

# BOOKNEWS from

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## Happy Holidays to All

**Opening Hours M-Fri 10 AM-7 PM; Sat 10 AM-6PM; Sun 12-5 PM**

Note: Event times are in Mountain Standard Time from Nov. 5

Note: The events marked "Live" offer Signed books. The virtual events do so when noted

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.

### Thank you for shopping at our small business

As long as people have been buying gifts for the holidays, they have been buying books. Books offer infinite variety, are easily wrapped, can be personalized for the recipient and displayed as a signifier of one's own identity. They are, in many respects, the quintessential Christmas — or Hanukkah or Kwanzaa or other December celebration — gift

### Holiday Store Hours

M-F 10 AM-7 PM Sat 10 AM-6 PM Sun 12-5 PM  
Closed at 5 PM December 24 and 31  
Closed all day December 25 and January 1 & 2

### Shipping dates:

To the lower 48 US states  
By December 15 for regular USPS service  
By December 20 for USPS priority mail service  
By December 21 for USPS overnight delivery  
By Dec 18 for UPS ground

By Dec 19 for UPS 3 day service  
By Dec 20 for UPS 2<sup>nd</sup> day air

For Alaska and Hawaii, check the carriers:  
International Shipping  
Available but dicey after December 8

Before reading further check this essay on [How a Good Book Became the "Richest" of Holiday Gifts](#) as Christmas came to be celebrated in the home

### SATURDAY DECEMBER 2 2:00 PM Live

**KensiCon, a Christmas Cozy Program with John**

**Maddie Day** signs [Murder Uncorked](#) (\$27)

**Dianne Freeman** signs [A Newlywed's Guide to Fortune and Murder](#) (27)

**Carlene O'Connor** signs [Some of Us Are Looking](#) (\$27)

**Rosemary Simpson** signs [Murder Wears a Hidden Face](#) (\$27)

### MONDAY DECEMBER 4 12 PM

**Val McDermid** discusses [Past Lying](#) (Grove \$27)

A Polis Scotland DCI Karen Pirie investigation

Signed UK edition [Past Lying](#) (Sphere \$44)

### MONDAY DECEMBER 4 6:00 PM

**SJ Rozan** discusses [The Mayors of New York](#) (Pegasus \$26.95)

Bill Smith & Lydia Chin

Signed books available

### TUESDAY DECEMBER 5 11:00 AM

**Douglas Preston** discusses [The Lost Tomb](#) (Grand Central \$30)

This is a ticketed event and library fund raiser. \$50. One copy of the book with each ticket. Call 480.488.2286 to buy a ticket, we are not selling them

Location: Jones/Coates Room, Desert Foothills Library, 38443 N School House Rd

Cave Creek, AZ 85331

### TUESDAY DECEMBER 5 7:00 PM Live

**Douglas Preston** discusses [The Lost Tomb](#) (Grand Central \$30)

Gripping non-fiction inspiring many of his novels

A special trading card set comes with our copies

### WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 6 6:00 PM

**Stephen Spotswood** discusses [Murder Crossed Her Mind](#) (Knopf \$27)

PIs Pentecost and Parker

Signed books available

⌘ = British      PW=Publishers Weekly      LJ=Library Journal

**THURSDAY DECEMBER 7 6:00 PM Live**

**Jennifer Graeser** Dornbush discusses [Last One Alive](#) (Blackstone \$26.99)

**SATURDAY DECEMBER 9 2:00 PM**

**Ugly Christmas Sweater Contest and Party**

**Paige Shelton** discusses [Lost Hours](#) (St Martins \$28)

Alaska Wild #5

Paige is joined by Kate Carlisle and Jenn McKinlay

**SATURDAY DECEMBER 9 5:00 PM**

**Croak and Dagger Christmas Party**

The Club discusses Francine Mathews' [Death on a Winter Stroll](#) (\$16.95)

Nantucket Police Chief Merry Folger

**FRIDAY DECEMBER 15 7:00 PM**

**SciFi Friday** discusses Matt Haig's [The Midnight Library](#) (\$18)

**THURSDAY DECEMBER 21 7:00 PM**

**Hardboiled Crime** discusses [Three Aces](#) (Stark House \$19.95)

**SUNDAY DECEMBER 24 (all day for you at home)**

Enjoy *Jólabókaflóð*. This "flood of books" is an Icelandic tradition that features gifting books on December 24, and settling in to read those books with a cup of hot chocolate!

**OUR DECEMBER BOOKS OF THE MONTH**  
**Give someone a Blind Date with a Book (in a Box)**

*A Club is a Great Present to give to yourself or to someone who will then think of you every month when a carefully chosen book arrives—basically a Blind Date with a Book in a Box*

**We select a book and charge it to you. Free shipping. It's a treat each month, for you or as a gift.**

**Email [Karen@poisonedpen.com](mailto:Karen@poisonedpen.com) to join**

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

Vassell, Charlotte. [The Other Half](#)

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

Connally, Celeste. [Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Lord](#)

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

Gerritsen, Tess. [The Spy Coast](#)

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

Armstrong, Jess. [The Curse of Penryth Hall](#)

**Hardboiled/Noir Club** One Signed First Printing per month  
TBA

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

Epstein, Allison. [Let the Dead Bury the Dead](#)

**Historical Fiction Paperback Club** One Unsigned paperback per month

Ibanez, Isabel. [What the River Knows](#)

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

O'Donnell, Michael. [Above the Fire](#)

**International Crime** One Unsigned Hardcover or paperback per month

Gustawsson, Johana. [Yule Island](#) (UK edition, US is May 2024)

**Romance and Relationships** One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Cantor, Jillian. [The Fiction Writer](#)

**NEW, A COOKBOOK OF THE MONTH CLUB**

Each month the moderator will select a new cookbook for use at the next month's meeting. Members will select a recipe of their choice from the cookbook to prepare and bring to the meeting for all members to taste. Afterwards members will engage in a constructive conversation about the recipes and the cookbook including tips and possible modifications. Membership is limited to 20.

The initial moderators will be Robert Rosenwald and John Charles and the first club meeting will be held in January, date TBA. Because most people have a copy of it, the first cookbook to be used is *The Joy of Cooking*. For more information on this new book club or to reserve your place in the club, contact John Charles at [johnc@poisonedpen.com](mailto:johnc@poisonedpen.com) or [click here](#) to enroll.

**SIGNED BOOKS**

⌘ Armstrong, Jess. [The Curse of Penryth Hall](#) (St Martins \$28).

John reviews our **December First Mystery Book of the Month**:

Winner of the Mystery Writers of America First Novel Crime Award, Armstrong's entrancing historical debut delivers an elegantly crafted, supernatural-tinged plot that evokes the best of Barbara Michaels, with nods to Conan Doyle's *The Hound of Baskervilles*. Superbly rendered characters include a plucky

protagonist whom Maisie Dobbs would be proud to claim as a friend and an evocative sense of place reminiscent of Daphne du Maurier at her best. Ostensibly in Cornwall to deliver some antiquarian books, Ruby Vaughn has a real motive, to check in on her old friend Tamsyn. But Tamsyn, now the wife of Sir Edward Chenoweth and mistress of Penryth Hall, is no longer the vibrant girl Ruby knew during the Great War. Tempted to chalk up the changes in Tamsyn to Edward (who is a bully if not worse), Ruby

thinks it's a blessing in disguise when Edward is found dead. But then everyone in the village claims that his death is the result of the Penryth Curse, and Tamsyn insists that she and her young son will be the next targets. Readers who like their historical mysteries embellished with plenty of gothic ambience and enhanced with an abundance of dry wit will adore this splendid debut.

Clayton, Dhonielle. [The Memory Thieves](#) (Henry Holt \$17.99). Fantasy fun for readers ages 8-12. Eager to wield their stapiers for Marvel Combat, Ella, Brigit, and Jason are back for their second year at the Arcanum Training Institute. With Ella's celebrity growing throughout the Marvellian world after thwarting the Ace of Anarchy's diabolical plans, it's proving hard for her to focus on her coursework. But back home in New Orleans the Conjure community isn't too happy about her return to the skies for another year learning to become a Marveller. As if life wasn't complicated enough, Ella soon discovers more dangerous secrets about the Conjure architect who built the school. Before she can dig deeper, a mysterious magical illness sweeps through the Institute, and Ella lands at the top of the suspect list.

**REPEAT RAVE:** Cumming, Charles. [Kennedy 35](#) (Penzler \$27.95). Note that the title refers to a street address and not to JFK in this terrific 3<sup>rd</sup> novel in the Box 88 Series of spy novels. 1995: In the wake of the Rwandan genocide, 24-year-old spy Lachlan Kite and his girlfriend, Martha Raine, are sent to Senegal on the trail of a hunted war criminal. The mission threatens to spiral out of control, forcing Kite to make choices which will have devastating consequences not only for his career at top-secret intelligence agency BOX 88, but also for his relationship with Martha. 2023: Eric Appiah, an old friend from Kite's days at school and an off-the-record BOX 88 asset, makes contact with explosive information about what happened all those years ago in West Africa. When tragedy strikes, Kite must use all the resources at his disposal to protect Martha from a criminal network with links to international terror. Charles Cumming once again straddles two timelines to create a high-tension thriller in this latest Lachlan Kite novel.

Day, Maddie. [Murder Uncorked](#) (Kensington \$27). Raise a glass to Cece Barton, a widowed single mom and recent L.A.-to-California-wine-country transplant who suddenly finds herself at the center of a murder investigation. As the manager of Vino y Vida Wine Bar in Colinas, she's experiencing her first harvest while worrying about her estranged college-age daughter, juggling her responsibilities at the bar, and navigating the sticky politics of the local wine association. Just when it seems things can't grow any more intense, Colinas is rocked by a murder within the wine community . . . and Cece is identified as a possible suspect! With her reputation and her livelihood on the line—and the Sonoma County deputy sheriff breathing down her neck—Cece has no choice but to open up her own murder investigation. Here is a series start.

**REPEAT RAVE:** Deaver, Jeffery. [The Watchmaker's Hand](#) (Putnam \$29). We still have a FEW Signed copies of a thriller that turns urban strife into a tense tick-tock narrative. "The fatal sabotage of a construction-site crane is followed by a message from a band of radicals demanding the formation of a nonprofit

to create more affordable housing: 'New York City will suffer one disaster every twenty-four hours until the corporation is created. . . . "The countdown has begun. Paralyzed forensics ace Lincoln Rhyme and NYPD detective Amelia Sachs, his wife and professional partner, take charge of the race to defuse the scheme. Evidence and common sense indicate that there's more to this time-bomb scenario than it seems. The sites designated by the 'Kommunalka Project' for public housing are toxically contaminated and unfit for use. And the terrorists' demands coincide with the detected presence in New York of Charles Vespasian Hale, alias the Watchmaker, an international villain for hire whom Rhyme has thwarted in the past." —WSJ. I add that you will never ever walk underneath a construction crane again.

Dornbush, Jennifer Graese. [Last One Alive](#) (Blackstone \$26.99). Local author Dornbush uses years as a forensics specialist to craft a thriller where surgical resident Dr. Emily Hartford is dragged from Chicago into snowy Michigan and into a cold case by the sole survivor of the triple homicide, a case Emily's father, the scrupulous Freeport medical examiner, inexplicably failed to resolve. Joining forces with Solange, Dr. Emily finds herself in the crosshairs of a diabolic killer determined to finish what he began a decade earlier. It comes in a paperback too: [Last One Alive](#) (\$16.99).

Eng, Tan Twan. [The House of Doors](#) (Bloomsbury \$28.99). I am beyond thrilled that this beautifully written book has suddenly become available signed. The landscapes of Penang and South Africa, the quality of the prose, and intricacy of the relationships. "This marvelous novel evokes the British empire in its final heyday. Sun Yat Sen, the great fighter for Chinese independence, appears in its pages, as does that masterly betrayer of expatriate secrets, the short story writer Somerset Maugham. In fact, Tan Twan Eng's gripping book could almost have been written by Maugham himself." —Anthony Everitt. Author Jonathan Lee adds that it "does what the very best stories do — it draws us into many fascinating worlds at once: The British Empire's incursions into South-East Asia; the secret life of one of England's finest writers; a forgotten murder trial playing out in the Kuala Lumpur courts a century ago. Weaving all this together with great skill and power, bringing the reader a surfeit of pleasure, Tan Twan Eng also teaches us a crucial lesson: never trust a writer."

