

BOOKNEWS from

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January Booknews 2024
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Happy New Year!

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.

Note that we have opened a [YouTube channel just for John Charles'](#) many author interviews, most of which do not appear in our regular calendar but are supplemental and varied. Watch at your leisure.

THURSDAY JANUARY 4 12:00 PM

UK's Matthew Blake discusses [Anna O](#) (Harper \$30)
Debut and our January British Crime Cub Pick

FRIDAY JANUARY 5 12:00 PM

Femi Kayode with Patrick
Kayode discusses [Gaslight](#) (Little Brown \$29)

MONDAY JANUARY 8 6:00 PM Virtual Book Launch

James Patterson discusses [Holmes, Marple & Poe](#) (LittleBrown \$30)
Signed bookplates with each copy

TUESDAY JANUARY 9 6:00 PM

Jayne Anne Krentz with JT Ellison
Krentz discusses [The Night Island](#) (Berkley \$28)
Signed books in stock

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 10 4:00 PM

Kate Brody discusses [Rabbit Hole](#) (Soho \$25.95)
They're internet rabbit holes....
Signed books in stock

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 10 6:00 PM

Katia Lief with Patrick
Lief discusses [Invisible Woman](#) (Grove \$27)
Big alert to fans of Patricia Highsmith
Signed books available

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 10 7:15 PM Live

Jon Talton discusses [The Nurse Murders](#) (Poisoned Pen \$16.99)
Phoenix Noir #2 with 1936 PI Gene Hammons

THURSDAY JANUARY 11 6:00 PM

Amy Pease discusses [Northwoods](#) (Atria \$27)
Debut for fans of William Kent Krueger
Signed books available

MONDAY JANUARY 15 7:00 PM Live

Stacy Willingham discusses [Only If You're Lucky](#) (St Martins \$29)
A Dark Academic with unnerving twists

TUESDAY JANUARY 16 7:00 PM Live

Thomas Perry discusses [Hero](#) (Penzler \$27.95)
Classic Perry cat & mouse chase

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 17 7:00 PM

Ariel Lawson discusses [The Frozen River](#) (Knopf \$28)
Our January Historical Fiction Book and Reese's Club Pick

THURSDAY JANUARY 18 7:00 PM Live

Rachel Hawkins with Olivia Fierro
Hawkins discusses [The Heiress](#) (St Martins \$29)
Our January Crime Book of the Month

FRIDAY JANUARY 19 7:00 PM

SciFi Friday discusses Gabrielle Zevin's [Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow](#) (\$28)

SATURDAY JANUARY 20 10:30 AM

Croak & Dagger discusses Deborah J. Ledford's [Redemption](#) (\$16.99)

MONDAY JANUARY 22 4:00 PM

Kensington Spring Mystery Preview
Larissa Ackerman and Vida Engstrand with John Charles

MONDAY JANUARY 22 7:00 PM Live

Jonathan Santlofer discusses [The Lost Van Gogh](#) (Landmark \$34.99 or \$16.99)
Our January Notable New Fiction Book of the Month

TUESDAY JANUARY 23 6:00 PM

Stephen Hunter discusses [Front Sight: Three Swagger Novellas](#) (Atria \$28.99)

One per Swagger generation: Charles, Earl, and Bob Lee
Signed books available

TUESDAY JANUARY 23 7:15 PM

Duane Swierczynski with Patrick Swierczynski signs [California Bear](#) (Mulholland \$29)

January Hardboiled/Noir Book of the Month

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 24 1:00 PM

UK's Janice Hallett discusses [The Mysterious Case of the Alperton Angels](#) (Atria \$27.99)

Another clever epistolary (sort of) clever mystery

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 24 7:00 PM Live

Kate Alice Marshall discusses [No One Can Know](#) (Flatiron \$28.99)

Really bad parenting!

THURSDAY JANUARY 25 6:00 PM Live

Michael Grumley discusses [Deep Freeze](#) (Tor \$26.99)

Speculative fiction bringing a hero back to life

THURSDAY JANUARY 25 7:15 PM

Hardboiled Crime discusses John D. Macdonald's [The Last One Left](#) (\$17)

Introduction by Dean Koontz

SUNDAY JANUARY 28 2:00 PM Live

Allison Brennan discusses [Missing Witness](#) (Mira \$30)

Cate Quinn discusses [The Clinic](#) (Sourcebooks \$27.99)

MONDAY JANUARY 29 4:00 PM

Mariah Fredericks with Karen Odden

Fredericks discusses [The Wharton Plot](#) (St Martins \$28)

Author Edith Wharton as sleuth

Signed books available

MONDAY JANUARY 29 7:00 PM Live

Brad Taylor discusses [Dead Man's Hand](#) (Harper \$32)

Pike Logan and team take on Putin

Our copies come with a special flashlight

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 31 4:00 PM

Australia's Benjamin Stevenson discusses [Everyone on This Train Is a Suspect](#) (Harper \$30)

A locked train mystery on Australia's The Ghan running from Darwin to Adelaide with mystery writers aboard

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 31 7:00 PM Live

Kemper Donovan discusses [The Busy Body](#) (Kensington \$27)

Our January First Mystery Book of the Month by the host of the "All About Agatha" podcast

Mike Lawson drops by to chat and sign

OUR JANUARY BOOKS OF THE MONTH SO FAR

It's not too late to 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 to US Customers. It's a treat each month, for you or as a gift.

