

# BOOKNEWS from

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## WELCOME TO 2022

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.

**TUESDAY JANUARY 4 7:00 PM Live National Book Launch**  
**James Rollins** discusses [The Starless Crown](#) (Tor \$28.99)  
Moon Fall #1, Epic Fantasy  
Signed books available with custom extra created for The Pen

**WEDNESDAY January 5 5:00 PM**  
**Emily Levesque with Dana Stabenow**  
Levesque discusses [The Last Stargazers](#) (\$16.99)

**THURSDAY JANUARY 6 5:00 PM**  
**Michael Robotham** discusses [When You Are Mine](#) (Scribner \$27)  
January British Crime Club Book of the Month  
Starts a series

**THURSDAY JANUARY 6 6:15 PM**  
**Peter Mann** debuts [The Torqued Man](#) (Harper \$26.99)  
January Historical Fiction Book of the Month  
Signed copies available

**MONDAY JANUARY 10 5:00 PM Virtual National Book Launch**  
**James Patterson and Mike Lupica** discuss [The Horsewoman](#) (Little Brown \$28)  
Mother and Daughter riding champions compete  
Signed by both bookplates available

**MONDAY JANUARY 10 7 PM Virtual National Book Launch**  
**T. Jefferson Parker** discusses [A Thousand Steps](#) (Forge \$27.99)  
A Laguna Beach Age of Aquarius story  
Signed copies available

**TUESDAY JANUARY 11 7:00 PM Live National Book Launch**  
**Brad Taylor** discusses [End of Days](#) (Morrow \$28.99)  
Pike Logan & The TaskForce  
Signed copies available

**WEDNESDAY JANUARY 12 1:00 PM**  
**Charles Cumming**  
Cumming discusses [Box 88](#) (Mysterious Press \$27.95)  
Signed bookplates available

**THURSDAY JANUARY 13 6:00 PM Live**  
**Alafair Burke** discusses [Find Me](#) (Harper \$26.99)  
NYPD's Ellie Hatcher  
Signed copies available

**SATURDAY JANUARY 15 10:30 AM**  
**Croak and Dagger Club** discusses Damien Boyd's [As the Crow Flies](#) (\$15.95)  
Britain's DI Nick Dixon #1

**SATURDAY JANUARY 15 2:00 PM Live National Book Launch**  
**Dana Stabenow** discusses [Disappearance of a Scribe](#) (Zeus \$29.95)  
Eye of Isis Series  
Signed copies available

**MONDAY JANUARY 17 6:00 PM Virtual National Book Launch**  
**Stephen Hunter with Jack Carr**  
**Hunter** discusses [Targeted](#) (Atria \$28.99)  
Bob Lee Swagger  
Signed copies available

**TUESDAY JANUARY 18 4:30 PM**  
**Sulari Gentill** discusses [Where There's a Will](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.99)  
Australia's Rowland Sinclair and friends

**TUESDAY JANUARY 18 6:00 PM**  
**Lisa Gardner with Caroline Kepnes**  
**Gardner** discusses [One Step Too Far](#) (Dutton \$27)  
Missing persons tracker Frankie Elkin  
Signed copies available

**WEDNESDAY JANUARY 19 7:00 PM Live**  
**Nick Petrie** discusses [The Runaway](#) (Putnam \$27)  
Peter Ash  
Signed copies available

**THURSDAY JANUARY 20 5:30 PM**  
**Stacy Willingham** discusses [A Flicker in the Dark](#) (St Martins \$27.99)  
January First Mystery Book of the Month  
Signed books available

**THURSDAY JANUARY 20 7:00 PM**

**Rachel Grant and Jayne Ann Krentz**

Grant discusses [Crash Site](#) (Montlake \$12.99)

Archaeologist Fiona Carver

Signed Bookplates

**Krentz** discusses [Lightning in a Mirror](#) (Berkley \$28)

Fogg Lake

Signed copies available

**FRIDAY JANUARY 21 12:00 PM**

**Lars Kepler** with Brad Thor

Kepler discusses [The Mirror Man](#) (Atria \$28.95)

Killer Instinct #8

**FRIDAY JANUARY 21 5:00 PM Violin concert included**

**Gerald Elias** discusses [Cloudy with a Chance of Murder](#)

(Level Best Books \$19)

Musician Daniel Jacobus

**FRIDAY JANUARY 21 7:00 PM**

**SciFi Friday** discusses Katherine Addison's [The Goblin Emperor](#)

(\$17.99)

**SATURDAY JANUARY 22 4:00 PM LIVE**

**Spenser #50 Party**

**Ace Atkins** discusses [Robert B. Parker's Bye, Bye, Baby](#)

(Putnam \$28)

Signed copies available

**MONDAY JANUARY 24 5:00 PM**

Eva Jurczyk discusses her debut [The Department of Rare Books and Special Collections](#) (Poisoned Pen \$26.99/\$16.99)

January Cozy Crimes Book of the Month

Signed bookplates available

**MONDAY JANUARY 24 6:30 PM**

**Eliza Jane Brazier** discusses [Good Rich People](#) (Berkley \$27)

Signed books available

**TUESDAY JANUARY 25 12:00 PM**

**Janice Hallett** discusses [The Appeal](#) (Atria \$27.99)

Signed bookplates available

**TUESDAY JANUARY 25 6:00 PM**

**Lisa Lutz** discusses [The Accomplice](#) (Ballantine \$28)

Signed copies available

**WEDNESDAY JANUARY 26 6:00 PM**

**Joanna Schaffhausen and PJ Tracey**

Schaffhausen discusses [Last Seen Alive](#) (St Martins \$27.99)

Ellery Hathaway

Tracey discusses [Desolation Canyon](#) (St Martins \$27.99)

LAPD's Margaret Nolan

Signed copies available for both

**THURSDAY JANUARY 27 6:00 PM**

**Marie Benedict** discusses [Her Hidden Genius](#) (Sourcebooks \$26.99)

Overlooked heroine of DNA research

Signed books available

**THURSDAY JANUARY 27 7:30 PM**

**Hardboiled Crime** discusses Dorothy B. Hughes' [Dread Journey](#) (\$15.95)

**MONDAY JANUARY 31 6:00 PM**

**Fiona Davis** discusses [The Magnolia Palace](#) (Dutton \$27)

Drama, secrets, murder at NY's Frick Golden Age mansion (museum)

Signed books available

**OUR JANUARY BOOKS OF THE MONTH**

**British Crime Club** One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Robotham, Michael. [When You Are Mine](#)

**Cozy Crimes Club** One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Jurczyk, Eva. [The Department of Rare Books and Special Collections](#)

**First Mystery Club** One Signed First Printing per month

Willingham, Stacy. [A Flicker in the Dark](#)

**The Crime Collectors Book of the Month Club** One Signed First Printing per month

TBA

**History/Mystery Club** One Signed First Printing per month

Mann, Peter. [The Torqued Man](#)

**Notable New Fiction** One Signed First Printing per month

Rollins, James. [The Starless Crown](#)

**International Crime** One Unsigned Hardcover per month

Apostol, Gina. [Bibliolepsy](#)

**SIGNED BOOKS, Tip-ins, Signed Bookplates**

Atkins, Ace. [Robert B Parker's Bye, Bye, Baby](#) (Putnam \$28). Spenser #50! A milestone in crime fiction for sure. And Atkins' 10<sup>th</sup> and final contribution to its continuation. Here he takes inspiration from politics and postulates a kind of AOC representing Boston. Lacking a reading copy, I quote *Kirkus*: "Spenser is a tough White detective, and his close associate is a tougher Black guy named Hawk. Both are pretty much on the right side of the law, though Hawk has a less-than-heartwarming

history with cops. Aides of Massachusetts Congresswoman Carolina Garcia-Ramirez, aka CGR, want to hire Spenser to protect her from troubling death threats as she campaigns for renomination, although she doesn't think it necessary. There's going to be a primary debate, and the word on the Boston street is that someone plans to 'make a run' at CGR immediately afterward. The FBI wants CGR to fire Spenser and Hawk, but she wisely has confidence in the local muscle." Maybe some

CGR insider is sharing details of her schedule and placing her in someone's crosshairs....

Benedict, Marie. [Her Hidden Genius](#) (Sourcebooks \$26.99). Well I remember the sensation when British scientists James Watson and Francis Crick announced the double helix, their discovery of the structure of DNA, in 1953. Here's a description of Watson's book [The Double Helix](#) (\$16.99): "With humility unspoiled by false modesty, Watson relates his and Crick's desperate efforts to beat Linus Pauling to the Holy Grail of life sciences, the identification of the basic building block of life. Never has a scientist been so truthful in capturing in words the flavor of his work." Benedict offers a compelling contradiction.

At the time there were rumors that Watson's "personal account" suppressed the contributions of others to the discovery. Benedict, whose specialty is novelizing surprising facets of influential women's work (Hedy Lamarr, Mitza Maric, Clementine Churchill), reveals the pioneering work of Rosalind Franklin. Always an outsider, cold-shouldered as a woman working in a male bastion in England after more camaraderie in a Paris laboratory, she has a natural genius for physics and chemistry that guides her experiments. When she is assigned to work on DNA she thinks her time has come. Never again will she have to listen to her colleagues complain about her, especially Maurice Wilkins who'd rather conspire about genetics with James Watson and Francis Crick than work alongside her. Then it finally happens—the double helix structure of DNA reveals itself to her with perfect clarity. But then.... Like Marie Curie, Rosalind was unwary of radiation, leading to her work ending her life before its time and with credit for her work hidden by the male colleagues who should have celebrated her extraordinary gifts and contributions to molecular biology.

Brazier, Eliza Jane. [Good Rich People](#) (Berkley \$27). "Dark, adrenaline-fueled, and wickedly funny...a compulsive tale of privilege and survival that grabs you from the first page and keeps you guessing breathlessly until the very last." —Emma Rous. The *PW* Starred Review adds, "Lyla Herschel, the principal narrator of this fiendish psychological thriller, suffers from boredom, as does her super wealthy husband, Graham, with whom she lives in a grand house perched on a cliff in the Hollywood Hills. To alleviate their mutual emotional ennui, the couple initiates a dangerous game with the well-to-do tenants they solicit for the guesthouse on their property. Meanwhile, Demi Golding, who's homeless, stumbles into a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take on the identity of a well-paid director of a tech company. Lyla is happy to accept Demi when she applies to be their new tenant, and she soon becomes unwittingly engaged in Lyla and Graham's nefarious schemes. Brazier plays delicious homage to Richard Connell's *The Most Dangerous Game* and Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust* as the action builds to a climactic out-of-control 30th birthday party that involves guests in a battle of "simunition" ("Real guns but fake ammunition"). Along the way, the two women—one trapped in a dead-end marriage, the other in an audacious attempt to improve her social status—bond." *LJ* enthuses: "Full of fast cars, designer clothes, and pulse-racing cinematic thrills."