Epstein, Allison. [Let the Dead Bury the Dead](#) (Doubleday \$28). In a deeply researched and brilliantly imagined novel somewhat paralleling *War and Peace*, Epstein introduces some fantastical elements but gives us insights into the Russia of today. Tsarist Russian society is in turmoil after the war with the defeated Napoleonic forces, now in retreat. In dead of winter, Army Captain Sasha slogs back to the Catherine Palace at Tsarkoe Selo and his lover, the charming and mercurial Grand Duke Felix, whose father, the Tsar, has exiled him for his wanton ways. Near the palace, Sasha discovers a mysterious woman seemingly in distress in the snow. Once sheltered inside the palace, the enigmatic Sofia captivates the Grand Duke, alienating him from Sasha and sending him out to confront his father with demands for better treatment of the common people. Sasha deeply mistrusts Sofia, suspecting her of being a destructive, manipulative figure he knows from legends: a *vila*. Sofia also infiltrates a group of dissidents called the Koalitsiya, similarly

dividing its constituents as she pushes all factions toward greater conflict and bloodshed. When Felix's attempts at mitigating his father's callousness toward his people go as poorly as Sasha predicts, Felix flees imprisonment, ending up in league with the dissidents and rioting with them. Epstein, author of *A Tip for the Hangman*, blends elements of fantasy and folklore to create a heady, transportive read and our **December Historical Mystery Book of the Month**. **Remember: Not all mysteries are murder mysteries.**

✉ Kernick, Simon. [The First 48 Hours](#) (Headline \$44). A detective is hunting cold-blooded killers, but does he know more than he admits? A mother, a lawyer, must defend a murderer—but how far will she go to protect her only child? A couple will commit the perfect crime according to their plan, but can they trust each other? Trust each other with their lives? How will these three stories play out in just two days? And is there only one secret at their heart? This book has yet to ship to us from London; I will check on it.

Lawhon, Ariel. [The Frozen River](#) (Doubleday \$28). **Lawson will be visiting The Pen on January 17 although this novel comes out December 5.** It will be our **January Historical Mystery Book of the Month** thus. And is based on the life of Martha Ballard, an 18th-century midwife in Maine. The Indie Next Pick: “*The Frozen River* is mesmerizing. Martha is brilliant and strong in a period when women were lucky to read. Throw in a murder mystery with vivid characters? Heaven.” More from me in January. First prints are selling out so please reserve your copy now unless you belong to this excellent Book of the Month Club. I recommend enrolling for 2024 if you like historical fiction, mostly mystery.

Lindsay, Jeff. [The Fourth Rule](#) (Dutton \$28). Riley Wolfe is a master of heists and disguises, whose life's work is swindling the rich out of their undeserved treasures. Now rumors surrounding a dangerous new figure of international crime are spreading through the underworld. And this ruthless collector, the Cobra, has a personal vendetta against Riley. No matter—with the aid of his new partner, Caitlin, Riley prepares to take on the most powerful cultural institution in the world and plots snagging the Rosetta Stone. Why? Wolfe begins the novel putzing around the British Museum, brainstorming ways to snag fabled Nazi treasure from continental Europe. At an exhibition on German expressionist Otto Dix, he bumps into Caitlin O'Brian, a beautiful Irishwoman whom he wines, dines, and falls for almost immediately. After their whirlwind first date, Wolfe fails to get Caitlin's phone number, so he retools his heist plans to keep him in London and increase his chances of seeing her again. With the Cobra waiting for the right moment to strike, Riley is put to the ultimate test.... I love a good heist thriller. This [interview with Lindsay](#) is well worth reading as is his latest book.

Lupica, Mike. [Robert B Parker's Broken Trust](#) (Putnam \$29). Signed books for this Boston Brigadoon (the city ages, the cast never does) are in stock now. Note that Spenser's apartment is relocated near his office for a walking commute. The plot in Lupica's first Spenser after taking over from Ace Atkins centers on the past secrets of an elusive tech billionaire. A brilliant scientist and astute businessman, Andrew Crain's groundbreaking work with lithium has made him one of the world's richest men. He is universally adored and admired; that is, until Crain's beau-

tiful wife, Laura, comes to Spenser hoping that he can find out what skeletons lurk in her husband's closet. So a classic PI story opener and then an interesting exploration of ethics as well as character.

**REPEAT RAVE:** McDermid, Val. [Past Lying](#) (Sphere UK \$40). So what you get with this gem is a bookish plot involving authors behaving badly, archivists, an expansive tour of Edinburgh (Ian Rankin fans, take note), and as it is set in spring of 2020 a brilliantly realized account of what life was like under the UK's strict lockdown and the choices people make to follow the rules, or flout them. Which is a real impediment either way to an Unsolved Crimes (aka Cold Case) investigation with a most unusual origin story originating in an archive. Note that we just discovered Season One of *Karen Pirie* on BritBox which is excellent television and brilliantly cast (Outlander fans, there's one for you in it). I'm hoping for Season Two.

I add this rave from the *WSJ*'s Tom Nolan: “An intriguing investigation begins with a phone call from the National Library: An archivist has come across a strange manuscript in the papers of the recently deceased crime novelist Jake Stein, ‘one of the pioneers of the so-called Tartan Noir school.’ The newly discovered tale bears striking similarities to the case of a young woman, Lara Hardie, who disappeared a year before and is presumed dead. Could this manuscript, about a writer attempting the perfect crime, be a veiled confession of murder? So, a novel within a novel, not unlike Anthony Horowitz's *Magpie Murders* (2016). Stein's manuscript, ‘The Vanishing of Laurel Oliver,’ is presented in full; the story turns on a rivalry between two crime writers who meet to play chess and envy each other's achievements. Pirie and her partner, Daisy Mortimer, try to puzzle out the real people behind the imagined characters.... In Stein's story, ‘Jamie’ tells ‘Rob’ that he's thought of a way to commit murder without being caught—and plans to test his theory in real life, on a victim who closely resembles Lara Hardie. As Pirie and Mortimer study the manuscript, their obsession with determining the fate of Hardie intensifies. Ms. McDermid negotiates her ceaselessly exciting book's twists like a master.”

O'Connor, Carlene. [Some of Us Are Looking](#) (Kensington \$27). In late summer, the Dingle peninsula is thronged with tourists drawn to County Kerry's dark mountains and deep, lush valleys. For Irish vet Dimpna Wilde, who has returned to run her family's practice after years away, home is a beautiful but complicated place. An imminent meteor shower has elevated the usual gossip to include talk of shooting stars and the watch parties that are planned all over Dingle. But there are also matters nearer at hand to discuss—including the ragtag caravan of young people selling wares by the roadside, and the shocking death of Chris Henderson, an elderly local, in a hit-and-run. Then there is the beautiful young woman named Brigid Sweeney who later turns up at Dimpna's practice, her clothing splattered in blood and an injured hare tucked into her shirt. Brigid claims that a mysterious stranger has been trying to obtain a lucky rabbit's foot. Dimpna is incensed at the thought of anyone mutilating animals, but there is far worse in store. On the night of the meteor shower, Dimpna finds Brigid's body tied to a tree, her left hand severed. She has bled to death. Wrapped around her wrist is a rabbit's foot....

O'Donnell, Michael. [Above the Fire](#) (Blackstone \$25.99). In keeping with an effort to make the book club picks for December

have a winter setting, our **Notable New Fiction Book of the Month** is a timely and tense debut where O'Donnell invents the counterpart to the "summer beach read"—call it the "winter cabin fever read"—and his careful prose thrusts the reader into a worst-case scenario where every choice could mean life or death." Laboring under a shared loss, Doug and his young son, Tim, set out on a late season backpacking trip through the White Mountains of New Hampshire. They find beauty and solidarity in the outdoors, making friends along the trail and falling into the rhythms of an expedition. But when reports of warfare and social collapse reach the ranger station, Doug—seeking to protect the only family he has left—withdraws even further into the backcountry. The alpine winter presents its own dangers, as father and son must endure the elements, the solitude, and the ever-present threat of outsiders. As their isolation intensifies, and the nature of the country's disorder becomes more unsettling, their bond with each other grows. But as spring approaches, what then?

Preston, Douglas. [The Lost Tomb](#) (Grand Central \$30). Our copies each come with a set of images created for the book. Foreword by David Grann.

I loved this. I'm not alone, here is a Starred Review: "Preston shares the inspirations for many of his thrillers in this gripping compendium of his journalistic work, much of which was previously published in the *New Yorker*. Selections include the masterful "Monster of Florence," in which Preston and an Italian crime journalist attempt to identify a serial killer who claimed 14 victims in the 1970s and '80s, and Preston himself gets accused of complicity in the murders. "The Skiers at Dead Mountain" is another highlight, and has a more satisfying ending: Preston provides a persuasive explanation for the "apparently inexplicable" mass deaths of skiers in Russia's Ural Mountains in 1959, which some attributed to a murderous yeti. There are also intriguing natural puzzles, such as "The Mystery of Hell Creek," about a graveyard in North Dakota containing animals killed by the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs. Their remains were discovered by a paleontologist who read one of Preston's novels that featured a similar find. Throughout, Preston tackles his subjects with the obsessive enthusiasm of an amateur detective and the skills of a seasoned novelist; even those who read the articles when they first were published will take pleasure in new Afterwords that provide updates about Preston's theories. This is unbeatable reading for armchair sleuths."

Rozan, S J. [The Mayors of New York](#) (Pegasus \$26.95). Here's a Starred Review: "PIs Bill Smith and Lydia Chin tackle a pair of hot potato mysteries... Bree Hamilton, who handles PR for Carole McCann, the city's first female mayor, enlists Smith to help her boss: McCann's 15-year-old son, Mark, has apparently run away, taking money, clothes, and a backpack with him. The mayor is hoping to keep his disappearance from the NYPD, out of concern that involving them could cost her at the bargaining table during sensitive salary negotiations with the Detectives' Endowment Association. Despite his personal distaste for McCann, Smith, who frequently ran away from home himself as a child, agrees to take the case. He soon discovers it might connect with the apparent suicide of a teenage overachiever that Chin has been asked investigate. Rozan has never been better at quip-filled dialogue that Rex Stout would be proud of, and once again excels at evoking the tangled power dynamics of contemporary New York City."

Shelton, Paige. [Lost Hours](#) (St Martins \$28). Lesa reviews: After she was kidnapped in Missouri and held captive for three days, thriller writer Beth Rivers hid in Benedict, Alaska, for a year. Her kidnapper has now been arrested, so Beth feels safe to emerge from hiding and take in the sights. She's finally taking a tour boat to see the glaciers near her home in Benedict when the boat is forced to veer off course to rescue a woman waving from a nearby island. Covered in blood, the woman identifies herself as Sadie and claims she was taken from her home in Juneau and that her kidnapper was killed by a bear. While Beth sympathizes, Sadie's claim to be in witness protection doesn't ring true to her or to local Police Chief Gril Samuels ... The quirky characters and Alaskan setting are series strengths.

Simpson, Rosemary, [Murder Wears a Hidden Face](#) (Kensington \$27). This is a crackerjack story with a strong plot and characters and is perfect for readers of SJ Rozan's new book listed above. They can be paired for a view of NY and its Chinese community a century and more apart. Highly recommended as a gift idea.

February, 1891. A diplomat's murder draws heiress-turned-lawyer Prudence MacKenzie and former Pinkerton Geoffrey Hunter away from the opulent mansions of Gilded Age New York's high society and into the dark heart of Chinatown. New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art is hosting an exhibition of Chinese art objects, timed to coincide with the arrival of a new Chinese cultural attaché, Lord Peng. Prudence and Geoffrey are invited to attend the opening ceremonies. But among the throng of dignitaries making their way through the galleries is one decidedly unwelcome and unexpected visitor—an assassin who stabs the attaché to death, then flees through Central Park. As witnesses, Prudence and Geoffrey quickly become immersed in the case and join former New York detective Warren Lowry in investigating the murder. But there are complications.... The Chinese government tries to force the Peng family to return home by revoking their diplomatic standing, though official communications make it clear that violence would await them back in China. McKenzie and Hunter help the Pengs escape into the anonymity of Chinatown—but the family is soon wrapped up in the neighborhood's criminal affairs while Tha Mah's killer remains at large. Simpson's historical research pays off in spades, resulting in a captivating depiction of the ethnic enclave that never distracts from the plot's high tension. "By eschewing the expected focus on the Gilded Age's Robber Barons, this mystery takes readers on a fresh and exciting ride."

