangle proximity to Atlantic shipping lanes. Meanwhile we meet Alan Jones, a Black Bermuda ferryboat pilot and family man with a daughter who falls for American Lieutenant Harley Harvey, call sign Swordfish. They become a secret interracial couple while Hook, figuring out Grant is the man spying for Germany, recruits Swordfish to help bring Grant down. Richards has a lively, brisk style and really knows his stuff, making this an entertaining and informative WW2 story.

A dedicated history buff, Richards intends this to be the first of three thrillers embedded in military and geopolitical events in the Crown Colony which today remains the oldest British overseas territory.

Rufin, Jean Christophe. [The Hanged Man of Conakry](#) (Europa \$17). Set in Conakry, the capital of Guinea, this gem of a diplomatic thriller from Prix Goncourt winner Rufin opens with a crowd of locals gazing at the body of a man hanging by one foot from the mast of a sailboat moored in a decrepit marina. The victim, a vacationing Frenchman who’s been in the marina for months, also has a large wound in his chest. How he ended up

hanging dead from a mast presents a puzzle that Aurel Timescu, a minor French embassy official with a lifelong passion for investigating crime, is determined to solve. Scorned by most of his French associates, Aurel, a small man of indeterminate middle age with an odd dress sense, grew up in Communist Romania, where he became accustomed to the “permanent union of respectability and crime.” Yet this outwardly ridiculous character possesses cunning and other hidden strengths based on such experiences as time spent in Ceausescu’s jails, where he was tortured, that make him a good detective. Rufin offers razor-sharp insights into cultural clashes in the former French colony as economical prose drives the intricate plot to a powerful ending. Readers will be reminded of Georges Simenon, only better

Smith, Ian K. [Wolf Point](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$15.95). Lesa reviews a book I really enjoyed: “The adult children of Black Chicago politico Walter Griffin ask P.I. Ashe Cayne to look into their father’s mysterious death, two years after it was ruled a suicide. Neither Griffin’s family nor the residents of Chicago’s South Side believe he killed himself; Griffin’s wife is convinced someone in the mayor’s office ordered a hit on him. Golf lover Ashe has the time to invest in the case, since leaving the Chicago police force with a several million dollar settlement. As he digs into Griffin’s past, he finds that lots of people might have wanted him dead, including Russians who lost money on a land deal and wealthy mobsters who were owed money. Even the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools was an enemy. Ashe knows that murders can be connected to jealousy, hatred, money, or sex—with Walter Griffin, any of those could be the cause. Ashe’s dogged determination and dislike of political game-playing lead him to a surprising solution.” Lesa adds, “It could do without some of the details of Chicago and golf.” And there I disagree because what I loved the most about this sequel to [The Unspoken](#) (\$15.95) is the way Smith portrays Chicago.

Here’s a comment from *Kirkus* I echo: “With its huge, entertaining cast and smooth sleuth, this series kickoff recalls vintage Chandler or Hammett.” As I do this one: “Smith creates a fond and layered portrait of the Windy City, in all its multidimensional glory, as we traipse from fancy high-rises, to grungy boxing gyms, to tastefully decorated criminal lairs. Here’s hoping for many more installments in the series!”—CrimeReads, Most Anticipated Crime Books of 2020

Trollip, Stanley. [Wolfman](#) (White Sun Books \$13.95). This thriller is a prequel to Michael Stanley’s book [Shoot the Bastards](#) (\$15.95), a tense tale of rhino poaching and smuggling set principally in South Africa, which I much enjoyed editing and publishing for Poisoned Pen Press. Wolfman is written by half of Stanley, i.e. Trollip.

Crystal Nguyen is hired as an investigative reporter for a Duluth TV station, and finds herself doing the typical cub-reporter job. Her break comes with the trial of two wolf poachers and a fiery report that she presents on air. After that, her relationship with her boss, Scott Hansen, goes up and down with the ratings and the threats from angry hunters. The two hunters are found not guilty of wolf poaching despite the fact they have numerous wolf pelts in their possession. Hansen is incensed that they got off and gives Crys the opportunity to report on it in prime time, with the admonition not to mention hunters. She doesn’t use the word, but calls them barbarians instead, which ignites a heated debate in the community, which is her goal, and draws anger from her boss.