Burke, Alafair. [Find Me](#) (Harper \$26.99). The fate of Hope Miller, as her friends in Hopewell, N.J., know her, drives Edgar finalist Burke's new investigation featuring the NYPD's Ellie Hatcher. The set-up: Fifteen years earlier, Manhattan defense

lawyer Lindsay Kelly pulled Hope, who had lost her memory, out of an overturned vehicle on a road near Hopewell. Lyndsay became Hope's best friend, mentor, and protector. Now, in search of a fresh start, Hope moves to East Hampton, Long Island. Lindsay's fears that her friend will be lost without her are quickly realized after Hope disappears, the only clue a drop of blood matching a DNA sample related to a Wichita, Kansas, serial killer. The subsequent death of an East Hampton businessman leads the police to believe Hope is not a victim but a villain. Now enter Ellie, whose late father was so obsessed with his investigation into the Wichita serial killer that he died by suicide. While Hope and Lindsay's deep friendship takes center stage, Ellie's intelligence, insight, and lingering grief over her father will hold you to the end.

✂ Cumming, Charles. [Box 88](#) (Mysterious Press \$27.95). I'm always up for a spy story and Cumming's work is a long time favorite. I'm glad to see this series start by him. Here's a Starred Review for it: "Lachlan Kite, the hero of this excellent spy thriller from bestseller Cumming is a career man at Box 88, a joint British-U.S. black ops outfit so secretive that not even the CIA and MI5 are sure it exists. While attending a funeral outside London for an old prep school friend who died by suicide, Kite lets down his guard and is kidnapped by an Iranian team that wants information on a case he was involved in 30 years earlier. His pregnant wife is also abducted as part of the plot to pressure Kite into revealing his secrets. Flashbacks to 1989 show Kite as a green operative prone to professional insecurity, missteps, and major flubs. In the present, Kite's decades of experience as a spy provide him with the skills to turn the tables on his kidnappers during his interrogation. Between the two time frames, a thorough portrait of Kite emerges. Well-timed action scenes match focused glimpses into the world of spycraft. This outing cements Cumming's place in the top rank of espionage writers." We've lost Le Carré but we have Herron, whose new book is [Dolphin Junction](#) (Murray \$40 Signed), and Cumming, and among the US stars, Joseph Kanon whose new book [The Berlin Exchange](#) (Scribner \$28 Signed) publishes in February.

Davis, Fiona. [The Magnolia Palace](#) (Dutton \$27). Here is the captivating story of a missing diamond and the history of New York's Henry Clay Frick House, before and after it became a museum. [The Frick](#) is one of my favorites, embracing a Gilded Age mansion and a superb art collection. Currently, after some disputes over the garden, etc, it is under renovation and the art is temporarily installed in a Brutalist-style building over on Madison. The first Frick mansion is a Victorian located in Pittsburgh which I have visited; the two make an interesting comparison and in part chart the upward movement on the social scale achieved by industrialist Frick, who bought some of his art from the estate of JP Morgan whose Gilded Age Mansion is also a favorite to visit when in New York. Morgan was and remains one of our country's great bibliophiles and collectors.

"Dual timelines seamlessly connect the lives of two women at New York's Frick Collection. In 1919, Lillian Carter (based on the real-life artists' model Audrey Munson) is the supermodel of her day and the muse of classical sculptors; her face and figure grace hundreds of famous statues throughout New York City. When her landlord's wife is murdered, Lillian is sought as a person of interest and hides away by taking a job at the Frick mansion, her career shattered. There she works

as private secretary to Helen Clay Frick and lives among the collection's masterpieces, including a portrait of herself. In 1966, British model Veronica Weber comes to the Frick mansion (now a museum) for a photo shoot and ends up being locked in during a storm. [The two timelines meet when Veronica discovers a set of papers in the museum that may provide clues to finding a rare pink diamond owned by Henry Frick, which went missing in 1919. She then asks for help from archivist Joshua Lawrence.] Davis adeptly interweaves two compelling story lines to shine a light on another NYC landmark (after novels set in the Chelsea Hotel and the New York Public Library). This is historical fiction at its best, with well-developed characters, detail, art history, and mystery."—*LJ* Starred Review. And there are more Stars.

Davis' last, [The Lions of Fifth Avenue](#) (\$17), a similar story structure set at the NY Public Library, was a 2020 Crime Book of the Month or I would make this one our January selection.

Dorsey, Tim. [Mermaid Confidential](#) (Harper \$28.99). "In bestseller Dorsey's delightfully madcap 25th crime novel featuring Serge A. Storms, the vigilante serial killer and his stoner pal, Coleman, take a break from road trips and criminal pursuits to become responsible tenants at Pelican Bay, a bustling condominium complex in the Florida Keys. But, alas, the condo's fun-loving community spirit has given way to petty squabbles, drunk and disorderly behavior, gun violence, and malicious prank calls to police, with boisterous, disruptive renters causing havoc within the complex. Finding themselves in the thick of things, Serge and Coleman are encouraged to take suitable action against troublesome occupants on behalf of their friendly neighbors. Meanwhile, a blast across from Pelican Bay on a neighboring key, which injures dozens, including members of the infamous Millan cartel, heralds the onset of a turf war between the cartel and the Benzappa family, and a gang of murderous drug smugglers with a treasure map head for the Keys to unearth a hoard of buried cash. The suspenseful, seemingly unconnected subplots imaginatively intertwine as Dorsey brings everything to a suitably vicious and explosive finale. This fiendishly funny adventure is irresistible."

Estleman, Loren D. [Cutthroat Dogs](#) (Forge \$25.99). What a pleasure to spend time with the talented old pro Estleman, winner of numerous awards for his wide universe of books, including the Shamus for Best Private Eye novel. And that's what we have here, a new PI investigation by Detroit's Amos Walker. He's a cynical guy with a natural buck of authority but good-hearted. 20 years ago a college freshman, April Goss, was found dead in her bathtub. It looked like suicide but some anomalies suggested murder and her boyfriend Dan Corbell was attested, convicted, and incarcerated. Now a chance meeting resulting from Walker taking down a bank robber introduces him to Corbell's sister. She has all along insisted he is innocent, but been brushed off by cops and court. She hires Walker to investigate and he learns that no one is eager to see this cold case reopened. April's father has become a true crime podcaster on the basis of her case, his *Cutthroat Dogs* earning top rating. The public defender who represented Corbell has moved on. Corbell himself has lost not only hope but any will to live. So things are urgent. But Walker has little to work with. Still....

Gardner, Lisa. [One Step Too Far](#) (Dutton \$27). We met Frankie Fallon last winter in [Before She Disappeared](#) (\$17), a woman whose self-appointed mission is working missing-persons cold

cases. That one brought her to Boston. Now she's in Wyoming's Shoshone National Forest to join a search party for Tim O'Day. Five years earlier, Tim and four of his best friends set out into the woods for a bachelor party weekend. Tim, the future groom, disappeared without a trace. Every year since, Martin, Tim's father, has organized a search for his son's remains. This is to be Martin's last attempt. Frankie insinuates herself into the group, which includes Tim's four friends from the original trip. One day into their six-day trek, problems arise. From missing provisions and the sense of being watched, things escalate quickly, and the question becomes: who will survive? "Fascinating details on cadaver dog training, as well as on camping and tracking in difficult terrain, complement the suspenseful journey as it winds toward a surprising conclusion." "An authentic Wyoming setting, a tantalizing mystery, and a Labrador named Daisy. What's not to like?"—C.J. Box. Indeed. I thought Frankie's first case was a zinger and look forward to reading this one.

Grant, Rachel. [Crash Site](#) (Montlake \$12.99). **Signed bookplates.** I was absolutely crazy about archeologist Fiona Carver's first appearance in [Dangerous Ground](#) (\$12.95 Signed bookplate), with its vividly rendered landscape of the Aleutians and the prehistoric village, missing artifacts and a missing volcanologist whose twin brother, famed wildlife photographer Dean Slater, has bluffed his way onto Fiona's team with fake credentials to track him down. Fiona and Dean generated lots of sparks and some serious personal heat, but Dean, still deeply grieving his dead young wife, is determined never to risk heartbreak again. Which of course nearly breaks Fiona's heart.

Ruby Island is part of the Caribbean nation Dominica and leased to a wealthy shipping dynasty that has created a private luxury compound. The lease is nearly expired so Jude Reynolds, heir and CEO of RAM Freight, has hired Fiona and others to document the 17<sup>th</sup> Century fort and other territory, some of which are caves where indigenous people hid from the incoming European colonizers. This team flies in aboard a helicopter which mysteriously crashes, nearly killing them all. Then Dean unexpected shows up, his mission to photograph the rain forest, the island's birds, and such, and, it turns out, add spice to the documentary being filmed of the project by reuniting with Fiona who is furious when he shows up on Ruby Island. It goes from there, laced with fascinating stuff about wildlife photography, archaeology, Caribbean history, villainy (the least surprising part), diving, and romance.... I think of Grant, author of many books, as here writing a kind of modern Mary Stewart romantic suspense with attention to the landscapes but more edge to the characters. Speaking of Stewart, a few of her wonderful books are available—see the Large Paperbacks section below.

✠ Graves, Stephanie. [A Valiant Deceit](#) (Kensington \$26). [Olive Bright, Pigeoneer](#) (\$15.95) introduced us to the plucky young woman living in the little village of Pibley, Hertfordshire, where pigeonier and amateur sleuth Olive supports the war effort by training her homing pigeons for a clandestine government organization stationed at a nearby manor. Who knew these valiant birds were superb wartime couriers? And recruited for the covert intelligence organization known as Baker Street Her latest assignment, training the pigeons to carry messages for Resistance fighters in Europe, is interrupted when a mild-mannered acquaintance, Lt. Jeremy Beckett, is found dead. The police determine his death was an accident, but things don't add up—



Beckett was carrying a coded message in his pocket and a map of Germany clutched in one hand. Was he a spy? Determined to find the truth, Olive solicits the help of her superior officer, the handsome but prickly Capt. Jameson Aldridge. They must overcome their fraught relationship long enough to devise a trap for the real traitor. I add that Olive has some maturing to do along with her budding romance with Jamie. “Graves’s focus on a fascinating bit of WWII history makes this stand out among lighter wartime mysteries.”

Gudenkauf, Heather. [The Overnight Guest](#) (Park Row \$28.99). **Out in January, Signed here on February 10. Please order early.** Reclusive Oregon writer Wylie Lark retreats to an unoccupied, isolated farmhouse in Burden, Iowa, where two people were murdered and a little girl went missing in 2000. The murders and disappearance are the subject of her fourth true crime book and as usual she wants to get a feel for the crime scene. During a major snowstorm, Wylie discovers a bleeding five-year-old boy in her front yard with remnants of duct tape on his mouth. She can’t contact the sheriff because her utilities are out due to the storm, so she brings the boy inside, tends to his injuries, and tries to get him to tell her what happened, but he’s frightened and refuses to talk. Wylie goes outside to collect firewood, but on returning she finds she’s locked out, and, through a window, she sees a woman with a hatchet. Wylie’s frantic efforts to save the boy alternate with flashbacks that reveal in suspenseful increments what happened in the farmhouse two decades earlier.... Iowan Gudenkauf scares with a Midwestern murder.