Spotswood, Stephen. [Murder Crossed Her Mind](#) (Knopf \$27). Vera Bodine, an elderly shut-in with an exceptional memory, has gone missing and famed detective Lillian Pentecost and her crackerjack assistant Willowjean "Will" Parker have been hired to track her down. But the New York City of 1947 can be a dangerous place, and there's no shortage of people who might like to get ahold of what's in Bodine's head. Does her disappearance have to do with the high-profile law firm whose secrets she still keeps; the violent murder of a young woman, with which Bodine had lately become obsessed; or is it the work she did with the FBI hunting Nazi spies intent on wartime sabotage?

Talton, Jon. [The Nurse Murders](#) (Poisoned Pen Press \$16.99). You can't beat Talton for a detailed and irreverent (if loving) history of Phoenix. It's 1936. In his 2<sup>nd</sup> outing Gene Hammons, a former city cop, turns down an unusual request from a William

Jordan: deliver the \$10,000 ransom demanded by a kidnapper of a teenage boy, though Jordan isn't the boy's uncle and won't identify who he is. Jordan then hires teacher-turned-shamus Pamela Bradbury for the job. In the meantime, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover enlists Gene as an informant. Phoenix's crime scene instantly grows richer with the fatal shooting of Jordan, who's really George Parris, a man with a checkered past, and then a nurse with red hair is killed, whose death looks suspiciously like a couple of others in Little Rock in 1933 and El Paso last year. Joining forces first professionally and then romantically, Gene and Pamela struggle to unearth the links between the victims and rival gangsters Cyrus Cleveland and Gus Greenbaum, a Mob guy settled in Phoenix. Their search is frustrated by the fact that their leading suspects keep getting killed.... Touring local landmarks, some now gone, is a treat and Talton adds an appendix identifying known players like Barry Goldwater and many others you probably won't recognize. This Phoenix Noir series begins with [City of Dark Corners](#) (\$15.95). Talton joins us on January 10 at 7:00 PM for a live discussion of his work.

Turnbull, Cadwell. [We Are the Crisis](#) (Blackstone \$26.99). A Starred Review: Following the events of Turnbull's [No Gods, No Monsters](#) (\$18.99)—a huge favorite with Pat King—the whole world knows about the existence of monsters. Now, in this powerful and intricate sequel, they've started going missing. Could these disappearances be related to the rise of antimonster hate group the Black Hand? Nonhierarchical werewolf pack Laina Calvary, Ridley Gibson, and Rebecca Vázquez investigate. Meanwhile, young Dragon looks for a family with the rebel Alexandra "Alex" Trapp and shape-shifter Tezcat, and Senator Sondra Reed works to pass monster rights legislation while caring for her mother, who's recovering from a trauma. The interweaving plot lines are relayed by a multiverse-traveling narrator, Calvin, who, in his own story line, uncovers more about and the role of "small gods" in the ongoing interspecies struggle. It's a densely packed whirlwind of magic and social change, and Turnbull keeps readers on their toes throughout."

**REPEAT RAVE:** ✂ Vassell, Charlotte. [The Other Half](#) (Knopf \$27). Our **December British Crime Book of the Month** is "A scintillating debut which shifts effortlessly from the sacred to the profane by combining a cast of compulsively ghastly characters, a truly engaging cop, Ancient Greek, Instagram, a corpse on the Heath and a butler in McDonald's. "How seriously can you take a whodunit whose characters are burdened with names like Hereward Trollope-Bagshott and Sir Rupert Achilles de Courcy Beauchamp? Charlotte Vassell's debut is a satire of the young and the louche in London, as well as a mystery involving murder, money laundering and the dark implications of a charity named Help for Hippos. The book starts as the aforementioned Rupert hosts a black-tie birthday party in the ironic location of a McDonald's. Before the night is over, Rupert's influencer girlfriend, Clemmie (known as Phlegm to her frenemies), has been found dead on Hampstead Heath, poisoned and stabbed. Did Rupert do it? What about Clemmie's boss, who was also her lover? What is the significance of a second murder, that of an older man who stashed a priceless antiquity in his mop bucket? And what awful thing happened between Rupert and Nell, the true object of his desire, on a trip to Greece? One of the best things about the book is the affectionate relationship between its detective, Caius Beauchamp, and his law-enforcement

colleagues. (He's not related to Rupert, and his name is pronounced differently, reflecting his family's lower social status.) Caius is an astute observer of behavior, criminal and otherwise."—*NY Times Book Review*

## CHRISTMAS FROM THE PEN

A [Gift Card](#) is definitely better than trying to beat the shipping deadlines. Can be digital, sent anywhere—and at the last minute. It can be for any \$ amount or for a specific book

[Bonfire](#) is the on-line source for many different Poisoned Pen Mugs, Tees, and such. There is also a donation option.

[The Poisoned Pen Canvas Tote](#) (\$15). Carried in the store. And excellent for carrying your shopping or you can use it to package up gift books.

**We also carry PP Logo mugs and tees in the store.** [Here's a link](#) to a wide selection of all our logo merchandise

Pair a mug from the store—[Black Mug](#) (\$12). [White Mug](#) (\$12). Or [Red Mug](#) (\$12)—with one of the Tees we carry: [Chai Cozy](#) (\$14.95) for a canister of loose tea; [Fiesta Holiday Sachets](#) (\$5). Add a cozy or a romance or anything that feels "holiday" for a delicious gift package. It will fit in a Poisoned Pen tote too.

## PUZZLES/GAMES FOR VARIOUS AGES

Du Sautoy, Marcus. [Around the World in 80 Games](#) (Basic Books \$30). It takes a wizard Oxford University mathematician to construct a tour of the globe in the spirit of Jules Verne but visiting the homes of games that puzzle, inspire, madden, and educate us. He shows they are integral to human psychology and culture. I wrote a Master's thesis on games back in the dark ages and find his additional insights to be knockout. What's the best property in Monopoly—and where did the game originate? How can pi help you win rock, paper, and scissors? What about Go? Tic-Tac-Toe? Chutes and Ladders? Bridge? Backgammon is a Middle East contribution as is the Royal Game of Ur. Diagrams, illustrations. Organized by regions starting with the Middle East. Highly recommended to YA readers as well as to adults.

And speaking of Monopoly we have for you the [Scottsdale AZ Edition](#) (Top Trumps USA (\$44.99). Bring a group together over the board during holiday gatherings.

Karber, GT. [Murdle Volume 1](#) (\$16) is a collection of 100 murder mystery puzzles helmed by the inscrutable Deductive Logico. Marrying its author's fondness for classic crime to a fiendish intellectual challenge reminiscent of Wordle or Sudoku, Murdle invokes codes, maps, illustrations and more to create the perfect gift for all armchair detectives and fans of whodunits. As does [Murdle Volume 2](#) (\$16), a new 100 puzzles. This series of brain teasers is so hot it keeps going out of stock so my advice is order it now. Perfect for whiling away a winter night by you armchair detectives.

Lewis, Henry. [The Museum Heist](#) (Möbius \$19.99). This UK import beats the US edition by 3 months and so makes a special present. This hardcover is for ages 12 and up in my view. It offers suspect lists, profiles, documents, and information gathering via QR Codes that can be scanned. The Museum here is a stand-in for the British Museum. If you can't stand to rip out pages to fill in as you go you can use ingenuity (maybe your phone) for it. There's a delightful Agatha Christie feel to this book.

Lewis, James Weston. [British Museum: The Curse of the Tomb Robbers](#) (\$14.99). A super colorful gem with lively illustrations. Want to learn hieroglyphs? This puzzle book makes it easy to learn how to read the symbols used by ancient Egyptians. Fun for readers of recent Tasha Alexander or Deanna Raybourn mysteries or the Eye of Isis series set in Cleopatra's reign by Dana Stabenow.

And for Roman fun, [British Museum: The Plot Against the Emperor](#) (\$14.99). And you can sign up for Duolingo to learn more Latin.

Shaw, Hanna. [Kitten Lady's Cativity Book](#) (Harper \$17.99). Coloring, Crafts, and Activities for cat lovers of all ages plus takeaways to help vulnerable felines.

Workman, [Brian Quest ABCs](#) (\$8.99). The first in a series of board books helps babies and toddlers learn the alphabet and expand vocabulary.

### Agatha Christie's World

[Agatha Christie Playing Cards](#) (\$14.99). Learn more about her world while playing with this quality deck. Comes with a booklet on everything depicted in the deck.

[World of Agatha Christie](#) (\$21.99). 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle with 90 helpful clues

[World of Hercule Poirot](#) (\$21.99). 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle that references all 33 Poirot novels.

### And switching to Jane Austen

[Jane Austen Playing Cards](#) (\$14.99). Use for your favorite card games or learn to play 5 Regency games. Nice to pair up with an Austen novel as a gift.

### BRITISH CHRISTMAS CRIME CLASSICS

Benedict, Alexandra. [The Christmas Murder Game](#) (\$16.99). Twelve clues. Twelve keys. Twelve days of Christmas. But how many will die before Twelfth Night? And [Murder on the Christmas Express](#) (\$16.99). In the early hours of Christmas Eve, the sleeper train from London to the Highlands derails, along with the festive plans of its travelers. With the train buried in snow in the middle of nowhere, the passengers have only each other, and not all of them will reach their holiday celebrations. As a killer tries to pick passengers off one by one, former Met Detective Roz Parker can't resist one last investigation, but murder in a locked room is a formidable puzzle for even the most seasoned investigator. Note: these two books are in short supply so order quickly.

Dickson, Carter. [The White Priory Murders](#) (Poisoned Pen \$14.99). A British Library Crime Classic begins when James Bennett has been invited to stay at White Priory for Christmas among the retinue of the glamorous Hollywood actress Marcia Tait. Her producer, her lover, the playwright for her next hit and her agent are all here, soon to become so many suspects when Tait is found murdered on a cold December morning in the lakeside pavilion

Edwards, Martin, ed. [A Surprise for Christmas and Other Seasonal Mysteries](#) (\$14.99). Short fiction makes good holiday reading and this collection of stories from the British Library Crime Classics series is aces for Golden Age Christmas-themed mysteries. And also as a stocking stuffer. So is another Edwards-

edited anthology: [The Christmas Card Crime and Other Stories](#) (\$14.99)

Farjeon, J. Jefferson. [Mystery in White](#) (\$14.99). This British Library Crime Classic became a huge bestseller in the UK when it appeared in 2016. Don't miss it. On Christmas Eve, heavy snowfall brings a train to a halt near the village of Hemmersby. Several passengers take shelter in a deserted country house, where the fire has been lit and the table laid for tea—but no one is at home. Trapped together for Christmas, the passengers are seeking to unravel the secrets of the empty house when a murderer strikes in their midst. This classic Christmas mystery is now republished for the first time since the 1930s, with an introduction by Martin Edwards.

Kelly, Mary. [The Christmas Egg](#) (\$14.99). London. 22nd December. Chief Inspector Brett Nightingale and Sergeant Beddoes have been called to a gloomy flat off Islington High Street. An elderly woman lies dead on the bed, and her trunk has been looted. The woman is Princess Olga Karukhin—an emigrant of Civil War Russia—and her trunk is missing its glittering treasure... Out in the dizzying neon and festive chaos of the capital a colorful cast of suspects abound...

Latimer, Rupert. [Murder After Christmas](#) (\$14.99). In this British Library Crime Classic, Good old Uncle Willie—known for an insatiable sweet tooth and being an epic pain in the rear—has come to stay with the Redpaths for the holidays. As luck would have it, he's found dead in the snow, in a Santa suit on Boxing Day. It seems as though someone may have poisoned his chocolate...or was it the mince pie?

Moncrief, Ada. [Murder Most Festive](#) (\$14.99). Christmas 1938. The Westbury family and assorted friends have gathered together for another legendary Christmas at their Sussex mansion. As family tensions simmer on Christmas Eve, the champagne flows, the silver sparkles and upstairs the bedrooms are made up ready for their occupants. But one bed will lie empty that night...