However, her reports cause the station’s ratings to soar. Without the ratings, he would have fired her. When it becomes apparent that her life may be in danger, first from poachers that she goes after, then from a so-called ally of hers who doesn’t think she’s doing enough, her boss becomes very protective. Of course, she wonders whether he’s trying to protect her or the ratings.”

NEW IN LARGE PAPERBACKS

Belle, Kimberly. [My Darling Husband](#) (Park Row \$16.99). Celebrity chef Cam Lasky—Atlanta’s much touted “steak king”—tries to explain to a TV reporter why he doesn’t deserve to be called “the most hated man in America” after the home invasion several months earlier that involved his wife, Jade, and their two young children being taken hostage. Flash back to the fateful day. At work, Cam is dealing with suspicious insurance adjusters after a fire destroyed his popular signature restaurant. Jade’s distraught call forces Cam to refocus his priorities—she and the children have been ambushed by a masked man hiding in their garage. The kidnapper knows details about their lives, including Cam’s work schedule, and wants exactly \$734,296. Raising the cash is a problem, because, unknown to Jade, Cam is deeply in debt. Cam wonders whether the fire was set by his loan shark or by a vengeful former employee. “Several well-placed twists deliciously shake up the brisk plot, which smoothly moves among the viewpoints of Jade, Cam, and the kidnapper. Belle knows how to keep the pages turning.”

✦ Brody, Frances. [Murder Is in the Air](#) (\$16.99). It’s not immediately clear what William Lofthouse, owner of the Barleycorn Brewery, wants of Kate Shackleton. To be sure, his nephew James, groomed as his successor, has been away in Germany longer than he ought. What’s really worrying William, though, is having the business in tiptop shape when James does return. To that end, he asks Kate’s fellow detective Jim Sykes to come to the brewery and uncover the reasons for a lot of minor problems that add up to big trouble. The establishment is supporting wages clerk Ruth Parnaby, whose brother and troubled father also work there, in a Brewery Queen contest. William’s secretary, Miss Crawford, knows everything there is to know about the business, but before she can disclose something important to William, she’s run over and killed in a hit-and-run that’s clearly no accident. Kate and Jim soon discover that someone’s been working against the brewery’s interests. I’m a fan of this between the wars series that focuses sharply but kindly on the plights and roles of women in the workplace and society.

✦ Buckley, Fiona. [The Scent of Danger](#) (\$17.95). Buckley has kept this Elizabethan age series going for many chapters in the life of Ursula Blanchard, half-sister to the Queen and a spy for Sir Francis Walsingham as well as a frequent widow, a wealthy one, whose family life and household keep shifting. A long story arc involves the Queen’s cousin Mary Stuart and, speaking of shifting, this new assignment shifts Ursula to Devon where she has relatives in the village of Zeal Aquatico. There she finds two of his local agents have died, probably suspiciously, and rumors float that King Philip of Spain may invade England. Buckley pens lively but impeccable historical mystery. I am a reader all the way through this series which here has reached 1586.

Disher, Garry. [Under the Cold Bright Lights](#) (\$16.95). This is a standalone thriller from Australia’s Ned Kelly Award-winner Disher. The young detectives think Alan Auhl is washed up, but

that doesn't faze him. He does things his own way—and gets results. He still lives with his ex-wife, off and on, in a big house full of random boarders and hard-luck stories. And he's still a cop, even though he retired from Homicide some years ago. He works cold cases now. Like the death of John Elphick—his daughters are still convinced he was murdered; the coroner is not so sure. Or the skeleton that's just been found under a concrete slab. Or the doctor who killed two wives and a girlfriend, and left no evidence at all. Auhl will stick with these cases until justice is done. The challenge for you the reader is the multiple story lines to follow.

Evanovich, Janet/Steve Hamilton. [Bounty](#) (\$17). In this latest Fox and O'Hare adventure, FBI agent Kate O'Hare and charming criminal Nick Fox race against time to uncover a buried train filled with Nazi gold.