✎ Hallett, Janice. [The Appeal](#) (Atria \$27). **Signed Bookplates.** At the start of British journalist, playwright, and screenwriter Hallett’s ingeniously plotted debut, our **February British Crime Club Book of the Month**, two young lawyers face a Herculean challenge issued by a Queen’s Counsel: blitzing through almost two years of emails, texts, and messages so they can assist with an appeal brief due within days. And the question: is the proper person in prison for the crime(s)? As they read, at first the communications among members of a London area amateur theater group seem unremarkable, even banal. But things get real when troupe leader Martin Hayward shares that his two-year-old granddaughter, Poppy, has been diagnosed with a rare brain tumor—for which the only hope is an astronomically expensive experimental US produced drug not paid for by the National Health program. Though plans for the show proceed, an urgent appeal to raise funds for Poppy’s treatment takes center stage. As crowd-funded contributions climb and someone ends up dead, Hallett skillfully lays an intricate and twisty trail of bread crumbs that leads to half a dozen suspects, which should delight those eager for the opportunity to sift through the evidence. It’s a challenge for the reader as well for the two young solicitors. As a speed reader I thought I would dislike the story’s structure, but in fact it rocketed along uninterrupted by the various communications. I worked out most of what was transpiring, but Not All! *The Appeal* was a Number One bestseller in the UK for good reason.

✎ Hallett, Janice. [The Twyford Code](#) (Viper \$36). Hallett’s second book publishes in the UK in January and steps into Richard Osman and Alex Pavesi territory. Here is the publisher’s description: Forty years ago, Steven Smith found a copy of a famous children’s book by disgraced author Edith Twyford,

its margins full of strange markings and annotations. Wanting to know more, he took it to his English teacher Miss Iles, not realizing the chain of events that he was setting in motion. Miss Iles became convinced that the book was the key to solving a puzzle, and that a message in secret code ran through all Twyford’s novels. Then Miss Iles disappeared on a class field trip, and Steven has no memory of what happened to her. Now, out of prison after a long stretch, Steven decides to investigate the mystery that has haunted him for decades. Was Miss Iles murdered? Was she deluded? Or was she right about the code? And is it still in use today? Desperate to recover his memories and find out what really happened to Miss Iles, Steven revisits the people and places of his childhood. But it soon becomes clear that Edith Twyford wasn’t just a writer of forgotten children’s stories.... I am told the story’s structure may be that of voice mails but cannot confirm.

✎ Hannah, Sophie. [The Couple at the Table](#) (Hodder \$40). You’re on your honeymoon at an exclusive couples-only resort. You receive a note warning you to ‘Beware of the couple at the table nearest to yours’. At dinner that night, five other couples are present, and none of their tables is any nearer or further away than any of the others. It’s as if someone has set the scene in order to make the warning note meaningless—but why would anyone do that? You have no idea. You also don’t know that you’re about to be murdered, or that once you’re dead, all the evidence will suggest that no one there that night could possibly have committed the crime....

Hunter, Stephen. [Targeted](#) (Atria \$28). In bestseller Hunter’s superb 12th Bob Lee Swagger novel, a determined *New York Times* reporter wants to interview Bob, who’s 74, about his part in recently bringing down a bad guy known as Juba the Sniper in this sequel to 2019’s [Game of Snipers](#) (\$9.99). Bob, who’s recovering from a bullet wound in his upper body, declines, but after the reporter publishes an article describing Bob’s role, Bob is subpoenaed to testify before a House subcommittee set up for purely political purposes. A confrontational congresswoman, a wily and ancient veteran who’s facing a tough upcoming election campaign, leads the hearing, which is convened in a Boise, Idaho, high school auditorium near Bob’s home for his convenience. Bob holds his own at the hearing, but eventually the committee charges him with “wanton endangerment.” In a battle where “words are bullets,” he’s on the ropes, until a prison bus commandeered by a Chechen crime family of five, all escaped inmates, crashes the hearing, setting loose wild mayhem. “The suspense rises as Bob must try to save the lives of the very people accusing him of wrongdoing. With this inventive nail-biter, Hunter sets a new bar for both himself and the genre.”—*PW* Starred Review. I add that Hunter drops you back over two centuries into Swagger family history during our Revolutionary War that interweaves with the present action and is enormous fun.

Dana Stabenow, a Hunter fan like me, adds: “Hunter starts out this book pissed off at everyone, especially Congress and the media, but by the end he has mellowed a trifle, toward everyone except the media. Again with the Hunterian edge-of-your-seat thrill ride, with excellent villains both Congressional and Chechen, another fascinating peek into Bob Lee’s family history, and Bob Lee himself at his rough guy best, proving yet again that we need the rough men and always will.”

Jurczyk, Eva. [The Department of Rare Books and Special](#)

[Collections](#) (Poisoned Pen \$26.99/\$16.99). **Signed bookplates** from the Canadian librarian author. “Who doesn’t love a mystery involving rare books and bad librarians?” Liesl Weiss long ago learned to be content working behind the scenes in the distinguished rare books department of a large university, managing details and working behind the scenes to make the head of the department look good. But now when the Department Head is in ICU following a stroke, she becomes the acting Head, despite being on sabbatical with no official responsibilities at the library for a full year. She lacks the safecracking skills needed to determine whether a major acquisition has gone missing from the secure safe in the Head’s office. It might have migrated into the stacks by mistake. Or, did someone steal it? Everything was fine in the library until it wasn’t and now it’s all Liesl can do to not day-drink nor call the cops. Why doesn’t she take this obvious action, I ask? “As Liesl’s colleague Francis Churchill points out, ‘Our entire job is finding information.’ Not detection. So the goal is not to upset the donors, plus to navigate department and university politics as Jurczyk consistently subordinates the question of whodunit to the question of how to handle the case. Jurczyk displays a keen satirical eye as she delineates the characters, even the absent Department Head Christopher. *Library Journal*, the natural reviewer for this debut, adds, “Filled with characters that resonate, glimpses into the reality of libraries and academia, and enchanting descriptions of rare books, this debut from a librarian will captivate bibliophiles.” *Kirkus* adds, “Toronto librarian Jurczyk’s first novel is a valentine to librarians that doesn’t shy away from their dark sides.” “Biblio-wrap” is a new phrase I discovered in the *NY Times* recently, new for bibliophilia, which can tip over into obsession. This is stretching to select Jurczyk’s tale for our **January Cozy Crimes Book of the Month** but it ticks most cozy boxes so I did it.

Krentz, Jayne Ann. [Lightning in a Mirror](#) (Berkley \$28). Jayne Ann writes to me, “Olivia LeClair likes the concept of speed dating. It’s fast and efficient. She’s got only one question for each man who sits down at her table: ‘If I disappeared tomorrow would you walk into hell to find me?’ But things have not been going well. Most of the candidates get a deer-in-the-headlights look and move on to the next table as quickly as possible. The exceptions are not promising. One turns out to be a serial killer who targets her. And then there’s Harlan Rancourt. Long believed dead, he sits down and says, yes, he would walk into hell to find her because he’s looking for the legendary Vortex lab and he’s convinced she’s the only one who can help him find it. Right answer. Wrong man. Vortex is the code name for a late 20th century government project dedicated to the study of the paranormal. There are those who are willing to kill to protect the secrets of the old lab. Really, what can possibly go wrong?” Well, Jayne Ann certainly knows.

*Publishers Weekly* adds, “Krentz wraps up her Fogg Lake trilogy in dazzling fashion with this paranormal tour de force...masterfully ratcheting up the tension on the way to a powerhouse finale. Readers will devour this smart, sexy story.’ The first two books in the trilogy are [The Vanishing](#) (\$7.99) and [All the Colors of Night](#) (\$8.99/\$27.99 Signed).” Jayne Ann would like to add that, “contrary to certain rumors, she can finish a series. Sort of. This trilogy is proof. And this book can be read as a standalone.”

Lutz, Lisa. [The Accomplice](#) (Ballantine \$28) opens with Luna and Owen meeting in an intro to ethics class in college. Shortly afterward, Luna, who has epilepsy, has a seizure while sharing her notes with Owen. They are alone, and he cushions her head with his jacket and sticks his fingers in her mouth in the belief that epileptics are at risk of swallowing their tongues—a fallacy for which she later ridicules him. The cement for their bond is thus set, despite the fact that their personalities are wildly different: Luna is guarded, sometimes flippant and mysterious, definitely self-protective, whereas Owen is affable, popular, and privileged, a schmoozing womanizer. The story that develops alternates between Owen and Luna’s college days, during which time Owen’s ex-girlfriend is found dead, and the present, when Owen’s wife is murdered. Luna finds her body and runs to tell Owen before calling the police. Things look fishy. Is it the basic dysfunctionality of the characters responsible, or something more sinister at play? Will their bond stand or break? How dangerous is it for someone to be around them? Lutz has always explored relationship dynamics and unusual family structures, here taking it to a bond between unlikely friends.

Mann, Peter. [The Torqued Man](#) (Harper \$26.99). An Irish double agent and his German handler form an unlikely bond in 1940s Berlin. “When ex-Irish resistance fighter Proinnias “Frank” Pike is liberated from a Spanish prison in 1940 by German intelligence operative Adrian de Groot, aka Johann Grotius, the ill-matched duo are launched on a daring series of exploits inside Nazi Germany. Debut novelist Mann seamlessly intertwines two narratives—de Groot’s candid journal and a third-person account of Pike’s escapades entitled ‘Finn McCool in the Bowels of Teutonia’ (his alter ego is a well-known hunter/warrior figure in Irish mythology)—to describe some of the same events from their wildly differing perspectives. De Groot, a philologist and translator and the titular torqued man (another sly nod to Irish myth), recruits Pike to engage in missions intended to turn Ireland’s ancient antipathy to England into full-fledged support for Hitler’s regime, but the Germans are a step behind the English, who intend to take advantage of Pike’s presence in the heart of the Reich’s war machine to thwart these schemes and serve their own ends.”—*Kirkus* Starred Review on our **January Historical Fiction Book of the Month**.

Parker, T. Jefferson. [A Thousand Steps](#) (Forge \$27.99). Barnes & Noble speaks for me with this: “T. Jefferson Parker has been a favorite of ours since his Charlie Hood series. Here, Parker takes us to a land and time as trippy as the gorgeous cover — Southern California in 1968. As Timothy Leary once said, ‘Turn on, tune in, drop out.’ *A Thousand Steps* is a beguiling thriller, an incisive coming-of-age story, and a vivid portrait of a turbulent time and place by the three-time Edgar Award winner and bestselling author.”

Yes, our longtime friend T. Jeff is an inventive writer, never resting on his laurels but stretching to access different genres, different characters, and varied communities. So here he is in Laguna Beach where the Age of Aquarius is in full swing, Leary is a rock star, LSD is “God.” Newcomers flock seeking peace, love, enlightenment. And 16-year-old Matt Anthony is just trying to get by. His mom is a stoner, his dad is long departed, his admired older brother is serving in Nam, and his big sister Jazz has just gone missing. Is she just a runaway hippie, as the cops

clock her, enjoying a summer of love? But wait, there's another missing girl and she's found dead on the beach. So Matt, broke, sans driver's license or any resources, shoulders finding his sister against all the odds. A bonus is the story of Matt's brother. Parker has always been good at coming-of-age stories, and chronicling 20<sup>th</sup> Century California into the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Patterson, James/Mike Lupica. [The Horsewoman](#) (LittleBrown \$28). **Signed bookplate by Lupica and Patterson.** It's a natural for famed sportswriter Lupica to pair up with Patterson for more than a thriller—it's an eye-opening ride through the high-stakes world of equestrian show-jumping. Patterson and Lupica make a great team, writing at a full gallop and with faultless timing of the lives of three fearless women connected by blood, competition, and a passion for fast horses."—Carl Hiaasen. Interestingly Louise Penny adds, "Patterson and Lupica manage to get deep into the world of high-level show jumping and also, incredibly for two men, deep into the lives of three generations of strong women. I don't know what's more compelling—the white-knuckle descriptions of the horse shows in the lead-up to the Olympics or the tense, complex relationships among the three women." Basically what we have is a mother and daughter, champion riders, who despite a vow never to go up against one another, end up competing in the run up to the Paris Olympics.