### SPECIAL BOOKS

Cornwell, Bernard. [Uhtred's Feast](#) (Harper \$32 SIGNED). *The Last Kingdom* is one of the most successful historical fiction series of our time. The novels tell the epic story of the birth of England and introduces one of the greatest ever fictional heroes: the iconic Uhtred of Bebbanburg, the Saxon-born, Norse-raised warrior and rebel. In this lively compendium, Bernard Cornwell revisits Uhtred's realm, illuminating elements of the Anglo-Saxon world he couldn't fully explore in his novels. And there are recipes to try.

Dames, Nicholas. [The Chapter](#) (Princeton University \$59). Why do books have chapters? With this seemingly simple question, Nicholas Dames embarks on a literary journey spanning two millennia, revealing how an ancient editorial technique became a universally recognized component of narrative art and a means to register the sensation of time. "An essential element in how chapters have developed is toward a functional innocuousness, an insistence, in fact, on their own vagueness, flexibility, and resistance to rising to any flagrant notice. As a result chapters escape the structure/ornament distinction; in their long, slow history, they become ever more tacit and recessive, ever farther from their initial structural purpose as an indexical device, and

as a result ever more indispensable, something that cannot be removed without damage to the whole. Discontinuous reading has gradually been redefined as the interruption of a sequence rather than nonlinear access, but the essentials are recognizable, despite local differences of tone or terminology, across 1,700 years: the chapter is a solicitation of the reader's convenience. Each instance here treats the chapter as an innovation, then proceeds to rationalize it along similar lines, with little consciousness of the long rhetorical tradition of that rationalizing. Only Fielding notes, unusually, that chapters 'have the Sanction of great Antiquity.' We can then speak of a continual rediscovery of a fact that never disappears long enough to seem to need rediscovering."

Deighton, Len. [The Ipress File](#) (Grove \$17). "When it comes to espionage, James Bond and George Smiley tend to overshadow Harry Palmer, the capable and irreverent English spy created by Len Deighton. Here is a new edition which marks Palmer's debut in 1962. Old and new readers can discover the author's oeuvre via trade paperback reissues. In addition to "Ipress," titles now available at the same price include the Palmer novel *Funeral in Berlin*."—Tom Nolan, *WSJ*

De Sève, Peter. [Local Fauna](#) (Abrams/Cernunnos \$40). Over the course of his career, de Sève has illustrated dozens of *New Yorker* covers with affectionate send-ups of city life—in one, a trench-coated subway commuter awaits his train, and just beneath him, an identically dressed rat does the same—and less city-specific but no less clever vignettes, such as the expectant rabbit parents whose sonogram shows an Easter egg. Those are presented here along with other work from his wide-ranging résumé, which includes a deep catalog of character design art for Disney/Pixar.

Davies, Kevin Jon. [42: The Wildly Improbable Ideas of Douglas Adams](#) (Unbound \$36.95). After his death in 2001, Douglas Adams' papers were loaned to his old Cambridge college, St John's. Reproduced here, in facsimile form and in close association with Adams's family and literary estate, *42* is a full-color, large-format hardback. "The archives of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* author Douglas Adams reveal the humor that endeared him to readers as well as his curious mind and passion for cutting-edge technology, as seen in a memo envisioning e-readers years before they became reality." Full-page scans of documents from throughout Adams's career showcase poetry, responses to fan mail, half-baked ideas, TV scripts, and even school assignments, such as a fictional biography of "international playboy" Christopher Turquoise. Davies is a UK film lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire.

Habib, Shahnaz. [Airplane Mode: An Irreverent History of Travel](#) (Catapult \$27). Habib navigates the messy intersection between global tourism and colonialism in vivid, mind-expanding essays on passport discrimination, travel guidebooks, and why it's so easy to find a Thai eatery in Barcelona. It's an excellent look at wanderlust's more complicated side. Indie Next calls this "A thought provoking read about the origins of travel and how it intersects with class, race and colonialism. Habib interweaves her life experience with her own migration and travel. This is subtitled as irreverent — it's anything but."

Houseman, Victoria. [American Classicist: The Life and Loves of Edith Hamilton](#) (Princeton University \$39.95). Edith Hamilton (1867–1963) didn't publish her first book until she was sixty-two.

But over the next three decades, this former headmistress would become the twentieth century's most famous interpreter of the classical world. Today, Hamilton's *Mythology* (1942) remains the standard version of ancient tales and sells tens of thousands of copies a year. During the Cold War, her influence even extended to politics, as she argued that postwar America could learn from the fate of Athens after its victory in the Persian Wars. Before LGBTQ Edith began a long relationship with pianist and stockbroker Doris Fielding Reid, life partners for over 40 years, while traveling and entertaining extensively. And writing! Loads of photos, a hefty index. Hours of reading and thought. I cut my mythology teeth on Bullfinch's *Age of Fable*; Hamilton's aim was to update him. Now we have Rick Riordan and a panoply of women bringing the ancient myths to life in books.

Russell, Gareth. [The Palace](#) (Atria \$29.99). 500 Years of British History at Hampton Court. Rich in splendid art and décor, Hampton Court Palace has been the stage of some of the most important events in British history, such as the commissioning of King James's version of the Bible, the staging of many of Shakespeare's plays, and Queen Elizabeth II's coronation ball. Accessible in layout it takes you into every room in the castle, revealing the ups and downs of royal history and illustrating what was at play politically, socially, and economically at the time. An engaging and charming history book that is perfect for fans of Alison Weir, Philippa Gregory, and Andrew Lownie.

So, Anthony Veasna. [Songs on Endless Repeat](#) (Ecco \$28.99). So's debut story collection, *Afterparties*, was a landmark publication, hailed as a "bittersweet triumph for a fresh voice silenced too soon" (*Fresh Air*). And he was equally known for his comic, soulful essays, published in *n+1*, the *New Yorker*, and *The Millions*. His last book brings together his essays, most of which had been previously published and excerpts from an unfinished novel, a rich gift that's much better than the phrase 'posthumously published work' usually suggests. "The essays in examine his youth in California, the lives of his parents, pop culture, friendship, and more. The fiction follows three Cambodian American cousins who stand to inherit their late aunt's illegitimate loan sharking business, and explores themes of community, family, immigration, and grief shot through with humor.

The British Library. [Shakespeare's First Folio](#) (Rizzoli \$135). Simply gorgeous. Also super heavy so this 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary facsimile full size edition makes a big impression. You can now own a "perfect replica" of this seminal Shakespeare volume luxuriously produced by the British Library under Adrian Edwards. Read this [illuminating article](#) and drool.

Walker, Martin. [Bruno's Cookbook](#) (Knopf \$40 SIGNED). I love this writeup in the *Wall Street Journal*—and completely agree. "Gourmands and gourmets abound in the ranks of detective fiction: Sherlock Holmes likes his Christmas goose, Lord Peter Wimsey knows his way around a wine cellar, Nero Wolfe has his own live-in chef and Philip Marlowe prides himself on brewing a perfect cup of coffee. But Bruno Courrèges, the French police chief whose exploits are chronicled by Martin Walker, is in a league by himself. *Bruno's Cookbook* is a sumptuous volume of recipes from the detective's native Périgord region by Mr. Walker and his wife, Julia Watson. Bread to beef to trout to tart: A cop cannot live on crime alone."



Wimberley, Ronald. [Gratuitous Ninja](#) (Beehive Books \$100). This unique box set contains four hundred consecutive feet of comics and ephemera bubbling with pugilist praxis, chanbara dialectics, pyrate vs. ninja warfare, and a whole secret history of NYC. Including a wall-sized subway map detailing the secret routes and ghost trains of the *GratNin* clans, a set of trading cards, a ninja union badge and much more, reinventing both the ninja tale and the graphic novel. 636 accordion-folded pages flip-kick through a sprawling saga of a reimagined NYC where ninjas run the underground and anarchist pirates run the streets. The fabled Namba clan went into hiding decades ago, living peacefully under the radar as community-minded hippies in Gowanus. But when they take some new blood under their wing, four young trainees take to the streets to solve Brooklyn's problems with ninja science. What good is being a ninja if you can't protect your own hood? *GratNin* isn't a linear story — it's an elaborate world to journey through, and try not to get lost in. *Gratuitous Ninjas*. That's what you'll find in the shadows of a New York City that's rotten with *shinobi*.

### CLASSICS

Carr, John Dickson. [The Problem of the Wire Cage](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.95). How could someone be strangled to death in the middle of a sodden clay tennis court without the killer leaving any footprints? That riddle animates this excellent in the British Library Crime Classics, originally published in 1939 and now appearing with an introduction by *Knives Out* filmmaker Rian Johnson. The story opens with four characters playing mixed doubles on Dr. Nicholas Young's estate, near London. Frank Dorrance is engaged to Brenda White, with their union primed to net them a considerable fortune from Brenda's guardian. Hugh Rowland, a criminal defense attorney known for getting guilty clients acquitted, harbors his own feelings for Brenda. The members of the love triangle are joined by Young's high-society neighbor, Kitty Bancroft. After the quartet's game is disrupted by heavy rain, one of them is found choked to death on the court. A case for Gideon Fell. Carr's tricks and puzzles are as thrilling as ever, and Johnson's introduction offers sharp insight into the story's enduring appeal ("The beating heart of any John Dickson Carr tale is the delicious terror of the unsolvable... and the implication that the monster is just outside your window"). This is an ideal introduction to a master of mystery fiction's golden age.

Deighton, Len. [The Ipress File](#) (Grove \$17). See Special Books above for a review of this new edition of Harry Palmer's 1962 debut.

Meskil, Paul S. [Lion Trio 3: Femme Fatale—Sin Pit / Dark the Summer Dies / The Devil's Daughter](#) (Stark House \$19.95). Hardboiled Noir by Meskil, Walter Untermyer, Peter Marsh. Check with Patrick for more books by Stark House.

Sims, Michael, ed. [The Penguin Book of Murder Mysteries](#) (\$18) offers 13 short stories that mostly date to the 19th century, when the detective tale came into full bloom. But the period's usual suspects—Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, R. Austin Freeman—are not represented. Mr. Sims instead focuses on "the different, the unjustly forgotten, [the] writers not associated with the genre." Tales by the likes of Anna Katharine Green, Charles W. Chesnutt and Ellen Glasgow introduce voices many mystery fans will be happy to encounter for the first time.

### COZIES

Benjamin, Kallie E. [Sniffing Out Murder](#) (Penguin \$17). "Kallie Benjamin's fictional middle-grade author Pris Cummings lets her protective bloodhound Bailey help sniff out who's behind the murder of a body the dog digs up in the town park. Pris, back in her hometown of Crosbyville, Indiana to pursue her writing career, is a determined and loyal sleuth in this delightful new series even as romance blooms, suspense mounts, another body drops, and Pris works to keep her dog and her beloved circle of humans safe. A must read!"—Maddie Day

Carpenter, Callie. [Death By Demo](#) (Crooked Lane \$29.99) begins a Home Renovation Mystery Series. It "was pure pleasure for a fixer-upper like me. She had me at page one with her description of a Queen Anne home needing her main character Jaime Moore's tender loving care. As contractor Jaime says, she likes to rescue houses and make them whole again. Jaime also rescues cats, as in the adorable stray she names Demo. Now if she can only rescue herself from a deranged killer who isn't too keen about her snooping around to find out who killed a high school acquaintance that Jaime finds entombed inside an interior wall in her new home. Death by Demo is an entertaining small-town cozy mystery with plenty of suspects—including Jaime's vile ex-husband, his new obnoxious girlfriend, an attractive guy next door, her parent's family lawyer, and the dead woman's callous boss. I thoroughly enjoyed the home renovation contractor tips, and the red herrings kept me guessing until the end."—Kathleen Bridge. This is an obvious choice for readers of Kate Carlisle's [Fixer-Upper Mysteries](#).

Gilbert, Victoria. [Murder Checks Out](#) (Crooked Lane \$30.99). It's not all sugarplums and snowflakes in the small town of Taylorsford where Amy Muir is director of the Blue Ridge Library—and part time sleuth. She's already buried under an avalanche of holiday responsibilities including helping her choreographer husband Richard present the *Nutcracker* as part of the festivities and dodging her frosty mother in law, Fiona, arrived for a holiday visit. Then the chair of the Festival Committee is found dead at the ice rink and Amy's brother-in-law is a suspect, found at the scene.