Gattis, Ryan. [The System](#) (Picador \$20). “On the night of December 6, 1993, heroin addict Augie Clark, a key player in this ambitious crime novel set in L.A., witnesses his dealer, Scrappy, getting shot outside her mother's house, and recognizes the shooter as gangbanger Wizard, but doesn't know who the guy with Wizard is. Clark saves Scrappy's life with some quick first aid, calls an ambulance—and pockets the gun used in the shooting left at the scene. The next day, Clark's parole officer finds the gun during a routine check on Clark, and blackmails him to finger Wizard and Wizard's usual accomplice, Dreamer, who has no felony record. The long, torturous road to trial offers a devastating portrait of the criminal network operating from jails, and shows how a person like Dreamer, the book's only sympathetic character, has little hope of justice. At times, this reads like a legal thriller, but with a lot more grit and sharper than usual characterization.” I wish I had time to read this since Gattis is a most interesting writer.

Gigl, Robyn. [By Way of Sorrow](#) (\$15.95). Attorney Gigl debuts by introducing criminal defense attorney Erin McCabe, an intelligent and resourceful protagonist with an unusual backstory. One day in 2006, 28-year-old William Townsend Jr., the son of a U.S. senator who's “a big player down in South Jersey,” is found stabbed to death in a sleazy hotel outside Atlantic City. The cards are stacked against Sharise Barnes, the Black, transgender, teenage prostitute who's arrested for the crime. Sharise admits to killing Townsend, but claims it was in self-defense. With the aid of an FBI agent, Erin searches for witnesses to support Sharise's self-defense claim and for clues to what led Townsend to his death. Slowly a pattern emerges, one that the victim's wealthy, well-connected, and politically savvy father will do anything to keep buried. Erin's ability to navigate the intricacies of the law is just as fascinating as the subsequent perils she encounters. This is a series start so look for the sequel, [Survivor's Guilt](#) (Kensington \$27), in January.

Giligan, Ruth. [The Butchers' Blessing](#) (Tin House Books \$16.95). Every year, Úna prepares for her father to leave her. He will wave goodbye early one morning, then disappear with seven other men to traverse the Irish countryside. Together, these men form the Butchers, a group that roams from farm to farm, enacting ancient methods of cattle slaughter. The narrative moves between the events of 1996 and the present across a wild, Gothic landscape. The Indie Next Pick calls it “A beautiful tale of the strife of traditions in a changing Ireland, woven together with the threads

of a modern-day mystery. Impossible to put down and harder to forget, this novel lingers and feels like fog.” If you are looking for something different, here it is.

Hughes, Lorena. [The Spanish Daughter](#) (Kensington \$15.95). A deftly written story entangling family, identity, chocolate and murder, set in the lush golden days of Ecuador's cacao boom. As a child in Spain, Puri always knew her passion for chocolate was inherited from her father. But it's not until his death that she learns of something else she's inherited—a cocoa estate in Vinces, Ecuador, a town nicknamed “París Chiquito.” Eager to claim her birthright and filled with hope for a new life after the devastation of World War I, she and her husband Cristóbal set out across the Atlantic Ocean. But it soon becomes clear someone is angered by Puri's claim to the estate... When a mercenary sent to murder her aboard the ship accidentally kills Cristóbal instead, Puri dons her husband's clothes and assumes his identity, hoping to stay safe while she searches for the truth of her father's legacy in Ecuador. Though freed from the rules that women are expected to follow, Puri confronts other challenges at the estate—newfound siblings, hidden affairs, and her father's dark secrets. Then there are the dangers awakened by her attraction to an enigmatic man as she tries to learn the identity of an enemy who is still at large, threatening the future she is determined to claim. “A lushly written story of bittersweet family secrets and betrayals that ultimately celebrates the healing power of hope, resilience, love—and chocolate!” —Andrea Penrose