Petrie, Nick. [The Runaway](#) (Putnam \$27). Peter Ash is a Jack Reacher kind of guy, an Iraq War Marine who suffers from PTSD and choking claustrophobia who finds stepping into danger to defend/rescue someone is a mission that keeps him sane and functional. Along the way he's acquired a friend in Lewis and a true love in freelance journalist June Cassidy, and they are all mobile so they move around with each mission. And here he is in rural Nebraska, powering along in his truck, when he comes across a vacant car and a very pregnant teen. She's 19-year-old Helen Johansen whom we know ditched her dead-end job and life in Coldwater, Montana, when a charming stranger pulls up to fill up with diesel for his rig at the crummy gas station where she works and dreads having to accept the advances of her equally crummy landlord. When Peter meets her Helene has figured out that her rescuer Roy Wiley is not a trucker but both leader of a team of professional break-in artists and a stone killer, and she's made a run for it. Peter offers her a lift and a terrific driving chase ensues across the northern Great Plains, first to escape Roy, and then for Peter to escape Roy when, cornered, Helene pretends to have gone with him unwillingly. It's a look at Middle America from an interesting perspective that shifting points of view—Peter, Helene, Roy, Lewis, June—illuminate. And at a young woman hell-bent on surviving what life has thrust on her including motherhood. You may not agree with her choices, but the key is that she does make them.

Qiu, Xiaolong. [The Shadow of the Empire](#) (Severn \$28.99). Robert van Gulik's brilliant Judge Dee mysteries, made the more delightful by his wonderful drawings, have long been one of my very favorite series. Set in the imperial Tang Dynasty (618-907), a Golden Age until its fall, they bring that era vibrantly to life while illuminating aspects of China's contemporary culture. Dutch diplomat and sinologist Van Gulik drew upon traditional Chinese detective stories, particularly an 18<sup>th</sup> Century *gong'an* novel by an anonymous author, to put a fictional character loosely based on the real-life Tang Dynasty magistrate Di Renjie in the Sherlock seat. Poetry is a facet of Van Gulik's novels so

it is great news that award-winning poet and detective novelist Qiu (Shanghai's Inspector Chen series) has penned a Judge Dee investigation. It's more a novella, really, a companion novel to [Inspector Chen and the Private Kitchen Murder](#) (\$28.99, two Signed copies left) and, fabulously, comes laced with Chinese poetry of the Tang era.

Judge Dee is on his way out of the imperial capital, named by Empress Wu as Imperial Circuit Supervisor—a device to remove him from a succession battle between the powerful Internal Minister Wu of her clan and Prince Li, the heir to his late Emperor Father. But he is waylaid by an emissary of Wu who brings Dee a command to investigate a sensational murder. Xuanji, a highly talented and popular poet and courtesan, has been accused of beating her servant Ning to death and burying the body near her home. Strict Confucian Dee moves into a nearby Buddhist temple as his base and learns the locals think Xuanji is possessed by the spirit of a black fox. The poetess claims to have been drunk when committing the crime although originally she professed innocence. Dee believes none of it. "Qiu combines a sophisticated puzzle with appropriate period detail."

Rollins, James. [The Starless Crown](#) (Forge \$28.99). **Our copies of *The Starless Crown* each comes with an exclusive specially designed giveaway along with Rollins' signature.** Rollins kicks off this epic fantasy series start at The Pen on January 4—returning to his roots, as he says, but never fear, the new Sigma Force adventure [Kingdom of Bones](#) (Morrow \$28.99) will debut here on April 18.

If you were a Michael Crichton fan, Rollins is the strongest heir to his brand of adventure for Sigma Force. Why not move with him into a fully realized fantasy world where a top-of-the-class student predicts an apocalypse and is promptly sentenced to death? She goes on the run with a crew of motley souls now finding purpose in their lives: a disillusioned soldier, a dissolute prince ducking out of his older brother's shadow, and a thief who uncovers an artifact that could change the world. The Indie Next Pick: "A captivating page-turner of impressive world-building and layered characters pits religious extremism against science; morally gray heroes against youthful innocence; and a mismatched squad trying to stop the end of their world."

**We are going to discontinue our SciFi/Fantasy Book of the Month and instead pick the occasional contender into the Notable New Fiction Club. So here is our January NNFC Book of the Month.**

✚ Rowland, Laura Joh. [Garden of Sins](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). Sarah Bain, feminist crime scene photographer in the late Victorian Age, and her new husband, Whitechapel Police Sergeant Thomas Barrett, are riding the London underground in November 1890 when their train derails. In helping to rescue the injured from the vividly realized wreckage, they discover a dead woman—dead by strangulation. It's not an ideal crime scene. In time the victim is identified as New Yorker Katherine Oliver, a Pinkerton agent in Britain searching for a vanished American heiress. The photographs on Oliver's state-of-the-art Kodak camera found in her belongings were taken at the Cremorne Gardens, a derelict London pleasure park, and one depicts Prince Eddy, Queen Victoria's libidinous grandson. Bain and Barrett discover that three former circus performers offering new attractions at the Cremorne have falsified their names and histories, while the prince's visits to the site using a false



name suggest that scandal awaits the royal family. **I add that this is a surprisingly dark and sexually explicit plot thread.** Rowland ups the ante by having Bain additionally face Barrett's entanglement with his former fiancée and the trial of her father for a rape and murder she worries he did indeed commit. The looming trial frames the story but is not well realized.

Rozan, SJ. [Family Business](#) (Pegasus \$25.95). Here's a repeat rave for a December book that, due to holiday madness, you may have been overlooked. Don't—it's a gem! Had we done a Crime Book of the Month for December, this would have been the Pick. As *Family Business* begins, crime boss Big Brother Choi has just died—of natural causes, of all things. Choi owned a Chinatown building occupied by the New York branch of the Li Min Jin, the tong over which he presided for decades. Developer Jackson Ting wants to buy the property, which would mean the building's demolition and, as Lydia grouches, "that whole gentrification thing." The decision to sell is now up to Mel Wu, a real estate attorney who inherited the property from Choi, her uncle. Mel hires Lydia and Bill Smith, Lydia's partner (in both senses), to escort her to the building, where Choi's top lieutenant said he would give her the message her uncle intended for her. She never receives it. "*Family Business* contains some gasp-making reveals and leaves readers with lots to ponder—about loyalty, about assimilation. Rozan embroiders her story with references to Chinese customs courtesy of chatterbox narrator Lydia, who uses her background to professional advantage. Still, her ultra-traditional mother considers her a disappointment: Why date a white guy like Bill when she could date Jackson Ting?"

Schaffhausen, Joanna. [Last Seen Alive](#) (St Martins \$27.99). For two decades, many people have viewed Ellery Hathaway purely as the sole survivor of serial murderer/kidnapper Francis Coben. Ellery's rescue at age 14 by FBI agent Reed Markham has affected all aspects of her life, from home security measures to her career as a Boston police detective. To try to free herself from her past, she recently ended her eventual romantic relationship with Reed that began the year before. Now, Coben, responsible for the mutilation deaths of at least 17 young women, has a deal—he'll confess where he buried eight other women if Ellery visits him in prison. Ellery agrees, but the meeting has some surprising consequences. "The author highlights Ellery's emotional state and the grief of the families desperate to know what happened to their loved ones as the suspenseful plot builds to a stunning finale. The chilling Coben, who shows that pure evil can lurk behind a handsome face, makes a memorable villain." I am not crazy about repeat serial killers or other villains, but Schaffhausen makes it work. This is [a series best read from the beginning](#).

Stabenow, Dana. [Disappearance of a Scribe](#) (Zeus \$29.95). I think of this as *On the Waterfront*, Cleopatra style. In other words the action takes place in Cleo's Alexandria and highlights the role of this great city as a port as well as locus of traffic on the River Nile. This is a book I edited, so to be objective I quote the enthusiastic *PW* review:

"In Edgar winner Stabenow's entertaining second mystery set during the reign of Egyptian queen Cleopatra after 2018's [Death of an Eye](#) (\$15.95), the city of Alexandria is rebuilding from a punishing siege during the recent civil war and is on its way to becoming a client state of Rome. When a body is discovered in the harbor, its feet secured in two amphorae by a rare type of Roman waterproof cement, Cleopatra dispatches

her childhood friend Tetisheri—a personal investigator and spy known as the Eye of Isis—to identify the victim and the killer. As she grapples with her new responsibilities (her predecessor was murdered in *Death of an Eye*), Tetisheri must deal with political intrigues, violence, and corruption from the crowded streets to the queen's palace. Stabenow brings Alexandria's Hellenistic period to life while demonstrating that murder, methodical detective work, and politically expedient resolutions that fall short of justice are nothing new under the sun. Best known for her series featuring Alaska investigator Kate Shugak, Stabenow is as much at home in ancient Egypt as she is in the Alaskan wilderness."

Taylor, Brad. [End of Days: A Pike Logan Novel](#) (Morrow \$28.99). Taylor has created a series of bestsellers by combining action (realistically drawn from his own military career) with vivid landscapes and a sound understanding of geopolitics. I've always liked touring the world with Pike Logan and the Task Force. Here we open in Switzerland at a high alpine paragliding site where Shia militia member Mustafa is on a mission to kill former Mossad head Gideon Cohen. After Mustafa dodges security precautions and engineers an accident in which both he and Cohen die, the Mossad asks private contractors Aaron Bergman and his partner, the deadly, spooky Shoshana, to help figure out who was behind the hit. Bergman and Shoshana say no deal unless they can recruit their best friends, Taskforce operatives Pike and Pike's fiancée, Jennifer Cahill, as backup. Because of Covid, Americans can't travel internationally, so the Israelis have to issue Pike and Jennifer fake Israeli passports to spring them from sheltering in Charleston, SC, which adds another layer of difficulty. There are several theories about who is responsible for Cohen's death and those of other key Americans and Israelis. The American pair follows a trail of bodies that leads to Rome and to the head of security for the papal order of chivalry, the Knights of Malta—and to an ambitious scheme that underlines... Well, no spoilers, read it to find out... there's a hint of Dan Brown in this.

Tracy, PJ. [Desolation Canyon](#) (St Martins \$27.99). LAPD Detective Margaret Nolan worked a tough case in 2021's [Deep into the Dark](#) (\$9.99), a Crime Club Book of the Month. She is still carrying guilt from a line-of-duty shooting. Afghan War vet Sam Easton's PTSD is stirred when he hears rifle shots while jogging in Desolation Canyon near Death Valley. Nolan's mother, grieving the combat death of her soldier son, goes on a spiritual retreat at the wilderness compound of the Children of the Desert. Father Paul, the sect's charismatic leader, is so outraged that his consort, Marielle, has fled with their daughter that he recruits a cold-blooded killer, an ex-con who is familiar with Father Paul's earlier criminal identity as Roger "Snake" Jackson—to help recover his "stolen property." That's the set up with the main players, all well realized with their vivid personalities and quirks. So, moving along, Nolan's investigation into a corpse dumped in the swan pond at the Hotel Bel-Air leads her to confront an ex-KGB crime boss and to ponder how the kidnapping of the murder victim's son decades ago could have consequences today. All these plot elements come neatly together as the tension builds along with Father Paul's drug-fueled paranoia and the hunt for Marielle. "Tracy should win new fans with this vivid, twisty crime novel." True, but I'd read Nolan's first case first. Fans of the Monkeewrench series will be pleased with this new Nolan one written by PJ after the death of her writing partner mother.