Johns, Patricia. [Murder of an Amish Bridegroom](#) (Crooked Lane \$29.99). When Petunia Yoder, the town's youngest old maid at 22, agrees to help homicide detective Asher Nate search for who killed Ike Smoker, the town of Blueberry's ice man, she uncovers the truth about more than just the murderer. She also learns that things are not always what they seem in this cozy series debut set in Blueberry, Pennsylvania.

### NEW IN HARDCOVER

✦ Connally, Celeste. [Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Lord](#) (St Martins \$27). A high-spirited historical with an engaging feminist slant for its engaging heroine, a lady who lost her beloved fiancé Lord Ingersoll to his fall down a flight of stairs and has resolved never to marry. Lady Petra Forsyth, an Earl's daughter, has independent means and wishes to hold to her money and her... independence. This leads to serious scrutiny by Society but she still enjoys a circle of friends. Then she learns that the wife of Lord Milford has suddenly died while in a physician's care. But wait, perhaps she is not dead but sent to an asylum (shades of Wilkie Collins here). Petra starts digging, and soon

uncovers a growing network of wives who've disappeared from society's upper crust under mysterious circumstances. The return of a dashing friend from the Continent complicates both her investigation and her commitment to singlehood. Connally's Regency England resembles the buoyant world of Jane Austen. This delightful period adventure makes our **December Cozy Crimes Pick of the Month** but is highly recommended to all historical fiction readers. The author is actually SC Perkins of the Ancestry Detective Mysteries, hence this is not a first novel but a series debut.

Cook, Robin. [Manner of Death](#) (Putnam \$29). The publication of Cook's *Coma in 1977* established him as the founder of the medical thriller genre. This one is far from his best but like many of his others, this one features Laurie Montgomery, chief medical examiner for the City of New York, and her medical examiner husband, Jack Stapleton, with the main protagonist this time around being Ryan Sullivan, an autopsy-averse resident doing a month-long rotation in the CME's office. He's curious about the commonalities among a handful of deaths that are believed to be suicides and sets out to prove they're somehow connected, risking his life in the process. In a parallel plot line, we meet Hank Roberts, a former Navy SEAL turned assassin who's been hired to make homicides look like suicides for a health-care company that's bilking corporations out of millions through phony diagnostic tests that indicate their employees have cancer when they don't....So there are plenty of dastardly villains.

Cox, Mollie Ann. [The Lace Widow](#) (Crooked Lane \$29.99). What if there was more to Alexander Hamilton's 1804 death than his duel with political rival Aaron Burr? That intriguing what-if animates Cox's brilliant debut mystery, which sees Hamilton's widow, Eliza, investigating his killing. Days after the duel, and before Eliza has had time to properly process its outcome, she witnesses the corpse of John Van Der Gloss being pulled from the North River near her Harlem home with his throat slashed. Van Der Gloss was not only Hamilton's friend, but one of the only witnesses to his and Burr's duel. The situation becomes even more personal when Eliza's teenage son, also named Alexander, becomes the prime suspect in Van Der Gloss's death.... "Eliza starts thumbing through Hamilton's papers, which leads her down a rabbit hole of secrets and conspiracies involving the U.S. government and New York City's elite. Cox plausibly recreates 19th-century New York without freezing it in amber, and wrings real emotion out of Eliza's investigation." Yes, I should have gone after signed copies of this one.

Crichton, Michael. [Scratch One](#) (Blackstone \$24.99). If Cook is somewhat subpar this time around, check out this thriller written under the John Lange pseudonym. "Crichton borrows heavily from the Hitchcock comic thriller *North by Northwest*, though the light tone isn't obvious from the outset. The book opens with a series of violent attacks: in Monaco, a man narrowly escapes being gunned down; in Egypt, another is smothered to death in sand; and a third is shot in the head in Portugal. That's only the first chapter, and Crichton proceeds to poison off a Norwegian businessman in Denmark, and have an exporter fall in front of a Paris train. The violence and intrigue set the stage for American attorney Roger Carr, first seen grabbing a bedmate's breast by accident instead of the ringing phone he was reaching for at his London hotel. Carr comes to France to buy a villa for a wealthy client, but is soon dodging bullets fired by those who have

mistaken him for a killer. Crichton's not known for a humorous touch, but he makes good use of it here." The holidays can use escape reading, no?

DeLuca, MM. [The Night Side](#) (Severn \$31.99). When Ruby Carlson was eighteen, she ran away from her home in Stoneybrook, Montana, and vowed she'd never return. Never return to life under the control of her manipulative mother, Ida, a self-styled medium and psychic scammer who made a career out of ruining people's lives. Never return to the small town where enemies lurk at every turn. But now, twenty years later, Ruby is back. Her mother is missing, presumed dead, and Ruby reluctantly returns to a home filled with chilling memories to settle Ida's affairs. Did she really commit suicide by drowning, or is this another dark scheme?

✎ Faulkner, Katherine. [The Other Mothers](#) (Gallery \$28.99). A London journalist struggles with parenting, work, and a coven of fellow playgroup mothers in this menace-infused thriller. If you can't get enough of British drama revolving around mums and kids and posh daycare or school circles filled with rivalries, secrets, and the shame of not being good enough, this is for you. Freelance journalist Natasha Carpenter splits her harried time between work-when she can get it-her 2-year-old son, Finn, and her husband, Tom. When Finn, under heartbreaking duress, starts going to a local playgroup, Tash has slightly more time to pursue her current investigative article, the mystery of a local nanny, Sophie Blake, found dead in a reservoir; she also starts hanging out with some of the playgroup's other mothers, Claire, Laura, and Nicole. Those three are living lives of higher-end luxury than Tash, accentuated by giant houses, cheerful-and sometime overly attentive-husbands, and fancy brunches at an upscale café, Ruby's. Despite her limited budget, Tash goes along gamely for the breezy social ride. But when she starts getting anonymous threats, Tash realizes something is seriously amiss.

I thought about this for the December British Crime Club Pick but we've read similar before as opposed to the biting satire of the posh and privileged in Charlotte Vassell's debut (see Signed Books). However if you are a fan of contemporary British crime you should pick this up.

✎ Frear, Caz. [Five Bad Deeds](#) (Harper \$30) cycles through the perspectives of married couple Ellen and Adam Walsh and a cluster of their neighbors and relatives to examine the sometimes suffocating bonds of small-town England. Ellen, a well-meaning teacher and mother of three, receives an enigmatic letter warning her that "sooner or later, everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences." The threat is followed by the exposure of Ellen's eponymous bad deeds. With her life on the brink of collapse, Ellen races to answer one question: why is someone doing this to her? "While Frear's exploration of the darker side of motherhood and the trappings of affluent domestic 'achievement' for white women seems to follow the recent trend in thrillers, the characters and the mystery itself are elevated by expert pacing; snappy, believable dialogue; and colorful metaphors—and its commentary on what some people will sacrifice for social status. Also in a paperback: [Five Bad Deeds](#) (\$18.99).

Griffin, Martin. [The Second Stranger](#) (Pegasus \$27.95). A nasty February storm has cut off phone service at the remote MacKinnon Hotel in the Scottish Highlands, where Remie Yorke is working at the front desk. Suddenly, an injured man comes

through the door, identifying himself as Police Constable Don Gaines and saying that he's been in a car accident — and that the dangerously manipulative inmate he was transporting from the local prison has escaped. The policeman is securing the premises when another injured man arrives, the title character. In a dismaying turn of events, this new visitor also claims that he is P.C. Gaines — and that the first man is the escaped prisoner, Troy Foley. Further complicating matters, one of the two remaining hotel guests seems to be surreptitiously recording his conversations with Remie, while the other has gone missing. Remie's own memories, about a criminal brother who was killed in prison, contribute to a sense that she, too, is keeping secrets from the reader. Are any of them telling the truth, and will any of them get out alive?

Gustawsson, Johana. [Yule Island](#) (Orenda \$26.99). In our **December International Crime Book of the Month**, a UK import, an art expert joins a detective to investigate a horrific murder on a Swedish island, leading them to a mystery rooted in Viking rites and Scandinavia's deepest, darkest winter. The Queen of French Noir returns with a chilling, utterly captivating historical thriller, based on a true story. Art expert Emma Lindahl is anxious when she's asked to appraise the antiques and artifacts in the infamous manor house of one of Sweden's wealthiest families, on the island of Storholmen, where a young woman was murdered nine years earlier, her killer never found. Emma must work alone, and with the Gussman family apparently avoiding her, she sees virtually no one. As she goes about her painstaking work and one shocking discovery yields clues that lead to another. When the lifeless body of another young woman is found in the icy waters surrounding the island, Detective Karl Rosen arrives to investigate, and memories of his failure to solve the first case come rushing back. The events are rooted in Viking rituals and a gruesome history during Scandinavia's harshest winter.

Harvey, Samantha. [Orbital](#) (Grove \$27) follows a space station's six crew members as they orbit Earth over the course of a nine-month mission. The crew members study the effects of microgravity on the body, report on Earth storms from their unique vantage point, and conduct experiments to learn about the effects of space on flammability, gardening, and human muscle use. "Harvey suggests that her characters all share various abstract ideas about the planet, which she conveys with lovely lyrical prose. This gorgeous meditation leaves readers feeling as if they're floating in the same 'dark unswimmable sea.'" Although I seldom cover the wealth of Science Fiction and Fantasy in the Booknews we have an ever expanding section curated by our staff in the bookstore.

Higashino, Keigo. [The Final Curtain](#) (St Martins \$28). Tokyo police detective Kyoichiro Kaga discovers an unsettling personal connection to a tricky murder case in the brilliantly twisty fourth entry in Higashino's series. Kaga's cousin, Shuhei Matsumiya, a detective with a separate division of the Tokyo police, suspects that two strangulation murders may be linked, despite no evidence of a connection between the victims. Though the crimes are outside Kaga's jurisdiction, Matsumiya seeks his cousin's advice. Soon afterward, Matsumiya's colleagues discover a calendar in the apartment where Oshitani died with phrases that harken back to the death of Kaga's mother more than a decade ago. She'd left Kaga's father long before that to pursue another

man, and among her effects was a note with the same phrases as the calendar, and in the same handwriting. "Higashino metes out the plot's surprises slowly, prioritizing Kaga's emotional response to the investigation. This poignant fair-play whodunit is sure to thrill fans of golden age detective fiction." Big rave here for not just this entry but the whole Kaga series.

Howe, Katherine. [A True Account: Hannah Masury's Sojourn Amongst the Pyrates, Written by Herself](#) (Holt \$28.99). Here's exciting historical fiction. In Boston, as the Golden Age of Piracy comes to a bloody close, Hannah Masury – bound out to service at a waterfront inn since childhood – is ready to take her life into her own hands. When a man is hanged for piracy in the town square and whispers of a treasure in the Caribbean spread, Hannah is forced to flee for her life, disguising herself as a cabin boy in the pitiless crew of the notorious pirate Edward "Ned" Low. To earn the freedom to choose a path for herself, Hannah must hunt down the treasure and change the tides. Indie Next says, "This book has everything I love in a good historical fiction novel: fierce female protagonists, pirates, smashing the colonial patriarchy, twentieth-century academia. It will make for a great book club selection — I can't wait to share it!"

Kennedy, Louise. [The End of the World is a Cul De Sac](#) (Penguin \$27). How much agency does a person have, especially in moments of turmoil, is the question at the heart of Kennedy's first volume of short stories, set in a contemporary Ireland divided by wealth and education. "Like fifteen novels squeezed between two covers, ready to blow your mind. The only other writer I can think of who packs this much moving, terrible life into each story is Alice Munro." —Emma Donoghue

Lemie, Asha. [The Wildest Sun](#) (Dutton \$27). When tragedy forces Delphine Auber, an aspiring writer on the cusp of adulthood, from her home in postwar Paris, she seizes the opportunity to embark on the journey she's long dreamed of: finding the father she has never known. But her quest—spanning from Paris to New York's Harlem, to Havana and Key West—is complicated by the fact that she believes him to be famed luminary Ernest Hemingway, a man just as elusive as he is iconic. She desperately yearns for his approval, as both a daughter and a writer, convinced that he holds the key to whom she's truly meant to be. But what will happen if she is wrong, or if her real story falls outside of the legend

The Indie Next Pick: "Asha Lemmie grants us a new look into her creativity with a novel about a woman who embarks on a mission to find her father: Ernest Hemingway. A homage to the dreams we hold dear; This is a book of adventure, expectations, love and hope. Enjoy!"