Jansson, Susanne. [Winter Water](#) (Grand Central \$16.99). “Set on the Swedish island of Orust, this disquieting tale of loss, grief, and rekindling of hope hooks the reader from the start. Martin, the owner of a failing mussel farm, lives with his family in a secluded house close to the sea. One morning, Martin allows his three-year-old son, Adam, to play in the yard while he answers a phone call. When he goes outside a few minutes later, Adam is gone. The police find one of Adam's rubber boots in the water, but no sign of the boy. Maya, a photographer who has come to Orust to take pictures for her next exhibition and was once a police photographer, decides to investigate, and together she and Martin discover that over the years other children have disappeared from the same spot and on the same date. Is this the work of a cult, of ghostly spirits calling from the sea, or of something even more sinister? Jansson does a good job maintaining the uncertainty and the suspense. Horror fans will also want to check this out,” says *PW*, but ScandiNoir fans will take to it too.

Kane, Darby. [The Replacement Wife](#) (Harper \$16.99). Can't get enough of domestic suspense? Elisa Wright is a mom and wife, living a nice, quiet life in a nice, quiet town. She's also convinced her brother-in-law is a murderer. Josh has one dead wife and one missing fiancée, and though he grieved for them he starts dating someone new. Elisa fears for that woman's safety, and she desperately wants to know what happened to her friend, Josh's missing fiancée. Searching for clues means investigating her own family. And she doesn't like what she finds. A laptop filled with incriminating information. Other women. But then Elisa becomes friends with Josh's new girlfriend and starts to question things she thinks are true. I ploughed through this and was unable to make sense of the characters or the plot, which may say I am hopelessly out of touch or Kane's success under her real name as a YA author may be responsible for interest shown in this and her first adult novel *Pretty Little Wife*.

✎ Knox, Joseph. [True Crime Story](#) (Sourcebooks \$16.99). British author Knox emulates the whole true crime podcast/cold case investigation phenomenon with a fictional story presented as if true, so it reads rather like a guilty pleasure tabloid. It's easy to go wrong here and think this is nonfiction instead of a clever concept. I was not much taken by it but here's a rave from I think Library Reads, reviews compiled each month from librarians: "What happened to Zoe Nolan? She walked out of her dorm room and hasn't been seen since. Knox weaves together interviews, emails, and police reports into an immersive missing persons case that will leave readers gasping for breath up until the last page. For fans of *The Word Is Murder* and the Six Stories series."

Lyle, HB. [The Year of the Gun](#) (\$12.99). Wiggins is at loose ends in 1912 London after the completion of his work for Vernon Kell, head of the British Secret Service. He boards the *Titanic* hoping to reunite with his former lover, Bela Grybus, in America, but is ushered off the ship in Ireland following a brawl. After Wiggins steps in to protect Dublin gangster Patrick O'Connell from assailants on the street, O'Connell hires him for his muscle and brains. Wiggins is attracted to O'Connell's mistress, Molly Lansdown-Smith, an Englishwoman fighting for Irish independence, and grows close to an O'Connell henchman named Fitz. Shortly after Fitz is murdered, O'Connell and Molly sail to New York, Wiggins in tow, to buy guns for the Irish nationalist cause. In Manhattan, Wiggins searches for news of Bela and re-encounters his mentors, Kell and Sherlock Holmes... You can see this plot boils up a real stew of encounters and events for the swashbuckling Wiggins.

✎ McElwain, Julie. [Shadows in Time](#) (\$17.95). Our blogger Lesa reviews: "In McElwain's follow-up to [Betrayal in Time](#) (\$15.95), time-traveling former FBI agent Kendra Donovan now lives 200 years earlier in Regency England in 1816. She's still uncomfortable with the restrictions on women, so she's surprised when she encounters Mrs. Horatia Gavenston, who owns and runs a brewery that has passed down from mother to daughter. Mrs. Gavenston knows Kendra found a killer once, so she asks her to find her missing business manager, Jeremy Pascoe. She has secrets, though, so even she is a suspect when Kendra finds Pascoe's body. Kendra also has troubles closer to home. The Duke of Aldridge has made Kendra, his ward, feel as if she were his daughter, Charlotte, who was swept overboard twenty years earlier. When a woman shows up claiming to be Charlotte, Kendra has her doubts. She hires Sam Kelly, a Bow Street Runner, to assist with both cases." This is fun but do not expect the historical accuracy of say Anne Perry or Rhys Bowen.