Trigiani, Adriana. [The House of Love](#) (Penguin Young Readers \$17.99). Now that Christmas 2021 is done, turn to Valentine's Day 2022 and consider an autographed copy of this charmer, illustrated by Amy June Bates, for kids ages 3-7. Mia Valentina Amore wakes up in the patchy old family home in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It's Valentine's Day. And with her mama Mia transforms it into a House of Love festooned with a gumdrop tree, cupcakes, and valentines for all six of her sibs. But wait... there's no valentine for Mia. Did mama forget her in preparing the family's celebration?

Willingham, Stacy. [A Flicker in the Dark](#) (St Martins \$27.99). Sometimes I make a First Mystery Book of the Month selection based on the writer's potential as well as the book in question. And also, to be frank, on what I estimate the publisher's level of support will be, as that makes a huge difference to a career trajectory. In short, what's the buzz? Willingham's January debut, an Indie Next Pick too, has all that going for it, so it is our **January First Mystery Book of the Month**.

Chloe was only 12 when her father was arrested for murdering six teenage girls in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. She watched in horrified disbelief, and again when he confessed and took a plea to serve six consecutive life sentences in order to avoid the death penalty. In the wake her mother attempted suicide and her outgoing older brother retreated inside himself. Flash forward to a 32-year-old Chloe who has forged a life as a psychologist in Baton Rouge where her history is unknown. She's prone to self-medicating. She engaged to Daniel Briggs, a pharmaceutical salesman, after a whirlwind romance. Daniel does know her story and gets her apprehension as the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murders approaches. Then a 15-year-old girl disappears from her neighborhood, and a few days later, another teen vanishes after visiting Chloe's office. Is there a pattern here? Has a copycat killer arisen? Or...? "Willingham skillfully intercuts Chloe's anxious first-person narration in the present with flashbacks to her childhood, ratcheting up the tension. Atmospheric prose and abundant red herrings amplify the tale's intensity."

Yanagihara, Hanya. [To Paradise](#) (Knopf \$32.50). **Tip-ins.** Following [A Little Life](#) (\$18), short-listed for the Man Booker Prize and a National Book Award finalist, Yanagihara's new novel tracks themes of love, loss, illness, power, and the unfillable desire for heaven on Earth over three centuries in stories tied together by a townhouse on New York City's Washington Square Park. In an alternate 1893 America, with New York belonging to the more or less freewheeling Free States, the scion of a prominent family prefers a poor music teacher to a more polished suitor. In AIDS-ravaged 1993 Manhattan, a young Hawaiian man living with a controlling older partner quietly suppresses his tattered childhood. And in plague-shattered totalitarian 2093, a troubled woman seeking her missing husband misses the guidance of her powerful scientist grandfather. As with the new Noah Hawley novel [Anthem](#) (Grand Central \$29), I question how many of us want to begin January with novels of hope, wonder, romance, even mystery, rather than with shattering stories, like these. It's an individual choice.

#### UNSIGNED EVENT BOOKS

Elias, Gerald. [Cloudy with a Chance of Murder](#) (Level Best Books \$19). Musician Elias presents a new case for his musician/

detective Daniel Jacobus. Elias says, "The setting is a chamber music festival from hell on an island in the middle of the Great Salt Lake. It has an Agatha Christie vibe, as everyone gets trapped on the island when the causeway is washed away, and there's a killer on the loose." Jerry's first appearance at The Pen came with a violin concert he performed. We will have music in addition to conversation on January 21.

Gentill, Sulari. [Where There's a Will](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.99). "Gentill's witty, rip-roaring 10th mystery featuring Australian portrait painter Rowland Sinclair takes Rowland to Boston, Massachusetts, with his ever-faithful entourage. His flamboyant university friend, Daniel Cartwright, has been murdered, and Rowland has been appointed the sole executor of the man's considerable estate. Rowland winds up not only investigating his friend's death but also dealing with Daniel's angry siblings, who have been left with what they consider to be the paltry sum of \$10,000 each. The bulk of the estate is to go to the mysterious Otis Norcross, whose whereabouts are unknown. The search for Norcross takes Rowland and his crew in some unusual directions, leading to encounters with William Randolph Hearst, Orson Welles, Joseph Kennedy, and Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald. Each chapter begins with an edifying quote from a period publication, and, as ever, Gentill elegantly infuses historically accurate details on the rise of fascism into the text, providing insight that's relevant to today's readers. This is historical mystery fiction at its finest," says the *PW* Starred Review. As the editor of this gem, I completely agree. The quirks and humor with which Gentill laces this 1930s mystery series, making them a joy to read, do not smother Gentill's unflinching portraits of family dynamics, on display here, and Fascism on the rise.

Kepler, Lars. [The Mirror Man](#) (Knopf \$28.95). In Kepler's stellar eighth Killer Instinct novel, Joona Linna, a detective with Sweden's National Operations Unit, looks into the case of a woman found hanged in a Stockholm playground. Her killer attached a winch to a jungle gym before slipping a wire noose around her neck. The discovery that the victim is Jenny Lind, who vanished five years earlier when she was a 16-year-old, adds additional mysteries—her whereabouts since her disappearance and why her captor decided to kill her now. Unfortunately, the one witness who may have seen the murder while walking his dog in the middle of the night suffers from memory lapses following an ice-fishing accident in which his daughter died years earlier. Linna comes to believe Lind was murdered by a serial killer, who may have more women in captivity. The ability of Kepler (the pen name of Alexander and Alexandra Ahndoril) to ratchet up the tension en route to a stunning reveal and an eminently fair solution is remarkable. This merits comparisons with the best of Thomas Harris."

✦ Robotham, Michael. [When You Are Mine](#) (Scribner \$27). Two-time Gold Dagger winner Robotham is living in Sydney so no signed books or bookplates. But this gem of a series start is our **January British Crime Club Book of the Month** and I urge non-club members to order it too.

Philomena McCarthy of London's elite Metropolitan Police is an ambitious officer. When she responds to a domestic violence call, she finds A Tempe Brown, the victim, trying to protect her abuser. He's a married man, one Darren Goodall, and he's a decorated hero from Scotland Yard, more or less bullet proof. Philomena is not intimidated and tries to build a case

against him, which puts her at odds with her colleagues and also with Tempe, who is not really what she says she is. Philomena has an additional problem: her estranged father is a powerful gangster heading a criminal empire along with his brothers. It handicaps Philomena's pursuit of being a cop on her own terms. When she is inevitably accused of stalking and harassing Goodall (a real shit), her father inevitably becomes involved. Further complications arise thanks to Tempe's lies and her skill at maneuvering to trap Philomena. Then there is Goodall's terrified wife and children to consider. The result: Philomena's career, her impending marriage to Henry, and her very survival are all at risk. Robotham structures this story with his usual skill, limning the characters brilliantly with all the relish he brings to coming up with exploring new lives and new characters. He says "this is a novel about abuse, toxic friendships, and the baggage that all families carry with them," but it's his gift to tell a story that flows unfreighted by any agenda(s).

### CLASSICS

✦ Christie, Agatha. [A Deadly Affair: Unexpected Love Stories](#) (Harper \$16.99) The 14 entries in this fine collection amply display Christie's gifts as a short-form storyteller, though it's a bit of stretch to label them all love stories. Her best-known creations, Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple, distinguish themselves, as do such now obscure recurring characters as Parker Pyne, who presents the deceptively benign facade of a dull civil servant. In "Death on the Nile," Pyne attracts clients via a laconic and enticing newspaper ad ("Are you happy? If not, consult Mr. Parker Pyne"). When a fellow British passenger on an Egyptian cruise, the wealthy Lady Grayle, expresses fear for her life, Pyne must act swiftly to avert tragedy and apprehend the would-be murderer. Poirot's focus on out-of-place details serves him well in "The King of Clubs," in which the cleanliness of a pair of shoes points the way to the truth about a murder. By linking mysteries that have affairs of the heart at their center, this volume allows the reader to appreciate better Christie's facility at crafting variations on a theme.

✦ Kelly, Mary. [The Spoilt Kill](#) (Poisoned Pen \$14.99). This fabulous book deserves a repeat rave from 2020. It won the 1961 Gold Dagger beating out a John Le Carré! But Kelly (1927-2017) then dropped into obscurity. I ate this up from the setting in the Staffordshire Potteries industry—Eritrea where Wedgewood began; Stoke-on-Trent—to the complex characters to the tricky plot that begins when a body is found turning in liquid clay (not dissimilar to bodies found in vats of wine or whiskey in other mysteries) to the unmasking of the industrial espionage agent to the author's musings on a culture of consumption. Plus it's a fine PI story: a pottery company hires Hedley Nicholson to shadow a suspect employee. "Widely heralded as a perfect golden age mystery, this piece of British crime fiction marked a shift in the genre towards mysteries characterized by psychological elements." Honestly it's the best book I've read in ages! It like the Classic by Bennett earned a Starred Review for its December publication.

Dana Stabenow adds, "This book is exquisitely written, with a totally character-driven plot in a fully realized workplace setting (a commercial pottery). The detective is undercover on a case of industrial espionage and the pottery's accountant is found murdered by, well, let's just say by clay. But this is one of those books that is about far more than its mystery... some passages could have been written today and be just as true now as then."

Starrett, Vincent. [Murder on B Deck](#) (American Mystery Classics \$15.95). First published in 1929, this cunning closed-circle whodunit from Starrett (1886-1974) opens in Manhattan, where mystery novelist Dunstan Mollock is seeing off his sister, Mavis, and her new husband, who are about to depart on their European honeymoon aboard the *Latakia*. After Mollock disembarks, he realizes that he forgot to give Mavis an advance copy of his latest book. He returns to do so, only to be stuck on the ship when he misses his last opportunity to get off. Making the best of the situation, Mollock flirts with passenger Dhu Harrington, who persuades him to start writing his next novel and to set it on a ship like the *Latakia*. Mollock starts dictating the first chapter to Miss Harrington in the presence of some others who have asked to listen in, including an old friend, former intelligence officer Walter Ghost. The recital's interrupted by news that someone has been strangled in their cabin, and Ghost is tapped to investigate. Ghost probes the possible motives of his fellow passengers, including Miss Harrington, but another life's claimed before he reaches the fairly clued solution. Starrett makes the most of the setting and populates it with an array of potential suspects.

✦ Walpole, Horace. [Gothic Classics: The Castle of Otranto and The Old English Baron](#) (The Haunted Library/Poisoned Pen \$14.99). No run of Horror Classics would be complete without what is considered the first Gothic Novel, published in 1764 by Walpole. In "Otranto" an evil lord seeks to avert an ancient foretelling by marrying his dead son's fiancée in order to attempt birthing another male heir. "The Old English Baron" (1778), which was written as a reaction to *Otranto* from a female author's point of view, a peasant boy, living in a royal family's castle, begins to show his superiority, much to the enmity of those in "higher stations." Series editors include Leslie S. Klinger and Eric J. Guignard.