Lynch, Paul. [Prophet Song](#) (Grove \$26). The winner of the 2023 Booker Prize. On a dark, wet evening in Dublin, scientist and mother-of-four Eilish Stack answers her front door to find two officers from Ireland's newly formed secret police on her step. They have arrived to interrogate her husband, a trade unionist. Ireland is falling apart, caught in the grip of a government turning towards tyranny. As the life she knows and the ones she loves disappear before her eyes, Eilish must contend with the dystopian logic of her new, unraveling country. How far will she go to save her family? And what—or who—is she willing to leave behind?

Here is [a link to an interview](#) with the Irish author.

McKinney, Chris. [Sunset, Water City](#) (Soho \$27.95). In the powerful conclusion to the sci-fi noir Water City trilogy, faith, power, and tech clash when our nameless protagonist passes the responsibility of saving the world to his teenage daughter. For fans of Phillip K. Dick and *The Last of Us*.

✎ Meyrick, Denzil. [Murder at Holly House](#) (Transworld UK \$29.99). It's December 1952, and a dead stranger has been found lodged up the chimney of Holly House in the remote town of Elderby. Is he a simple thief, or a would-be killer? Either way, he wasn't on anyone's Christmas wish list. Inspector Frank Grasby is ordered to investigate. The victim of some unfortunate misunderstandings, he hopes this case will help clear his name. But as is often the way for Grasby, things most certainly don't go according to plan in this Christmas to remember. Soon blizzards hit the North York Moors, cutting off the village from help, and the local doctor's husband is found murdered. Grasby begins to realize that everyone in Elderby is hiding something—something that may extend beyond this small village. This is written in a very British heavy humor style which makes it fun for those who like a bumbling detective and can unpick many of the references.

✎ Parks, Adele. [Two Dead Wives](#) (Mira \$30). An overprotective father has lived as a recluse until his adult daughter – Stacie Jones – returns from Paris, in need of radical brain surgery. Peculiarly, he appears to almost welcome her illness, it does at least mean she is back under his roof – and his control. In the meantime, the country is rapt with the scandalous case of murdered bigamist Kylie Gillingham. Her husbands, son and best friend are left dealing with a confused mix of emotions: grief, fear and triumph. But none of them can piece their lives back together while suspicion of her death hangs over at least one of the husbands. Despite the evidence, Kylie's two sons won't accept she is dead and gone. They set out to search for her and find themselves in the same town as Stacie and her father.... Also in paperback [Two Dead Wives](#) (Mira \$18.99)

Platt, Christine. [Rebecca, Not Becky](#) (Harper \$30). Two wealthy stay-at-home moms, one Black and one white, deal with the complexities of race in their northern Virginia suburb. White Rebecca is well aware of her privilege even if her husband doesn't get it. She chairs the diversity committee at the nearly all-white elementary school and is about to lead a charge to remove a Confederate statue from the local park. She's eager to get Black De'Andrea involved, though De'Andrea would really rather not, and she's not dying to join Rebecca's book club, either—but her therapist has directed her to make at least one white friend in Rolling Hills, challenging De'Andrea to overcome her extremely unabashed distaste. Then the two women's daughters fall in mad kindergarten love and there's no stopping it—the distance between them must narrow. Paperback edition: [Rebecca, Not Becky](#) (\$18.99).

Poyer, David. [The Academy](#) (St Martins \$29). There's little in military fiction on offer in December but here's an entry in a series. In his final tour of duty after a remarkable career at sea, Dan Lenson is appointed Superintendent of the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. He begins at a difficult time: Congress is cutting military budgets in the wake of the devastating world war with China, calls for radical reform are upending traditions, and Dan himself faces legal jeopardy for his actions during the war. And when a Category 5 hurricane threatens to overwhelm the

coast, Dan must fight to rescue the Academy itself. Parallel to this narrative runs the dramatic story of Dan's years as a first class midshipman, 40 years ago

Rivero, Melissa. [Flores and Miss Paula](#) (Harper \$29). “Three years after the death of the family patriarch, 33-year-old Brooklyn-based Monica Flores and her mother Paula are still struggling with his loss in vastly separate ways. Paula, tired of a minimum-wage job, speaks up to get more responsibilities at work and navigates a complicated friendship with Vicente, a married man known to the family for years. Monica, a financial officer for an online start-up specializing in high-end aquariums and exotic fish, must pay off her student loans and her late father's medical bills. She trusts the wrong person and loses her job, but a chance encounter with an investor plays to her advantage. In dual narrations, Monica and Paula give their individual perspectives on their Peruvian culture, which Monica knows very little about, and motherhood and marriage, both traps in Monica's opinion, before eventually finding common ground.”—*LJ*. Read this for the Peruvian mom's immigrant story and bridging the inevitable gap with her millennial daughter.

Ryan, Annelise. [Death in the Dark Woods](#) (Penguin \$27). A possible Bigfoot attack that kills a hunter in Wisconsin's Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is too intriguing for cryptozoologist Morgan Carter to pass up when she's brought in on the case by local conservation officer Charlie Aberdeen, who is eager to prove the cryptid sighting. When a second man is killed, a footprint is found near the scene, and Charlie is all in, knowing this is her chance to substantiate Bigfoot's existence. Morgan, on the other hand, approaches with her usual skepticism, and when she and her dog arrive in the village of Bayfield, she soon suspects that there's more going on. This is Morgan's second case after [A Death in Door County](#) (\$17), first in this Monster Hunting Series.

Soloski, Alexis. [Here in the Dark](#) (Flat Iron \$27.99). Vivian Parry, 32-year-old theater critic for an important New York City magazine, carefully rations her vodka and sedatives to keep clear of the grasp of the “therapists I'm occasionally required to see.” She holes up in her Manhattan studio apartment, writing and editing in between shows. Readers quickly understand that Vivian is avoiding an unnamed trauma. In the audience—anonymous, with pen and notebook poised—is the only time she is remotely okay: Vivian finds herself inexorably caught up in intrigues involving a missing person, a dead body discovered in a park, an abandoned fiancé, Russian gangsters, Internet gambling, and more. The line between performance art and “real” life begins to blur still further. Vivian is heavily reliant on drink and pills; it would be easy to mistake her increasing sense of danger for paranoia slow-burning psychological thriller: as numb as Vivian keeps herself, the terror surges to a crescendo, her wits and understanding of what is real pitched against an unknown foe.

Thompson, Victoria. [City of Betrayal](#) (Berkley \$28). The seventh “Counterfeit Lady” novel finds former con artist Elizabeth Bates, her husband, and her mother-in-law in Tennessee to convince legislators to support the amendment for women's suffrage. The Suffs (as they refer to themselves) have a hard time keeping track of various politicians as they pledge support, then renounce it later. Elizabeth and company are sure bribery is at the root of this change. Complicating matters is the appearance of Elizabeth's

father and brother, who are working a con, taking advantage of the large crowd there for the vote and the thirst for alcohol during Prohibition. As the days pass, tempers fray and violence increases. Can Elizabeth use her skill as a grifter to the benefit of the suffragists? Thompson does a marvelous job portraying the heroic efforts of the women and men who fought for women's rights. Think of this as historical fiction much more than mystery.

Tuti, Ilaria. [Daughter of Ashes](#) (Soho \$27.95), By now in her 4<sup>th</sup> investigation, hard-used Italian Police Superintendent Teresa Battaglia, in her 60s, is hard-pressed to conceal her Alzheimer's from her colleagues while trying to reckon with it herself. Returning to duty following her latest round of traumatic injuries, encounters some old enemies who just won't let go. The most obvious of these is Giacomo Mainardi, a serial killer imprisoned for 27 years, who broke out of prison two weeks ago but turned himself in to the police because he feared for his life and thought prison would be safer than the world outside. A more improbable foe with a different approach but no more scruples is wily District Attorney Albert Lona, who doesn't want Teresa to think bygones are bygones between them just because he rescued her from a fire that could have killed them both. Everyone around her, from supportive Inspector Massimo Marini to longtime medical examiner Dr. Antonio Parri, recognizes that she has some uncanny bond with Giacomo Mainardi, who's done something truly dreadful with the body parts he's stolen. Linking the superintendent together with the criminal, and both of them with the fourth-century Christian community of Aquileia.... Throughout her most insidious enemy is her dementia and her diabetes. Yet she is formidable with her "wounded physique and an extraordinary brain."

✂ Wilde, Darcie. [The Secret of the Lady's Maid](#) (Kensington \$27). This is a very fine Regency era mystery marred by a few anachronisms and for me, by the author's calling an Earl "Your Grace," a title reserved only for Dukes. And probably by putting an Earl in charge at Bow Street. But nit-picking aside, the story, set in 1820 London, leans bravely into family dynamics, a poisoning (at least one), a search to uncover a government spy instigating treason (it all depends on what one will do to protect the government and the monarchy), women with agency, a Sapphic love story, and a satisfactory conclusion to the murder investigation. "The setting is immersive, with dim coffee shops, cows in Hyde Park, plenty of fog, and thorough explanations of London policing." Wilde moves deftly between the personal and political in a complex tale of love and betrayal and a captivating heroine in Rosalind Thorne who has her own love story to sort out. You fans of historical mystery should seize on this novel for December reading. Also earlier entries in the series. The first Thorne and some subsequent ones appear to be eBooks only and with very different cover art.

Wilkes, Ally. [Where the Dead Wait](#) (Atria \$27.99). I will be candid: this is not a book I am going to read. I therefore give you this Starred *PW* review: "Wilkes follows up 2022's *All the White Spaces* with a spectacular tale of cold, cannibalism, and consequences. In 1869, William Day inherits command of a ship exploring Arctic waters after several of its senior officers die of scurvy. When the ship is immobilized by ice, its food stores quickly run out. Day, with the support of second-in-command Jesse Stevens, decides the crew must eat the dead to survive. After the survivors are rescued and Day returns to England, he

is vilified as a cannibal and a murderer, and his career appears to be over—until, 13 years later, a ship led by Stevens is lost in the same waters the pair once sailed together. Day is desperate to save Stevens, for whom he secretly harbors romantic feelings, so the British Admiralty reluctantly gives him the resources to mount a search, on two conditions: his expedition will lack official sanction, and he'll be accompanied by Stevens' wife, Olive, a noted American spiritualist, and a journalist obsessed with the earlier disaster. Eerie events follow.... Expertly interweaving the two timelines, Wilkes crafts rich physical and psychological landscapes that deepen her terrifying tale as it barrels toward an unforgettable crescendo. This is a breathtaking achievement."

Winslow, Don. [While Drowning in the Desert](#) (Blackstone \$26.99). The 5<sup>th</sup> Neal Carey, reissued. See the paperback below.

#### OUR DECEMBER LARGE PAPERBACK PICKS

Armstrong, Kelley. [Murder at Haven's Rock](#) (\$18). The idealistic attempt to carve a new town out of the Yukon snow runs into criminal complications that threaten to reduce the tiny population to zero. Detective Casey Butler and her husband, Sheriff Eric Dalton, who met in Rockton, a Yukon town intended to serve as a refuge for people the legal system can't adequately protect, resolved to use her substantial inheritance to self-fund construction of a similar community, Haven's Rock, after the ideals of Rockton were compromised. The new venture begins badly. Yolanda, the contractor in charge of the project, calls on Casey and Eric for their tracking skills when two members of her team—Penny, the architect, and Bruno, the engineer—disappear after violating the worksite's prime rule not to wander into the thick neighboring forest. Casey and Eric encounter an unknown person who first flees, and then steals Casey's backpack after she falls into a camouflaged pit. There, she makes a grim discovery—the stabbed corpse of a woman, who Yolanda says is not her missing employee. Armstrong gives her lead a complex mystery to solve, while vividly evoking the eerie isolation of the setting. I like the Rockton stories and moving on to Haven's Rock makes sense.

Carlsson, Christoffer. [Blaze Me a Sun: A Novel About a Crime](#) (\$18). I agree with this Indie Next Pick: "If you love a good Swedish crime novel or are a fan of Stieg Larsson then this book is for you! A runaway bestseller in Sweden, this is the American debut for the author and a can't put it down thriller that had me guessing until the end."