McPherson, Catriona. [The Turning Tide](#) (Mobius \$12.99). I am a longtime fan, since the series' beginning, of this series. It's been difficult to import most of this series' entries but now Mobius is the US arm of British publisher Quercus and so we get this book. *PW* agrees with my enthusiasm for it: "Agatha winner McPherson's vivid 14th Dandy Gilver mystery opens in the summer of 1936, when Dandy Gilver and her inquiry agent colleague, Alec Osborne, receive a series of letters from a Scottish minister begging for their help. Vesper Kemp, the ferry operator for the town of Cramond, on the Firth of Forth, has abandoned her post and seems to be losing her mind. A young man accidentally fell into the river and drowned, but Vesper insists she murdered him. Dandy and Alec dismiss the case as more appropriate for a doctor than for detectives, until

they discover the victim was Peter Haslett, whom Dandy has known since he was a child. Once in Cramond, Dandy and Alec find Vesper in a sad state, and their investigation takes several odd turns involving an old Roman fort, two unhelpful spinsters, four threatening millers, and a couple of students with a hidden agenda growing a particular strain of potato. McPherson does a masterly job capturing the feel of rural Scotland and the mores of pre-WWII Britain."

Mihesuah, Devon A. [The Hatak Witches](#) (University of Arizona \$16.95). If you like your mysteries deeply spooky, heads up: When a museum security guard is mysteriously killed, Detective Monique Blue Hawk discovers that a deformed skeleton is also missing from the museum. She soon learns of a Crow legend concerning a matriarch witch and a group of shapeshifting Choctaw entities bent on returning to our world.

✎ Parris, SJ. [Execution](#) (\$17.95). Set in 1586, Giordano Bruno, the Italian philosopher-sleuth in this sumptuous series, goes undercover as a Jesuit priest to England to inform Elizabeth's spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham of a plot, led by Anthony Babington, to kill the queen. Bruno is chagrined to find that Walsingham already knows of the plot and has sent a spy, Clara Poole, into the midst of the conspirators. However, a young woman identified as Clara is soon found ferociously murdered, her body dumped in an unconsecrated graveyard. Walsingham asks Bruno to infiltrate Babington's group and discover who killed Clara. "The action starts slowly as Parris supplies the background of the bitter conflict between Elizabeth and her cousin Mary, both of whom believe themselves to be the rightful queen of England. From the moment the perceptive and courageous Bruno agrees to go undercover, the story fairly races along, filled with murders, kidnapping, political intrigue, ciphers, romance, and a spot of torture. Actually, in its rave review the *NY Times* warns of "scenes of prison torture culminating in a public execution so intense that it might cause one to toss one's cookies." This series is a must for fans of CJ Sansom.

Patterson, James/Richard DiLallo. [The Paris Detective](#) (Grand Central \$16.99). Simultaneous with the hardcover release comes three cases worked by "the most revered detective in Paris, Luc Moncrief," who has rebooted his career in New York. **The Christmas Mystery:** In the heart of the holiday season, priceless paintings have vanished from a Park Avenue murder scene. Now, the dashing Moncrief must become a quick study in the art of the steal—before a coldblooded killer paints the town red. Merry Christmas, Detective. **French Twist:** Gorgeous women are dropping dead at upscale department stores in New York City. Moncrief and Detective Katherine Burke are close to solving the mystery, but.... And it opens with **French Kiss**, Moncrief's debut at the NPD. See the simultaneous hardcover release.

Smith, Alexander McCall. [Pianos and Flowers: Brief Encounters of the Romantic Kind](#) (\$16). A collection of stories and photographs from the best-selling author of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series, imagining the lives and loves of everyday people in the twentieth century. It's a charming gift book idea.