### COZY CRIMES

Delany, Vicki. [A Three Book Problem](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). Gemma Doyle, the owner of the Sherlock Holmes Bookshop and Emporium on Cape Cod, is helping a wealthy devotee of the canon host a Sherlockian weekend at a house rented for the occasion. Aided by her best friend, Jayne Wilson, the manager of Mrs. Hudson's Tea Room, Gemma arranges for people to pose as Victorian servants and provides catering and Sherlockian paraphernalia. Gemma soon picks up on undercurrents of tension among the guests, overhearing snatches of conversations that she gives further scrutiny to after one attendee is murdered. The homicide method, a poisoned dart, is straight out of Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*. Gemma's discovery that the victim was the author of a new theory about the canon's master blackmailer, Charles Augustus Milverton, proves crucial to the subsequent police inquiry. Remember this is a cozy and not a Sherlockian pastiche.

Flower, Amanda. [Crimes and Covers: A Magical Bookshop Mystery](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). An obnoxious customer who won't give her name tries to sell Violet Waverly, the owner of Charming Books in Cascade Springs, N.Y., a signed first edition of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Thoreau expert Violet, who suspects the book is stolen, turns the woman down. Two days later, just after Violet's wedding to police chief David Rainwater, a member of the Seneca nation, David fishes the drowned body of the customer out of a river. With their honeymoon on hold,

Violet and David try to solve the mystery of the woman's death and check out the claims of Imogene Thoreau, who says she's a descendant of Thoreau and the book's rightful owner. Violet, who gets supernatural support from the birch tree growing in her store watered by her from the nearby magical hot springs, strives to interpret the spirit's quotes from *Walden* that will lead her to the truth. The murder of an antiquarian bookseller raises the stakes. For cozy fans, "This is perfect reading for a winter's night when a bit of magic mixes well with a strong dose of murder most literary."

✦ Hutton, Callie. [The Mystery of Albert E. Finch](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). Set in 1892, Hutton's third Victorian Book Club mystery finds Lady Amy Lovell, amateur sleuth and author of mystery novels (under a male pseudonym, of course), marrying Lord William Wethington, her wealthy and utterly besotted sweetheart. At the happy couple's wedding breakfast, held on the outskirts of Bath at Amy's great-aunt's manor house, Alice Finch, one of the 50 or so guests, is poisoned. Two Bath police detectives, who disdain Lady Amy's interference in criminal matters, hastily conclude that the culprit is Alice's husband, Albert, who stands to inherit a great deal of money from her death. Amy does not concur. The newlyweds put their honeymoon on hold as they attempt to ferret out the truth. Historical fiction fans should keep in mind this is a cozy, not an Anne Perry nor a CS Harris. I wish American authors writing British historicals would really learn how titles and modes of address worked.

#### NEW IN HARDCOVER

Apostol, Gina. [Bibliolepsy](#) (Soho \$26). "In 1972, the year Ferdinand Marcos declares martial law in the Philippines, eight-year-old Primi Peregrino's parents mysteriously disappear from an inter-island ferry and are declared dead. Primi's father was an underground political cartoonist, and her mother was a beautiful but 'crazy' amateur taxidermist. Whether a double suicide, accident, or something more sinister, their deaths leave Primi and her older sister, Anna, in the care of their rich and eccentric grandmother. Primi, a reading prodigy, experiences what she later dubs 'bibliolepsy,' a sort of swooning rhapsody, when she reads texts such as *The Brothers Karamazov* or the poems of Estrella Alfon. Years later, at university, she seduces writers whose work she admires, mainly to stoke the lust for literature that saves her from the horrors and ennui of reality. Primi is incurably apolitical, but her involvement with writers and radicals, and Anna's fanatical mysticism (she believes that prayer and positive energy will oust Marcos and somehow avenge their parents) sweep her up into the 1986 revolution. With acerbic wit, Primi expresses her jaundiced view of those who demonstrate in the streets... [Filipino] Apostol's language is a constant delight, frank and full of felicitous turns of phrase and abundant humor. Layered and fully realized, it's deserving of several readings."—*PW* Starred Review. The Indie Next Pick: "A book lover's dream filled with hilarity, poetry, and rampant bibliophilia."

Chan, Jessamine. [The School for Good Mothers](#) (Simon & Schuster \$27). The *Kirkus* Starred Review: "Recalling *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Orange Is the New Black*, and *Clockwork Orange*, Chan's debut features Frida, a 39-year-old Chinese American mom with a part-time job in academia and an 18-month-old named Harriet. Left for a younger woman by her husband, Gust, soon after their daughter was born, Frida is

struggling with exhaustion and loneliness when she has her 'very bad day'—she leaves Harriet alone in the house while she goes out to get coffee and pick up papers at work. Harriet is taken into custody, then sent to live with Gust and his girlfriend while Frida is surveilled in her home and on supervised visits to determine her fitness to parent. When she fails, she is remanded to reform school with other mothers who have looked away at the wrong time, who have given in to anger or selfishness, who must now repent and relearn... They are paired with lifelike robot dolls on whom they practice 'Fundamentals of Care and Nurture' and study 'Dangers Inside and Outside the Home.' They are taught to speak 'motherese' and to disregard their own needs and desires; they are tested, monitored, scanned, and evaluated. Friendships and romances bloom; desperation spreads; trouble brews. If this doesn't become a miniseries, nothing will."

✦ Clare, Alys. [Magic in the Weave](#) (Severn \$28.99). Set in 1604, former ship's surgeon Gabriel Taverner examines a group of actors who are performing Shakespeare plays in the West Country, because the plague has closed London's theaters. It begins in Plymouth where Taverner's coroner friend, Theophilus Davey, is troubled by a fragmentary conversation he overhears in an alleyway between two actors, who refer to threats and an unspecified reason to have fled London apart from the plague. One of the pair remarks, "I fear for my life... and the death that stalks me is a particularly awful and long-drawn-out one that haunts me by day and night!" When one of the actors in the company later collapses, possibly from poison, it appears the thespians harbor a murderer in their ranks, and Taverner once again turns sleuth. "Plausible period detail and characters who feel real bolster the involving plot, and the prose and pacing are both top-notch."

Evison, Jonathan. [Small World](#) (Dutton \$28). The Indie Next Pick: "From the Gold Rush with Chinese, Irish, and Native Americans among the protagonists, Evison alternates time — work on the rails to Amtrak, gold panning to modern West Coast life — tying generations together in a splendid sleight of hand."

✦ Fellowes, Jessica. [The Mitford Vanishing](#) (St Martins \$28.99). Set in 1937, Fellowes's cleverly plotted fifth mystery featuring the real-life Mitford family deepens the personality of series lead Louisa Cannon. Louisa, who was once a servant in the Mitford household, has come up in the world. She's married her beau, former Scotland Yard inspector Guy Sullivan, and the couple has opened Cannon & Sullivan, a London detective agency. Business is slow, until the Mitford parents ask Louisa and Guy to help find their 19-year-old daughter, Jessica, known as Decca, who has disappeared. Decca told her parents she was traveling to Dieppe, France, to visit friends, but the older Mitfords have since learned that Decca lied about her plans. Meanwhile, Louisa and Guy get another client searching for a loved one when Julia Attwood consults them about her sister, Petunia, who hasn't been heard from for three weeks. The PIs fear foul play after learning that Petunia alleged fraud at the insurance company she worked for as a secretary. Fellowes has plausibly transformed Louisa from amateur to professional sleuth. Maisie Dobbs fans will be pleased. And we have 3 Signed UK copies: [Mitford Vanishing](#) (\$40).

✦ George, Elizabeth. [Something to Hide](#) (Viking \$29). When a police detective is taken off life support after falling into a coma, only an autopsy reveals the murderous act that precipitated



her death. She'd been working on a special task force within North London's Nigerian community, and Acting Detective Superintendent Thomas Lynley is assigned to the case, which has far-reaching cultural associations that have nothing to do with life as he knows it. In his pursuit of a killer determined to remain hidden, he's assisted by Detective Sergeants Barbara Havers and Winston Nkata. They must sort through the lies and the secret lives of people whose superficial cooperation masks the damage they do to one another.

Gorman, Amanda. [Call Us What We Carry](#) (Viking \$24.99). The new poetry collection from Gorman expands on the themes she touched on in her inaugural poem, [The Hill We Climb](#) (\$15.99) such as history, hope, and struggle. Gorman plays with form and style, referencing writers ranging from Anne Carson to Virginia Woolfe. Her "thoughtfulness and activist spirit shine through on every page."

Gonzalez, Xocitl. [Olga Dies Dreaming](#) (Flatiron Books \$27.99). The Indie Next Pick for a debut: "Get ready to root for Olga! I absolutely loved this book. It beautifully captures the Puerto Rican experience with humor and bravery." It's not just Puerto Rico as the landscape of this exuberant story, it's Brooklyn, portrayed in a rich novel focused on one charismatic woman that may remind you of *West Side Story*. While it ticks a lot of boxes, the force of the writing overcomes agenda. I really enjoyed it.

Guterson, David. [The Final Case](#) (Knopf \$27). "The death from hypothermia of an adopted Ethiopian girl, Abeba "Abigail" Addisu, while in the care of her Christian fundamentalist parents, Betsy and Delvin Harvey, drives this outstanding literary thriller from PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction winner Guterson. Betsy and Delvin, who live in rural Skagit County north of Seattle, are arrested on homicide charges, and Betsy is put on trial for murder. On a break from fiction writing, the unnamed narrator accompanies his elderly criminal attorney father, Royal, who has agreed to defend Betsy, for the pretrial interview of Betsy. When Royal dies before the final verdict, his son picks up the loose ends of his father's life while continuing to follow the case, which exposes the cruel conditions in which Abeba suffered. The narration is the novel's main draw. Equal parts philosophical, humane, and self-deprecating, it powerfully speaks to the ineffable contradiction of living a meaningful life. Guterson sensitively explores religion, white privilege, and justice while examining with realism and empathy the bond between parents and their children. With its simple message of hope, this novel will linger with readers long after the final page." Karen of our staff was among the first to champion Guterson's dazzling courtroom suspense debut [Snow Falling on Cedars](#) (\$14.95).

✦ Harris, Joanne. [A Narrow Door](#) (Pegasus \$26.95). While [Chocolat](#) (\$17) is the first thing you think of with Harris, I love her brilliant three academic mysteries set at St. Oswald's. In 2006, Rebecca Buckfast becomes the first female head in the Yorkshire school's 500-year history. Before her appointment, St. Oswald's was a bastion of male entitlement. Under Rebecca's reign, girls have been admitted and change is in the air. At the building site of the new sports hall, four of Latin master Roy Straitley's students see what might be a body, partially submerged in a muddy sinkhole. They tell Straitley, who takes the matter to Rebecca, but he senses that she already knows about the body. With Scheherazade-like skill, she tells Straitley her tale, teasing

out the story over the coming weeks. Rebecca's account of the devastating effects that her older brother's disappearance had on her family, and events that subsequently took place in 1989 when she was a substitute teacher at his grammar school, alternate with excerpts from Straitley's 2006 diary. Harris keeps the suspense high all the way to the exhilarating ending. This spectacular feat of storytelling will seduce the reader from page one. UK Signed Firsts: [A Narrow Door](#) (Orion \$40).