Carmen, Christa. [The Daughters of Block Island](#) (Lake Union \$16.99). After arriving on Block Island to find her birth mother, Blake Bronson becomes convinced she's the heroine of a gothic novel—the kind that allowed her intermittent escape from a traumatic childhood. How else to explain the torrential rain, the salt-worm mansion known as White Hall, and the restless ghost purported to haunt its halls? But before Blake can discern the novel's ending, she's found dead, murdered in a claw-foot tub. The proprietress of White Hall stands accused. Summoned by a letter sent from Blake before she died, Thalia Mills returns to the island she swore she'd left for good. She finds that Blake wasn't the first to die at White Hall under suspicious circumstances. "This compelling and atmospheric thriller pays homage to classic gothic novels while still adding something fresh to the beloved genre."

An easy sell to fans of the Brontës but also those who enjoy the creepy, psychological suspense of Simone St. James.” —*Booklist*

✦ Frear, Caz. [Five Bad Deeds](#) (\$18.99). “In this devastating suspense novel, Frear cycles through the perspectives of married couple Ellen and Adam Walsh and a cluster of their neighbors and relatives to examine the sometimes suffocating bonds of small-town England. Ellen, a well-meaning teacher and mother of three, receives an enigmatic letter.... The threat is followed by the exposure of Ellen’s eponymous bad deeds, beginning with the leak of drunk photos on Facebook that lead to a visit from Social Services, before escalating to a police investigation into her alleged affair with a 17-year-old student who’s gone missing. With her life on the brink of collapse, Ellen races to answer one question: why is someone doing this to her? Frear keeps readers on their toes from the start, but what elevates this above standard genre fare is the freshness and acuity of her language. This is a must-read for fans of Tana French and Gillian Flynn.”—*PW Starred Review*, echoed by Patrick, a Frear fan.

Gischler, Victor. [Fast Charlie](#) (Hard Case Crime \$15.95). A finalist for the Edgar Award when first published two decades ago, this is the story of a Mob enforcer trying to rescue his aging boss from a rival gangster, and it’s about to become a movie starring Pierce Brosnan as the enforcer and (in his final role) James Caan as the Mob boss. “The movie has been getting really good early word, and we’re excited to bring the book out in early December when the film should be in theaters. We even forewent our usual painted art style to put Mr. B on the cover (with his personal blessing). It’s a rollicking read that reminds me of Elmore Leonard at his best and well worth reading before you grab some popcorn and watch the movie,” says the publisher.

Jones, Darynda. [A Hard Day for a Hangover](#) (\$19). This is the final book in a good-natured trilogy set in New Mexico that has been great fun to read. Sunshine Vicram, the sheriff of Del Sol, NM, has her hands full dealing with murders, assaults, robberies, a sniper attack, an escaped prisoner, and a pregnant raccoon, not to mention the tourist town’s resident flasher, who ends up in the emergency room with a knitting needle embedded in his neck, claiming to have been attacked by a gang. Distinctive supporting characters who aid in Sunshine’s investigations include her chief deputy, Quincy Cooper; her 15-year-old daughter, Auri; and Levi Ravinder, the man she has “been in love with since childhood.” As Del Sol is “like Peyton Place on crystal meth,” there’s indeed a whole lot of sorting out to do. Fans will be delighted to see Sunshine and her kinfolk heading for a rosy future. Newcomers are advised to start with book one, [A Bad Day for Sunshine](#) (\$19) and book two: [A Good Day for Chardonnay](#) (\$17.99). All three will make an escape reading gift.

Laskowski, Tara. [The Weekend Retreat](#) (\$18.99). The wealthy Van Ness family gathers at their extravagant Finger Lakes winery for a weekend celebration that devolves into simmering jealousies, betrayals, and violence in this clever thriller. A breaking news report prologue establishes that “multiple people” have died at the Van Ness estate but withholds details about who has died or how. From there, Laskowski flashes back to the days leading up to the party, as Richard, a successful attorney, and his twin sister, Harper, who runs an online cosmetics company, prepare to celebrate their 35th birthday.... “She wrings plenty of suspense out of the narrative structure, and utilizes the family’s Gilded Age mansion, with its

myriad secret passages, to build more. The result is a satisfying mash-up of *Succession* and Agatha Christie.”

Meadows, Rae. [Winterland](#) (\$17.99) “is more than a story of women, and more than an expose of the abuse young gymnasts endure. It is a moving portrait of an authoritarian country and how hard it is to know when or how to stand up to what we know is wrong.” Not to mention how hard it is to live in what is basically a Russian sports commune in a dark, frigid Siberia. There is so much to unpack here that is shockingly relevant today embracing Russia’s Olympic stories, gulags, and of course the war.

Parlato, Terri. [All the Dark Places](#) (\$16.95). An inexplicable murder kicks off Parlato’s gripping debut. The day after psychologist Jay Bradley celebrates his 40th birthday with his wife, Molly, and three other couples at their home in Graybridge, Massachusetts, Molly finds Jay dead on his garage office floor with his throat slit, the beginnings of a new book, *Abnormal Psychology and the Criminal Mind*, open on his computer. Detective Rita Meyers of the Graybridge PD focuses her search for answers on the three couples, as well as Molly, who fears that someone has learned of a terrible secret from her past and her real identity. When the police discover that a young woman went missing six months earlier near the vacation home belonging to Jay’s family in Mountclair, N.H., they suspect her disappearance may be tied to Jay’s murder and his new book. News that Jay was contacting imprisoned felons and the discovery in his filing cabinet of a necklace belonging to the missing Annalise Robb threatens to bring Molly’s past crashing back into her carefully constructed present.

Reyes, Ana. [The House in the Pines](#) (\$18). Reyes weaves together several books’ worth of story—lost novels, unsolved murders, rocky relationships, and substance abuse, to name a few—into a debut that became a Reese’s Book Club Pick. It begins when “Girl Dies on Camera” appears on social media. In it, a young woman pitches over dead at a table in a diner in Maya’s hometown of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. As Maya sees to her horror, the woman was with Frank Bellamy, an older man/weirdo she dated that terrible senior summer. Frank was present when her best friend, Aubrey West, died the same way as the woman in the video, with no cause ever determined. Maya’s always thought Frank had something to do with it. Now she’s sure and takes a trip home to see what she can find out.

Taylor, Brad. [The Devil’s Ransom](#) (\$18.99). It’s 2021, and Afghanistan is falling. The Taliban wants to capture mortal enemy Jahn Azimi before he escapes their clutches, which he does with help from Logan and his crew. Aside from having killed many Taliban, Jahn has the Bactrian Treasure (yes, this is a real thing, a pile of ancient gold coins said to be worth billions of dollars). The Taliban want both the man and the gold “really bad.” Blood flows, of course. Meanwhile, bad guys test “zero-click” ransomware on a Washington, D.C., consulting company that happens to have ties to the U.S. intelligence community, but that’s just a dry run for a much bigger show. A private enterprise plans to send some rich dilettantes into space to dock with the International Space Station. Criminals plan to spoil that flight in spectacular and deadly fashion. But they discount Pike Logan and the Taskforce....

## NEW IN LARGE PAPERBACK

Andrews, Brian/Jeffrey Wilson. [Sons of Valor III](#) (Blackstone \$18.99). The pair who will be taking over the Jack Ryan, Sr, Tom Clancy series from Marc Cameron send their own guys on a third mission. After a shootout in Dubai left Hamza al-Saud dead and elevated brilliant aeronautical engineer Qasim Nadar to hero status in England, everyone assumes the terrorist threat from al Qadar has been eliminated. Everyone except JSOC counterterrorism analyst Whitney Watts. But when she decides to help MI6 penetrate Nadar's secret network, Watts gets a little too close to the truth and finds herself in a deadly situation not even her teammates from Tier One can save her from. As Lieutenant Commander Keith "Chunk" Redman and the rest of Tier One fan out across London in search of Watts, Nadar prepares to unleash his most dangerous weapon yet—an advanced drone with artificial intelligence and stealth technology. To stop a horrifying attack on London, Chunk and his Navy SEAL brethren must seek help from an unexpected ally and find a way to stop a war machine that was designed to be unstoppable.

Boyne, John. [All the Broken Places](#) (\$19). "Gretel Fernsby is a character for the ages! She's a 91-year-old full of guilt with stories to tell. Boyne writes her with great compassion — maybe more than she deserves — and brings alive a story spanning decades and continents."

Cotterill, Colin. [The Motion Picture Teller](#) (\$16.95). A mysterious videotape turns a movie lover into a cinematic sleuth. 32-year-old Supot Yongjaiyut lives a quiet life in 1996 Bangkok, working as a postman for the Royal Thai Mail Service and spending the rest of his waking hours at his best friend Ali's video rental store. The two men watch movies together every night, though Supot's pessimistic temperament prevented him from pursuing a career in the film industry. One evening, the pair is watching and bickering over *The Big Sleep* when a crusty homeless man called Woot disrupts their viewing with an offer to sell them a box of old videos. They reject his offer and shoo him away, but he leaves behind a heap of tapes anyway. Among these are several European classics and one tape enigmatically titled *Bangkok 2010*. The film is so unexpectedly brilliant and provocative that Supot becomes fixated on it... "Definitely not a whodunit, the tale still provides ample suspense, as Supot undertakes a risky adventure that profoundly changes him. Cinephiles will especially enjoy the wide-ranging film trivia and commentary shared by the duo, infused with the author's characteristic drollery and interspersed with chunks of the film's screenplay. Cotterill explores with empathy and insight the power of movies to enrich and even guide our lives."—*Kirkus Reviews*

Grant, RS. [The Buried Hours](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$16.99). Signed bookplates. Rachel Grant moves into crime with a debut for investigative crime journalist Signed Gates. Once kidnapped and drugged, she awoke from a 48-hour blank with little memory and a warning that if she tells anyone what happened, they will die. And they deliver on the threat. Then a source tells her two men recently found dead in Yosemite National Park are connected—and more information lies in the park's backwoods. Tormented still, and desperate to know who had targeted her, she embarks upon a dangerous journey without knowing who if anyone including her husband Leo she can trust.

Higashino, Keigo. [A Death in Tokyo](#) (\$19). Takeaki Aoyagi appears to be sleeping on the Nihonbashi Bridge, but when a police officer approaches, he sees a knife sticking out of his chest. As police search the neighborhood for witnesses, they came upon Fuyuki Yashima, who, when they attempt to question him, flees and gets hit by a truck. Yashima had Aoyagi's wallet and briefcase, and it seems like an open-and-shut case. Detectives Kaga and Matsumiya are part of the investigating team. Ace detective Kaga is not convinced Yashima killed Aoyagi.... Despite a less than compelling plot, fans of smart detectives with less observant, more laid-back sidekicks (à la Holmes and Watson) will enjoy this book through all its twists and turns. "Higashino unfolds them with the force of a powerful indictment against the corruption that seems to pervade his great city." This is a standalone.

Kantra, Virginia. [The Fairytale Life of Dorothy Gale](#) (Penguin \$17) takes on another beloved classic, bringing *The Wizard of Oz* into modern times and putting her own charming twist on it. Dee is a delightful heroine, and it's immensely satisfying to watch her make friends and rebuild her life after public humiliation destroyed her. The Dublin setting and the swoony-yet-surprising love story are the icing on the cake of this lovely homage to a classic."

Lichtarowicz, Paula. [The Snow Hare](#) (\$18.99) begins during the Soviet invasion of Poland during WWII. When Lena Sadowska's Polish village is invaded by the Soviets, she and her family are banished to a work camp in the barren lands of Siberia. Spirited and stubborn, fierce and flawed, she carried the story from the villages and mountains of Poland, to the brutal labor camp on the Siberian steppe, to her final days in England.

Liebrecht, Savyon. [The Bridesman](#) (Europa \$18). Micha, an Israeli expat in Los Angeles working as a ghostwriter, receives an unexpected invitation. Adella, married to his beloved uncle, has bought him a ticket to Israel and booked a boutique hotel, so that he can return home and meet with her. Years before, Micha was the bridesman at Adella's wedding. He remembers her as a rebellious young woman, and orphan and an outsider, who was mocked by his close-knit family of Persian Jews. Micha is stunned by the Adella of today—poised, confident, with nothing of the uneasy woman he remembers from the past. When finally Adella reveals the true story of her life, powerful memories resurface in Micha, although nothing can prepare him for the surprise she has in store for him...