✎ Tyce, Harriet. [The Lies You Told](#) (\$16.99). Sadie Roper, the narrator of this engrossing psychological thriller, returns to her native London, along with her 11-year-old daughter, Robin, after she and her husband break up in Brooklyn. Sadie plans to get back

the high-flying criminal barrister career she sacrificed for marriage ten years earlier. But the provisions of Sadie's late mother's will state that she can claim a small inheritance and her childhood home only if she sends Robin to Asham Girls School, the same school Sadie attended, a school where on the playground it's the law of the jungle... Despite the bullying Sadie endured at Asham, she agrees to the will's terms and enrolls Robin. It looks as though both Sadie and Robin will thrive, but then.... More than one suspicious death raises the ante as multiple twists keep the pages turning. Tyce debuted with [Blood Orange](#) (\$16.99).

Yokomizo, Seishi. [The Village of Eight Graves](#) (Pushkin Vertigo 14.95). "Set in 1950s Japan, this taut mystery from Yokomizo (1902–1981) provides an original variation on the plot of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Tatsuya Terada, a cosmetics company employee in his 20s who believes he has no surviving relatives, hears a radio announcement asking anyone who knows of his whereabouts to contact an attorney. He subsequently learns that an unknown, unnamed wealthy relative wants to adopt and provide for him. Tatsuya then gets an anonymous warning to "never set foot in the village of Eight Graves again," lest it "become a sea of blood." A curse was placed on the village in 1566 by the leader of a group of eight samurai killed by its residents. His vow of vengeance apparently manifested itself in the 1920s, when a man related to Tatsuya went berserk and slaughtered more than 30 villagers. Tatsuya agrees to return to Eight Graves, triggering a series of baffling murders. Kosuke Kindaichi, Yokomizo's Columbo-like sleuth, arrives to sort through the tangled puzzle and provide a satisfying solution. Fans of gothic-tinged fair play will be enthralled."—*PW*

OUR DECEMBER SMALL PAPERBACK PICKS

Alexander, Ellie. [Bake, Borrow, and Steal](#) (St Martin's \$8.99). Bakeshop #14. Jules and her team at Torte are working on their biggest event ever: creating chocolate showpieces for the gala opening of the exhibit Shakespeare's Lost Pages. But when the Bard's lost manuscript disappears and a security guard is found murdered, Jules must switch gears and begin searching for the killer.

Bradford, Laura. [Plus One for Murder](#) (Berkley \$8.99). Friend for Hire #1. After her travel agency goes bust, Emma Westlake reinvents herself as a paid companion. But when a client drops dead, and Emma becomes the prime suspect in the case, Emma must reinvent herself yet again as an amateur sleuth in order to find the real killer.

Brennan, Allison. [The Sorority Murder](#) (Mira \$9.99). Obsessed with the murder of Candace Swain, Lucas Vega, while interning at the medical examiner's, discovers new information about the cold case and teams up with a former U.S. marshal, who not only exposes Candace's secret life but also Lucas's to solve this case.

Carlisle, Kate. [Absence of Mallets](#) (Berkley \$8.99). Fixer-Upper #9. When one of her new friends is found bludgeoned to death by a mallet near the lighthouse on her boyfriend Mac's property, contractor Shannon Hammer, as more violence strikes, must quickly nail down the clues to stop an unhinged killer. *Kirkus* had this to say about Carlisle's latest "Believable characters, romance, and a solid mystery combine for an enjoyable read."

Hall, Rachel Howzell. [And Now She's Gone](#) (\$8.99). When a desperate family implores her to track down a woman who may

not want to be found, Grayson Sykes unravels violent secrets that embroil her in an increasingly dangerous game of cat and mouse. "Full of wry, dark humor, this nuanced tale of two extraordinary women is un-put-downable." (*PW*)

McKinty, Adrian. [The Chain](#) (\$9.99). A parent receives a panicked phone call from a stranger who reveals that both of their children have been kidnapped by someone who demands that they abduct another child to prevent the murders of their own. "At once a commentary on social media, greed, revenge, love, and true evil and written with almost a lyrical quality, this book will have readers searching for more of McKinty's titles to devour." (*Kirkus*).