Email Karen@poisonedpen.com to join

British Crime Club One Unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

[Anna O](#) (Harper \$30)

Cozy Crimes Club One Unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

TBA

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

Hawkins, Rachel. [The Heiress](#) (St Martins \$29)

First Mystery Club One Signed First Printing per month

Donovan, Kemper. [The Busy Body](#)

Hardboiled/Noir Club One Signed First Printing per month

Swierczynski, Duane. [California Bear](#)

History/Mystery Club One First Printing per month

Lawson, Ariel. [The Frozen River](#)

Historical Fiction Paperback Club One Unsigned paperback per month

Penrose, Andrea. [The Diamond of London](#)

Notable New Fiction One Signed First Printing per month

Santlofer, Jonathan. [The Lost Van Gogh](#)

Romance and Relationships One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Goodwin, Daisy. [Diva](#)

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 we will engage in a constructive conversation about the recipes and the cookbook including tips and possible modifications. The membership is limited to 20. Email JohnC@poisonedpen.com for more information.

BEST OF 2023 LISTS

I am lukewarm about a number of Best Lists, some from prominent sources like the *NY Times*. But here are two I can get behind

[The Sun-Sentinel](#)

By critic Oline Cogdill. Varied content including anthologies

[The Washington Post](#)

I especially like this one. Look at the paperback with which it begins, a true favorite and a 2023 Historical Paperback Fiction Pick

[100 Best Romances of All Time](#) (*Parade Magazine*)

Here's a link. Create your own reading list.

It includes John on Loretta Chase (yes!) and me on Mary Stewart.

Also me on [Katharine](#) by Anya Seton (\$22.95): "This classic novel is not just a fabulous romance but excellent historical fiction," says Barbara Peters of [The Poisoned Pen Bookstore](#) in Scottsdale, Arizona. "The complex, enduring love affair between John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and Katherine Swynford, sister in law to Geoffrey Chaucer, and their children who were legitimized when Gaunt could finally marry Swynford—an almost impossible event—is not just a fabulous romance but explains the entire sweep of the War of the Roses between the Houses of Lancaster and York. It ended when their great-great grandson Henry won the throne, meaning Lancaster got the win."

Finally, here are three favorites of 2023, disparate reads and all heartfelt by the authors as well as by readers here.

Aoyama, Michiko. [What You Are Looking for Is in the Library](#) (Hanover Square \$21.99). My highest recommendation for a January feel good read. You have to be patient to glean its fully glory (and comfort). Dana Stabenow, to whom I gave a copy, reviews: Five people in present day Tokyo have come to crossroads in their lives and find their way to their local library, where reference librarian Sayuri Komachi felts objects while she listens to their stories and then creates a list of books for them to help them on their way, along with a felted object of her own making, a tiny frying pan, a tiny cat, a tiny globe, a tiny plane, a tiny crab, all of which turn out to resonate with something in their lives. (Later she claims her choice of object is completely random, but we don't believe that for a minute)... Ms. Komachi asks each of her patrons "What are you looking for?" in a manner which makes all of them ask themselves, Well, what *am* I looking for? Ms. Komachi never fails them (see title). A lovely, gentle fable for our times, the kind of book that makes you feel good all over when you finish it, and a terrific translation, too. Highly recommended.

Preston, Douglas/Lincoln Child. [Dead Mountain](#) (Grand Central \$25 SIGNED). Perhaps my favorite of their books, in part for the plot, in part for its love letter to New Mexico, and in part because it has a sensible solution. Fifteen years before nine experienced hikers went missing in a blizzard. Only six bodies were recovered immediately following the event, all in bizarre circumstances never explained. Some obviously died of exposure but what drove them from their tent into a storm in the first place? In the present day two more victims are discovered by a couple of drunk, high frat boys and FBI Special Agent Corrie Swanson and archaeologist Nora Kelly are called to the scene. Will Cor-

rie's career be ruined the same way away that of the first agent in charge of the case so long ago? Dana adds, "Lots going on here—corrupt local police, high government cover up, an evil—nope, won't spoil—and a shoot-em-up at the end when your favorite sheriff and mine gets to ride to the rescue, but Preston and Child have written a master class here on how to keep every thread of their narrative alive and your attention riveted to the very last page. Great introduction to new FBI guy Clay Sharp, too—I hope we see more of him in future." Next book for the dynamic duo is [Angel of Vengeance](#) (\$30), Agent Pendergast, out August 13.