Marrs, John. [The Vacation](#) (\$18.99) is "an ensemble thriller from journalist Marrs that peeks into the secret lives of several tenants at an international hostel in Venice Beach, California. Among the cast are Nicole, an English nurse who's traveling all of Route 66 in honor of a recently deceased patient; Savannah, a pole dancer being hunted by ruthless henchmen sent by her evangelical father; Matty and Declan, two Irish lads intent on making American memories before an undisclosed deadline makes it impossible; Eric, an Englishman desperate to reinvent himself; and Ruth, an Australian woman who has come to Los Angeles to meet her favorite screen idol. Flashbacks disclose how each protagonist ended up at the hostel and why they'll do almost anything to keep their pasts hidden. Marrs keeps readers off-balance, shedding new light on each character's actions and motivations with every new bit of information, and he gradually reveals links between the

cast that feel surprising and well-earned instead of Crash-level contrived. Intricate and captivating, this fractured crime saga will hook readers from start to finish.

✎ McFadden, Freida. [Never Lie](#) (Sourcebooks \$17.99). Newlyweds Tricia and Ethan are searching for the house of their dreams. They think they've found it when they visit the remote manor that once belonged to Dr. Adrienne Hale, a renowned psychiatrist who vanished without a trace years ago. But when a violent winter storm traps them at the estate, the house begins to lose its appeal. Stuck inside and growing restless, Tricia stumbles on a collection of audio transcripts from Dr. Hale's sessions with patients. As Tricia listens to the cassette tapes, she learns about the terrifying chain of events leading up to the doctor's mysterious disappearance. The final cassette reveals the entire story...too late?

Patterson, James/Mike Lupica. [The House of Wolves](#) (\$18.99). The Wolf family's dominance of San Francisco is imperiled after patriarch Joe falls off his boat in San Francisco Bay and apparently drowns. The autopsy reveals both an elevated blood alcohol level and that Joe suffered a heart attack after entering the water. Given the number and power of Joe's many enemies, his daughter, Jenny, suspects her father was murdered. Her pursuit of that possibility comes as her life undergoes a dramatic shift. Joe's will leaves her in charge of his chief assets: the Wolves, an NFL franchise (whose aging star quarterback is Jenny's ex-husband), and the Tribune newspaper. That rankles her two brothers, who've been running the team and the paper, respectively, and vow to resist her takeover by fighting dirty if necessary. More deaths follow....

Rich, Roberta. [The Jazz Club Spy](#) (Gallery \$17.99) brings to life 1930s New York in this fast-paced, gritty historical thriller featuring a cunning, young cigarette girl with a quick mind and a hidden past who is dropped into a political conspiracy on the eve of WWII and comes face to face with secrets and lies that put everything—including her life—in jeopardy.

Ryan, Renee. [The Paris Housekeeper](#) (Harlequin \$18.99). Paris, 1940. German tanks rumble through the streets of Paris, forcing frightened citizens to flee. But not everyone has the luxury to leave. Camille Lacroix, a chambermaid at the world-famous Hôtel Ritz, must stay to support her family back home in Brittany. Desperate to earn money, Camille also acts as a lady's maid for longtime guest Vivian Miller, a glamorous American widow—and a Nazi sympathizer. Despite her distrust of the woman, Camille turns to Vivian when her friend and fellow hotel maid Rachel Berman needs help getting out of Paris. It's then that Camille discovers that Vivian is not what she seems... The American has been using her wealth and connections to secretly obtain travel papers for Jewish refugees. While they're hiding Rachel in an underground bunker under a Nazi's nose, a daring escape plan is hatched. But....

Shemilt, Jane. [The Vacation House](#) (Harper \$18.99). The vacation house is a luxurious getaway for a wealthy English family on Paxos. One hot summer night, while the parents and their friends drink wine and amuse themselves, a young woman—the teenage daughter of the Greek caretaker—ventures for a walk on their private beach. Her life will never be the same again. Skip ten years to London. Julia is the perfect spouse and mother. Slender, blonde, expensively dressed, she's the classic “yummy mummy” of high society and speechwriter to her influential husband. But

behind her winning smile is a stifled woman stricken with anxiety and perfectionism. Then Julia meets Laurel, a therapist and begins to uncover the truth of that night in Greece. I am a big fan of Shemilt's earlier novels and look forward to this one.

Sten, Viveca. [Hidden in Shadows](#) (Thomas and Mercer \$16.99). Sten delivers a pulse-pounding, character-driven follow-up to 2020's [Hidden in Snow](#) (\$14.95) that once again sees the powder near idyllic Swedish ski resort Åre stained red with blood. In February 2022, DI Hanna Ahlander, formerly of the Stockholm PD's domestic violence unit, and her colleague Daniel Lindskog are called to examine the corpse of a man found near the Norwegian border, with his hands tied behind his back and his head bashed in. The victim is identified as Johan Anderssen, a former Olympic skier who now owns a plumbing company. By all accounts, Johan was a cheerful, pleasant person, so what did he do to provoke such brutality? As Ahlander and Lindskog investigate, they discover links between Johan and a reclusive evangelical sect, and a web of secrets that could stir up even more violence. “Sten dives deep into the family lives of her characters—police and suspects alike—revealing how spousal abuse, adultery, and the stresses of new parenthood affect them and shape the core mystery. It makes for nuanced, emotional storytelling that doesn't stint on thrills.”

Winslow, Don. [While Drowning in the Desert](#) (\$16.95). Reissued. Graduate student Neal Carey is assigned to escort monkeyish octogenarian Natty Silver home from Las Vegas to Palm Springs. Natty, once a burlesque top banana, has a nonstop barrage of corny jokes, an eye for an aging cocktail waitress, and a chronic disappearing act. When Neal catches up with him, he can see why Natty doesn't want to go home. Sole witness to a crime, he's now the quarry of hard-faced suits, a fascist con artist, and a career-track assassin. And bodyguard Neal, scorching through the trackless desert at eighty miles per hour, brooding on his inner child by freezing starlight, and looking down the barrel of one gun too many, is soon dodging vultures and on the brink of a surprise watery grave. 5<sup>th</sup> in the Neal Carey Mysteries that launched Winslow's career in crime.

#### OUR DECEMBER SMALL PAPERBACK PICKS

Adams Taylor. [The Last Word](#) (\$9.99). After posting a one-star review for a poorly written—but gruesome—horror novel, Emma Carpenter is dragged into an online argument with the author himself, but when disturbing incidents start happening at night, Emma digs into his life and work, discovering a sadistic man who is capable of anything.

Oliver, Katie. [Cyanide and Sensibility](#) (Berkley \$9.99). Jane Austen Tea Society #3. When one of her sister Hannah's famous dark chocolate cupcakes poisons a local celebrity's assistant, Phaedra Brighton, to save Hannah's reputation and business, sets out to serve justice to a culprit willing to take their target off the menu—permanently.

Quigley, Mindy. [Public Anchovy #1](#) (St Martins \$8.99). Deep Dish Mysteries #3. Pizza chef Delilah O'Leary's hopes of perfecting a new “free-from” pizza recipe for a charity bash are dashed when a dead body crashes the party.

Ryan, Hank Phillippi. [The House Guest](#) (\$9.99). Making a new friend, one who's running from a dangerous relationship of her own, Alyssa Macallan, at the mercy of her wealthy and powerful



husband, offers Bree Lorraine the safety of her guest house who in turn makes a tempting offer on how they can solve each others' problems.

Sandford, John. [The Investigator](#) (\$9.99). Letty Davenport #1. Working with Homeland Security in Texas to investigate the thefts of crude oil, Letty Davenport, the brilliant and tenacious daughter of Lucas Davenport, is pitted against a militia group as the case quickly turns deadly.

Sullivan, Connor. [Wolf Trap](#) (\$10.99). Brian Rhome #1. A former Ground Branch paramilitary officer, Brian Rhome, thinking his time with this elite group of shadow operatives was over, instead finds himself in the midst of a deadly conspiracy that threatens the highest levels of American democracy.

## DECEMBER SMALL PAPERBACKS

Berenson, Laurien. [Killer Cupid](#) (\$8.99). Melanie Travis #29. In the Berkshires to celebrate Valentine's Day with her husband, Melanie Travis finds her romantic getaway interrupted by the murder of a fellow guest, and when her secret sleuthing attracts unwanted attention, her trip heats up, but not in the way she'd hoped.

Brown, Sandra. [Hello, Darkness](#) (\$9.99). Reissue. The host of a late night, call-in radio show, Paris Gibson joins forces with police psychologist Dean Malloy to identify a mysterious caller known only as "Valentino" before he can kill a woman whom he feels has wronged him, only to find herself the target of the would-be killer, who feels that Paris destroyed his relationship with his girlfriend.

Burton, Mary. [The Dollmaker](#) (\$9.99). Reissue. After forensic pathologist Dr. Tess McGowan examines the work of a serial killer who mutilates his victim's faces to look like dolls, she finds herself assisting her ex-husband, the agent on the case, who remembers a previous encounter with the deranged killer.

Cornwell, Patricia. [Livid](#) (\$10.99). Kay Scarpetta #26. When the sister of the judge presiding over a sensational murder case is found dead, chief medical examiner Kay Scarpetta, the reluctant star witness in the trial, investigates and recognizes telltale signs of the unthinkable, pitting her against a powerful force that returns her to the past.

Clark, Mary Higgins. [Where Are the Children Now?](#) (\$10.99). In this much-anticipated sequel to the iconic thriller *Where Are the Children?*, lawyer-turned-podcaster Melissa and her brother Mike must draw on the experience of their own abduction when Melissa's stepdaughter goes missing to save her from the trauma they still struggle with—or worse.

Day, Maddie. [Deep Fried Death](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Country Store #12. Preparing for Outhouse Race during the annual Abe Martin Festival on Memorial Day, country store and restaurant owner Robbie Jordan finds herself in hot water when someone tries to frame her for murder and must flush out a killer before everything goes down the toilet.

Fletcher, Jessica. [Murder, She Wrote: Death on the Emerald](#) (\$9.99). Murder She Wrote #56. While attending a Book Festival in Belfast, Ireland, Jessica discovers the cousin of a Cabot Cove neighbor has been murdered and investigates.

Gilstrap, John. [White Smoke](#) (\$9.99). Natural born leader Victoria Emerson, at the request of the deposed president of the U.S., arrives at the Hilltop Manor bunker, where the remnants of

the U.S. government have been imprisoned, and must call on her deepest personal resources and her unwavering convictions to restore justice to this broken world.

Hendricks, Greer. [The Golden Couple](#) (\$9.99). A maverick therapist who lost her license due to controversial methods, Avery agrees to help golden couple Marissa and Mathew Bishop overcome Marisa's cheating, setting all three of them on a collision course because the biggest—and most dangerous—secrets have not yet been revealed.

Matthews, Olivia. [Coconut Drop Dead](#) (St Martins \$9.99). Spice Island Bakery #3. Brooklyn's annual Caribbean American Heritage Festival is finally here, and Spice Isle Bakery is thrilled to be one of the event's food vendors. Co-owner Lyndsay Murray hopes their West Indian pastries and finger foods draw people back to the bakery in Little Caribbean. The day's festivities are cut short when Camille, lead singer of an up-and-coming reggae band, dies. The police think it may be a tragic accident. But Lyndsay's cousin Manny was close to Camille, and he believes someone cut her life short.

Robb, J D. [Payback in Death: An Eve Dallas Novel](#) (\$9.99). In Death #57. While investigating the apparent suicide of a retired Internal Affairs captain, who made his career tripping up bribe takers, rule breakers and worse, homicide detective Eve Dallas follows a trail of corruption all the way to the top to expose a killer bent on revenge.

Tata, A J. [Total Empire: A Garrett Sinclair Novel](#) (\$9.99). Garrett Sinclair #2. When his goddaughter disappears in the Eye of Africa, seemingly in pursuit of her father's killer, General Garrett Sinclair and his team go rogue in the Sahara Desert to find her, while racing against time to stop the Chinese from using its ground-based laser-targeting system against America.