Oliver, Katie. [Pride, Prejudice, and Peril](#) (Penguin \$7.99). Jane Austen Tea Society #1. A consultant on a new reality show *Who Wants to Marry Mr. Darcy*, English professor Phaedra Brighton, whose expertise lies in all things Jane Austen, adds sleuth to her resume when she has to clear her best friend's name of murder on the set. The launch to a fun new cozy series of which *Kirkus* said "Oliver bustles so nimbly among the assorted academics, relatives, and TV types that the killer sneaks in under the radar."

Ware, Ruth. [The Turn of the Key](#) (\$9.99). When a high-paying nanny job at a luxurious Scottish Highlands home ends with her imprisonment for a child's murder, a young woman struggles to explain to her lawyer the unraveling events that led to her incarceration."Ware skillfully lays the bread crumbs to the novel's satisfying conclusion without dropping too many hints or duping the reader. She presents Rowan as a woman making questionable decisions, and, by the end, provides a reason for each of those decisions, if not a justification. The final section not only pulls together the plot's many threads but also leaves readers with one final, haunting question, one that will stay with them long after they turn the last page." (*PW*)

NEW IN SMALL PAPERBACKS FOR DECEMBER

Blaedel, Sara. [Third Sister](#) (\$8.99). Ilka Jensen's life is in chaos following the tumultuous events of *Her Father's Secret*. The funeral home she inherited after her estranged father's death is bankrupt. Her new business partner, Artie, lies unconscious in the hospital after a savage attack by mysterious assailants, and her father's second wife is in prison. Then, just as Ilka learns a shocking revelation about her father, two menacing strangers turn up at the funeral home; dangerous men who mean to draw her further into a world of secrets, betrayal, and murder.

Brown, Sandra. [Tough Customer](#) (\$9.99). Reissue. Entreated by his former lover, Caroline, to help protect her daughter from a depraved man who has been stalking her, staff investigator Dodge Hanley teams up with a small-town sheriff and enlists methods from his own shady past to find answers.

Caldwell, Emmie. [Stitched in Crime](#) (Berkley \$7.99). Craft Fair Knitters #2. Knitting enthusiast Lia Geiger and the Ninth Street Knitters must unravel a tangled mess of clues when a new vendor at the Craft Fair is found dead and they find a connection between her death and a decades-old murder.

Conte, Cate. [Witch Trial](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Full Moon #2. While being investigated by the Magical Council and learning spells, Violet Mooney must solve two crimes – one of which is a murder – by tapping into powers she cannot yet control that conjure up both supernatural and mortal enemies.

Cussler, Clive. [Blue Gold: A Novel from the Numa Files](#) (\$9.99). Reissue. NUMA Files #2. Kurt Austin and his NUMA team must track down extortionists and rescue scientist Francesca Carval, whose plane has vanished over South America along with her revolutionary formula to convert the world's salt water to fresh.

Engberg, Katrine. [The Tenant](#) (\$9.99). Korner and Werner #1. Copenhagen detectives Jeppe Korner and Anette Werner investigate the murder of a woman, whose story is being suspiciously chronicled in her landlady's novel.

Fisher, Kerry. [The Woman I Was Before](#) (Grand Central \$8.99). Fans of *Big Little Lies* and *Little Fires Everywhere* **won't be able to resist this emotionally gripping novel about a woman trying to escape her past and start a new life with her daughter**—until an accident unleashes all of her secrets.

Morgan, Alexis. [Death by the Finish Line](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Abby McCree #5. When a city council member is murdered during the town's 5K charity run, Abby and her fellow race organizer Gil Pratt must team up once again to prove Gil's brother's innocence in the crime before the real killer makes a run for it.

Ross, Barbara. [Jane Darrowfield and the Madwoman Next Door](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Jane Darrowfield #2. When her new neighbor Megan, who has been having blackouts, hearing voices and feeling like someone's following her, vanishes into thin air, Jane Darrowfield and the police look into the ambitious young lawyer's past.

Staub, Wendy Corsi. [Lullaby and Goodnight](#) (\$8.99). Reissue. Determined to go it alone after being abandoned at the altar by her fiancé, a pregnant Peyton Somerset prepares for single motherhood, but her joy about the prospects of having a baby turns to terror when she begins to suspect that she is being followed, that someone has been watching her, and that someone has been in her apartment.