✦ Harrod-Eagles, Cynthia. [Dying Fall](#) (Severn \$28.99). London DCI Bill Slider and longtime sidekick DS Jim Atherton are dispatched to a home after an anonymous caller reported spotting a body inside at the foot of a staircase. The shoes of the deceased, a 30-something woman, are on different steps, suggesting an accidental trip on a hole in the carpet at the top. But the massive head wound suggests that a murderer staged the scene. After the victim's identified as Prue Chadacre, a secretary at the Historic Buildings National Drawings Archive, the plot thickens, as Slider and Atherton learn that Chadacre changed her birth name—and that the place she died was the site of another supposedly fatal accident decades earlier. Slider, who never met a pun he didn't like (he complains that he'd expected the film *Dunkirk* "was going to be William Shatner's autobiography"), and who's a devoted family man, is a refreshing alternative to the dour leads of many police procedurals. Fans of Catherine Aird's witty Inspector C.D. Sloan books, much beloved by me, will be hooked. My late mother and I relish(ed) every Bill Slider investigation. I am thankful Harrod-Eagles is still writing them.

Hawkins, Rachel. [Reckless Girls](#) (St Martins \$27.99). Hawkins debuted with [The Wife Upstairs](#) (\$17.99), a modern Gothic twist of *Jane Eyre* set in Alabama. She returns with a "strangers in paradise" theme, or island Gothic, a sub-genre of the burgeoning Gothic trend I predicted two years ago. It's a natural extension of the Trust No One and often tinged with DuMaurier's *Rebecca* or Christie's *And Then There Were None*. *The Reckless Girls* showcases women determined to survive the hands dealt them and it begins when one of them, her life cratered by her deceased mother's cancer, waitressing in a dead end job, meets Nico, a golden beach boy sort of guy with a sail boat. He invites her to sail off to Hawaii with him. And from there, lacking funds to repair the boat or do much, despite Nico's wealthy background, they take on two passengers for a sail to a remote Pacific island and back. At the island they encounter a sleeker boat captained by an upscale Aussie guy with a sleek gal to match, and then another person arrives, and then.... The Indie Next Pick: "A tropical murder mystery perfect for mid-winter reading, this book is set on a sinister island in the Pacific, packed with Hawkins' wonderfully gritty characters, and a murderer amongst them."

Hawley, Noah. [Anthem](#) (Grand Central \$29). Hawley is one terrific, propulsive writer and he inserts himself into this new novel in part in recognition of reaching 53 with an eight-year-old, which generates a different perspective. His takes on politics, pandemic, and the force of the World Wide Web are deeply thought provoking. It begins in April, 2009, as a privileged gathering in New York City faces financial collapse and worse. It leads to a rash of teen age suicides, local in America at first but spreading rapidly across the globe and marked by a cryptic *All* notation that perhaps only teenagers can understand. As I noted above with the new Yanagihara, I'm not ready for this conception to start off my 2022.

Houston, Victoria. [Wolf Hollow](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). In a spin-off from her Loon Lake fishing mysteries, police chief Lewellyn “Lew” Ferris juggles a race for Wisconsin’s McBride County sheriff and several cases that may or may not be related. First up is a posse of middle schoolers who set a trap for a sexual predator. The alleged perp is Noah McDonough, the 24-year-old son of local landowner Grace McDonough, who has run afoul of residents and conservationists by negotiating with a mining company to drill on her land. Among those committed to protecting the area’s wildlife is Pete Ferris, Lew’s brother, who dies suddenly under suspicious circumstances. When Grace and Noah are later found dead, Lew relies on her colleagues and fishing buddies/investigators to uncover a conspiracy that hits close to home. “Houston delivers her usual mix of folksy characters, solid plot, and plenty of insider fly fishing lures and lore. She remains a master of juxtaposing nature’s beauty with humanity’s ugliness.”

James, Laura/Charlie Alder. [The Daily Bark: The Puppy Problem](#) (Bloomsbury \$16.99). Read all about it! Edge-of-the-seat drama, a scintillating secret, a heartwarming resolution—it’s all here in the first offering in a new chapter book series that, if its inaugural title is any indication, will feature all the canine cuteness that’s fit to print.

Lippman, Laura. [Seasonal Work: Stories](#) (Morrow \$26.99). The Indie Next Pick for this collection of mystery stories: “What is there to say about a new Laura Lippman story collection except for: More, please! Each tale is a gem, and Tess Monaghan makes a couple of appearances. Laura Lippman knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men...and women.”

Prose, Nita. [The Maid](#) (Random \$27). With no reading copy I have to quote another bookseller—but I am anxious to read this debut which is highly recommended by our own Lesa Holstine. “A debut for the many fans of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in Nighttime* and *The Thursday Murder Club*, readers must be prepared to run around and solve this fatal mystery with the unflappable, neurodivergent Molly Gray.” Molly’s orderly life is upended the day she enters the suite of the infamous and wealthy Charles Black, only to find it in a state of disarray and Mr. Black himself dead in his bed. Before she knows what’s happening, Molly’s inability to read body language has the police targeting her as their lead suspect. “For every curveball thrown her way, maid Molly keeps the life rules of her dear departed grandmother at heart and uses them to help solve the untimely murder of a guest. The characters around the Regency Grand Hotel would push anyone to their limits, so her subsequent suspect list is endless. Imperturbable Molly will take you by the hand as you solve this fun, fast and endlessly sweet mystery.”

Thompson, Lara. [One Night, New York](#) (Pegasus \$25.96). In 1932, Frances Addams flees a Kansas dust bowl farm for New York City, where she joins her older brother, Stan, whom she hasn’t heard from in months. Frances suspects Stan, who looks worn down, and his friend from back home, Ben, a WWI vet who makes a living as a sax player, may be involved in dangerous illegal activity—though neither one will tell her anything. When Stan ends up murdered, Frances embarks, with the help of Ben and her friend and love interest, Agnes, on a perilous quest to enact vengeance on her brother’s killer that leads her into the

sordid underbelly of Prohibition-era organized crime—and to the top of the Empire State Building. Our John Charles writes, “Simultaneously an amateur sleuth mystery, a romance, and a coming-of-age tale, this depiction of Depression-era New York is both richly described and poignantly insightful along with ‘deep character development, relentless pacing, and understated noir atmospherics.’”

Wilson, Antoine. [Mouth to Mouth](#) (Avid Reader Press \$2). A chance meeting by two fliers to Berlin whose flight is delayed at JFK leads to a very long story spun by the successful First Class passenger to his less successful UCLA film class alumnus who has become a less than successful novelist. It begins when the polished, affluent Jeff was a long-haired kind of hippie teen who mustered up the nerve and stamina to save a man drowning in the Pacific. Brushed off by the ambulance crew but curious, Jeff eventually discovers the near-dead man’s name, learns he’s a highly successful art dealer, and again by chance, secures an entry level job at Francis’ gallery, changing the trajectory of his life. Why does he tell our narrator this story...omitting one crucial detail? The Indie Next Pick: “I loved this suspenseful novel, these mysterious characters. Wilson has created a situation worthy of Hitchcock or Highsmith. *Mouth to Mouth* asks if we can ever know the truth about those we love, or ourselves.” I add this is a slow but hypnotic novel, a mere 179 pages but completely immersive.

#### A FEW JANUARY LARGE PAPERBACK PICKS

Hughes, Lorena. [The Spanish Daughter](#) (Kensington \$15.95). John Charles reviews: 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. *PW* said this historical novel is “as addictive as chocolate,” while *The Washington Post* offered a similar tantalizing take saying “A lush Ecuadoran cacao plantation is the setting for this imaginative historical drama filled with sibling rivalry and betrayals. Threaded throughout this dramatic family saga are descriptions of cocoa-making that will leave your mouth watering for chocolate.”

Johnston, Carole. [Mirrorland](#) (\$17). Cat lives in Los Angeles, far away from 36 Westeryk Road, the imposing gothic house in Edinburgh where she and her estranged twin sister, El, grew up. As girls, they invented Mirrorland, a dark, imaginary place under the pantry stairs full of pirates, witches, and clowns. These days Cat rarely thinks about their childhood home, or the fact that El now lives there with her husband Ross. But when El mysteriously disappears after going out on her sailboat, Cat is forced to return to 36 Westeryk Road, which has scarcely changed in twenty years. The grand old house is still full of shadowy corners, and at every turn Cat finds herself stumbling on long-held secrets and terrifying ghosts from the past. Because someone—El?—has left

Cat clues in almost every room: a treasure hunt that leads right back to Mirrorland. To read this debut is to surrender yourself to going back and forth in the lives of the characters as the house of mirrors where they live(d) shifts.

“Author Johnstone has created a dark, twisting thriller that explores the pitch-black corners of people’s minds; how good and bad, love and hate, terror and joy can co-exist; and how childhood memories can be rewritten with time as the lines between imagination and reality are blurred. Fans of Gillian Flynn’s creeping dread and Liane Moriarty’s nuanced morality and complex relationships should love this book,” says *Kirkus Reviews*. The Indie Next Pick: “You will tie yourself in knots figuring out what’s happening in this story of two sisters growing up with different stories attached to the games they play, stories that take on a life of their own years later as buried memories arise.”

Pearse, Sarah. [The Sanatorium](#) (\$17). Set in the eerie and isolated Swiss Alps at Le Sommet, a luxurious, 5-star resort built on the site of an abandoned tuberculosis sanatorium, *The Sanatorium* beautifully balances a heart-pounding plot with intriguing, three-dimensional characters. Le Sommet is the last place that Elin Warner wanted to be. She’s taken time off from her job as a police detective, so when her estranged brother, Isaac, and his fiancée, Laure, invite her and her partner, Will, to celebrate their engagement at the hotel, Elin really has no reason not to accept. Arriving in the midst of a threatening storm, Elin immediately feels on edge—there’s something about the hotel that makes her nervous. And when they wake the following morning to discover Laure is missing, Elin must trust her instincts if they hope to find her. With the storm closing off all access to the hotel, the longer Laure stays missing, the more the remaining guests start to panic... but no one has realized yet that another woman has gone missing in this locked-room mystery debut. The action takes place in the (real) ski resort town of Crans-Montana where Pearse has a home.

✎ Raybourn, Deanna. [An Unexpected Peril](#) (\$17). Why is lepidopterist Veronica Speedwell bored with life in London? After all, she and her love, the Honorable Revelstoke Templeton-Vane, better known as Stoker, are living on a lovely estate while they work on a vast collection of objects of natural history and help design an exhibit to honor Alice Baker-Greene, an intrepid mountaineer and feminist, who died in a climbing accident in the tiny country of the Alpenwald. Princess Gisela of the Alpenwald herself comes to open the exhibit. All goes smoothly until Stoker finds Alice’s climbing rope among the exhibition items and notices that it wasn’t frayed but cut with a knife, turning her fatal accident into murder. Veronica, who’d met and admired Alice, is keen to investigate, but Stoker’s not interested in expanding their case files. Their differences are rendered moot when members of the Alpenwald delegation beg Veronica to pose as the wayward Princess Gisela, who often goes off on little trips on her own, in order to avert the scandal that would surely arise if she did not show up for her engagements. The two women look remarkably alike because both are related through Queen Victoria’s large family, Veronica as the unacknowledged daughter of Prince Bertie. Now that she has entree to all the Alpenwalders, Veronica, her boredom decisively ended, sets to work sleuthing with the reluctant Stoker. Their discoveries soon put them at odds with a clever killer. This well wrought and entertaining [Veronica Speedwell series](#) is best read in order.

✎ Todd, Charles. [A Fatal Lie](#) (\$16.99). Inspector Ian Rutledge remains out of favor with his jerk of a superior at the Yard, Chief Super Markham, and so in a cold spring of 1921 draws assignment to an odd case at the famed Telford-built aqueduct carrying narrowboats via a narrow indeed channel across a Welsh valley on 126 foot pillars. A body has been found in the River Dee below by a lad out with his fishing pole, a body clearly fallen from the aqueduct’s great height. Suicide? Accident? No. Rutledge quickly determines the man had been pushed off the tow path. His total lack of ID suggests murder. But who is he? Some intelligent examination of the corpse leads Rutledge to a small community where the man and his wife, Ruth, ran a failing pub. No one had missed Sam as he was thought to be in nearby Shrewsbury negotiating for supplies. And probably still on the hunt for the couple’s three year old daughter, Tildy, who went missing a year ago. Now Rutledge has two lines of investigation to work, with a little backup back at the Yard from Gibson. Weeks elapse as he motors all over northern Wales seeking answers while unearthing betrayals large and small....

### NEW IN LARGE PAPERBACK

Aimaq, Jasmine. [The Opium Prince](#) (\$16.95). A Starred Review: “In 1970, Afghan-born American diplomat Daniel Abdullah Sajadi, the protagonist of Aimaq’s stellar debut, is posted to Kabul to head the U.S. poppy eradication efforts in Afghanistan. While driving outside Kabul, Daniel accidentally hits a young girl and kills her. He pays a small fine, but opium kingpin Taj Maleki plays on his guilt and blackmails him into compromising himself and his counterdrug mission. Daniel’s haphazard ruse to redirect eradication efforts away from Maleki’s poppy fields leads to disastrous results. The lives of both men are thrown into peril as tensions rise between Islamic fundamentalists and pro-Communists. Along the way, Daniel learns the harsh truth about his celebrated Afghan war hero father, and risks everything to right the wrongs he set in motion as Soviet influence grows. Aimaq, an adviser on international arms control and foreign affairs, draws heavily on her childhood experiences in Afghanistan to provide glimpses into the complicated political and cultural dynamics of a country that has seen nearly half a century of constant war. Though she has altered some historical details to fit the narrative, her observations provide astonishing context to contemporary global issues such as Islamic extremism and the international heroin trade. Fans of Lauren Wilkinson’s Cold War thriller [American Spy](#) (\$17), and I am a serious one, won’t want to miss this.

Barry, Ava. [Windhall](#) (\$15.95). The scandalous 1948 murder of 26-year-old actor Eleanor Hayes at Windhall, the home of legendary film director Theodore Bates, propels Barry’s corker of a debut. At the time, Bates was charged with Hayes’s murder. He disappeared after being acquitted of the crime, which remains unsolved. In the present, investigative journalist Max Hailey, who writes for the Los Angeles Lens, reopens the case to discover who really killed Hayes and also to uncover Bates’s whereabouts, if he’s still alive. Time and again the obsessive Hailey breaks into now abandoned Windhall in search of evidence that reinforces his suspicions. Missing journals belonging to Bates he uncovers reveal much about Hayes and her part in the director’s final, long-lost film, *Last Train to Avalon*. After two copycat murders take place at Windhall, Hailey’s editor at the Lens wants to kill his Windhall story, thinking it folly, though sightings of an elderly



Bates in Hollywood keep Hailey on the man's trail. The discovery of *Last Train to Avalon* leads to a shocking denouement. Vibrant characters match the intricate plot and highlight Hollywood's Golden Age in its tarnished side.

Bell, Darcey. [All I Want](#) (Atria \$17). Emma, an artist, and Ben, her Broadway producer husband, are celebrating her birthday at a Brooklyn restaurant when he announces he has fallen in love with a dilapidated Victorian mansion in upstate New York. Emma, who's pregnant, eventually agrees it would be the perfect place to raise a family, though it was once a mental hospital for actors. After the couple settles in and starts renovations, strange things start happening and Emma begins to experience a little buyer's remorse. What's the real history of this house? Is its dark history repeating itself? Why does her husband suddenly seem so distant? Is she in danger? Is her baby? But Ben and their neighbors think she's hallucinating due to pregnancy hormones and don't take her fears seriously.

Benjamin, Tom. [The Hunting Season](#) (Constable \$15.99). Benjamin's outstanding sequel to [A Quiet Death in Italy](#) (\$15.99) delivers authentic Italian ambiance alongside a cleverly plotted mystery. When Ryan Lee, who has made a name for himself as a supertaster ("a sort of food detective, specializing in truffles"), goes missing, his American parents ask Daniel Leicester, the best (and only) English detective in Bologna, to investigate. The one clue to Ryan's whereabouts is a photo posted on his social media of a shop window full of cheese, salami, and truffles. Daniel's search for the young man takes him to local restaurants, to the annual truffle market, into the woods with a celebrated truffle hound, and onto the set of an Italian TV crime show. "The plot twists and turns in unexpected directions after the owner of a chain of top-class restaurants is found dead. Benjamin smoothly slips fascinating snippets of history, as well as contemporary Italian culture and food lore, into the narrative without slowing the pace. This is an essential guide for armchair travelers to Italy," says *PW*.

Cates, Bailey. [Spirits and Sourdough](#) (Berkley \$7.99). **Here is the only Small Paperback to publish before January 25.** Hedgewitch Katie Lightfoot works at the Honeybee Bakery in Savannah, and she's always up for investigating her adopted home's rich supernatural history. That's why she's taking a ghost tour for the very first time. But when the psychic tour guide tells Katie that she's being followed by the ghost of a recently murdered woman, Katie realizes she met the victim earlier that day, just before she died. She knows she must bring the killer to justice. And this murder isn't the only mystery Katie needs to solve. Her new husband, Declan McCarthy, is missing the guardian spirit who always watched over him, and she's concerned that Deck's life could be at risk if they can't find him.

Dorsey, Tim. [Tropic of Stupid](#) (\$15.99). Serial killer Serge A. Storms, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of Florida, wants to know more about his own background. So, he buys a DNA service advertised on TV to construct a family tree. Serge and his perpetually stoned friend, Coleman, cruise Florida, meeting far-flung relatives while deciding what to do with the string of guys tied up in their car's trunk. Along the way, Serge, who only kills those he deems deserving (such as those who swindle the vulnerable or disrespect Florida lore), realizes that one of his kin may also be a serial killer. As Serge holds forth on Florida's flora,

fauna, parks, and the glories of the TV show *Sea Hunt*, he crosses paths with a Florida Department of Law Enforcement agent investigating serial killers, and a predatory lawyer, in another send up of contemporary life through the absurd. See *Signed Books* for a new Serge chapter.

Druart, Ruth. [While Paris Slept](#) (\$16.99) "made me think and cry and rage and smile at mankind's capacity for both beautiful, selfless love and terrible, heartbreaking cruelty. It is at once a story of wartime courage and desperation, and of the many ways in which war reverberates through people's lives for years after the fact. Prepare to question yourself and the characters in the novel, to wonder what you might have done in their place; in short, prepare to be thoroughly engrossed in this compelling book in which four adults and one child grapple with the true meaning of love and family."—Natasha Lester, *The Paris Secret*

Percy, Benjamin. [The Unfamiliar Garden](#) (\$15.99). The night the sky fell, Jack and Nora Abernathy's daughter vanished in the woods. And Mia's disappearance broke her parents' already fragile marriage. Unable to solve her own daughter's case, Nora lost herself in her work as a homicide detective. Jack became a shell of a man; his promising career as a biologist crumbling alongside the meteor strikes that altered weather patterns and caused a massive drought. It isn't until five years later that the rains finally return to nourish Seattle. In this period of sudden growth, Jack uncovers evidence of a new parasitic fungus, while Nora investigates several brutal, ritualistic murders. Soon they will be drawn together by a horrifying connection between their discoveries, partnering to fight a deadly contagion as well as the government forces that know the truth about the fate of their daughter.

Stewart, Mary. [The Ivy Tree](#) (\$16.99); [The Moonspinners](#) (\$16.95); [Nine Coaches Waiting](#) (introduction by Sandra Brown) (\$16.95). [This Rough Magic](#) (\$19.99); [Thunder on the Right](#) (\$7.99); [Wildfire at Midnight](#) (\$14.95). This collection of publishers and prices illustrates the difficulty of sourcing older books in today's marketplace. Stewart was an acclaimed novelist read by zillions of my generation. Her romantic suspense novels took you to wonderful places like Northumberland, Crete, a French chateau, Corfu, the Pyrenees, Scotland in order above, with strong besieged heroines, a number of potential romantic partners or villains, interesting plots, local botanic descriptions, great food, etc. I can't think of better winter reading. There may be a couple more titles in print; I am checking.

☒ Tudor C J. [The Burning Girls](#) (\$17). When vicar Jack Brooks' boss asks her to leave St. Anne's in Nottingham for a more rural placement in the small Sussex village of Chapel Croft, it's more an order than a favor. She'll serve as interim vicar until a suitable replacement for the former vicar can be found. Jack's 15-year-old daughter, Flo, isn't thrilled to leave the city, but she knows that her mother could use some distance from a horrific tragedy at St. Anne's that Jack feels largely responsible for. Soon after they arrive at Chapel Croft, however, they learn that their new village has more than its share of weirdness and tragedy. The vicar that preceded Jack allegedly hung himself in the chapel; Merry and Joy, two teen girls, disappeared without a trace 30 years ago; and the village is known for the Burning Girls, aka the Sussex Martyrs, who were burned at the stake in the 16th century. Additionally, Jack keeps finding strange twig dolls on the church

grounds and disturbing accounts of exorcisms in her cottage's cellar. Meanwhile, Flo glimpses strange figures in the graveyard and befriends Lucas Wrigley, a troubled boy with a shady past. Then there are the bodies that keep turning up while dark secrets emerge about a local (and very powerful) family. The author steadily cranks up the scares and the suspense

✦ Willberg, TA. [Marion Lane and the Midnight Murder](#) (\$16.99).

A mysterious group of detectives recruited for Miss Brickett's Investigations & Inquiries and operating in tunnels beneath London use their cunning and gadgets to solve crimes that have stumped Scotland Yard. Late one night in April 1958, a filing assistant for Miss Brickett's receives a letter warning her that a heinous act is about to occur. She goes to investigate, but at the stroke of midnight, she is murdered by a killer she can't see—her death the only sign she wasn't alone. Marion Lane, a first-year Inquirer-in-training, finds herself being drawn ever deeper into the investigation. When her colleague is framed for the crime, she must sort through the hidden alliances at Miss Brickett's and secrets dating back to WWII to uncover the real killer. If you enjoy whimsy with a touch of James Bond, here is a novel to help while away a January day.

Williams, Walter Jon. [Lord Quillifer](#) (Saga Press \$18.99). Fill up those winter days with more epic fantasy as multiple award-winning author WJW returns. You fans of Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe novels will enjoy this look at "Rogue. Joker. Lover. Reluctant soldier, Quiller. He's back in court after two years away and finds that the small castle and domain that came with his knighthood require much renovation. To complicate matters further, Quillifer is outed as Princess Flora's lover, and those who once despised him now seek his favor. Of course, Queen Berlauda will attempt to reconquer the country with the power of her husband's armies. At the very least, there will be a long, long war...but Quillifer is ready to fight.