See, Lisa. [Lady Tan's Circle of Women](#) (Scribner \$28). I was riveted by See's first foray into historical fiction with her bestseller [Snow Flower and the Secret Fan](#) (\$18). China's culture made manifest including the practice of foot binding as well as secret writing. I did not expect it to be topped but in fact See has not only done that but introduced a murder mystery into her gorgeous plot as well. Curl up with Lady Tan this winter. And as a bonus, you can sink into Colonial Britain in Malaysia and the activism of Sun Yat Sen whose target was overthrowing China's ruling dynasty, in Tan Twan Eng's brilliant [House of Doors](#) (Bloomsbury \$28.99). We are facing modern China and its aspirations every day; this is a good time to learn more about its past.

SOME SIGNED BOOKS FOR JANUARY

Please note that publishers have not sent Advance Reading copies for many of the below which forces me to quote sources that have read the books. I may not agree with their take but it's what we have. You can tell from the personal comments which books I have read which, as January is a great month for paperbacks, includes all of our January paperback picks.

Akbar, Kaveh. [Martyr!](#) (Knopf \$28). Poet Akbar's debut in fiction features Cyrus Shams, a child of the Midwest and of the Middle East. When Cyrus was an infant, his mother, Roya, a passenger on a domestic flight in Iran, was killed by a mistakenly fired U.S. missile. His father, Ali, who after Roya died moved with Cyrus to small-town Indiana and worked at a poultry factory farm, has also died. Cyrus disappeared for a time into alcoholism and drugs. Now on the cusp of 30, newly sober but still feeling stuck in his college town, Cyrus becomes obsessed with making his life matter, and he conceives of a grand poetic project, *The Book of Martyrs*. With no copy at hand, but intrigued, I add this from the *Booklist* Starred Review: "Poet Akbar is an almost deliriously adept first-time novelist, writing from different points of view and darting back and forth in time and into Cyrus' satirical dreams and the lives of Iranian poets from Rumi to Farrokhzad. Akbar creates scenes of psychedelic opulence and mystery, emotional precision, edgy hilarity, and heart-ringing poignancy as his characters endure war, grief, addiction, and sacrifice, and find refuge in art and love. Bedazzling and profound." I'd have considered this for our January Notable New Fiction Book but tips is what we get.

Blake, Matthew. [Anna O](#) (Harper \$30). Not Signed but a debut getting varied press, and our **January British Crime Club Book**. In a sense it's a medical thriller, along the lines of Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*. And it hits you over the head with the theme: Sleeping Beauty (Anna O) meets the Prince, Dr. Benedict Prince, psychologist, who specializes in sleep-related crimes, studying instances of reckless driving, murder, and robbery committed

while the perpetrators were asleep. His article on a possible cure for “resignation syndrome,” or involuntary extended sleep, has brought him to the attention of officials at England’s Ministry of Justice, who want Prince to revive 25-year-old editor Anna Ogilvy, so she can be tried for murder: Anna’s been asleep for several years, ever since she was found beside a bloody knife in a cabin next door to the corpses of two of her friends. As Prince attempts to stir Anna, he looks into the factors that might have driven her to violence.

I looked up resignation syndrome, *Uppgivenhetssyndrom* in Sweden where the cases prevail, causes children to stop walking, talking and eating. They assume a coma-like state, lying prone, with their eyes closed, disconnected from the world around them. They are fed via feeding tubes. Their muscles exercised. Blake has developed something generally limited to traumatized refugee children for his plot, creating a situation for Anna where, as chief suspect in grisly knifing murders, she has withdrawn from an unbearable reality and can’t be interrogated. Prince I add is married to Clara Fennel — now a Metropolitan murder squad detective who just happens to have been the very first officer called to the scene of the bloody double homicide! —and it’s falling apart. He hopes that the “Anna O” case will not only boost his reputation and income, but also restore his family. Some reviewers give this a rave and at least one, the distinguished critic [Maureen Corrigan](#), hated it. Read her lively review if you like and make up your own mind. Why did I choose this for our club? It’s a debut fairly guaranteed to start a career. It presents a fascinating medical puzzle. It highlights aspects of Britain’s health care and judicial systems. The author is imaginative and shows style.

Brennan, Allison. [The Missing Witness](#) (Mira \$30). “LAPD detective Kara Quinn and her boyfriend, FBI agent Matt Costa are back. Kara is back in L.A. to testify against David Chen, a sweatshop owner and human trafficker who put a price on Kara’s head after her investigations led to his arrest. When Chen is gunned down on the way to court one morning, his driver notices a young woman fleeing the scene. Is she the murderer or a witness? Kara attempts to track down the runaway woman and find out. Before long, someone tries to kill Kara as well, then frames her for the murder of one of Costa’s FBI colleagues. Brennan packs the proceedings with a large cast of potential suspects and a jumble of incidents that eventually reveal themselves to be links in the chain of a full-blown conspiracy to cheat the California government out of funds set aside to address homelessness. All the while, the pace never flags, even as Brennan adds a welcome new chapter to Kara’s backstory.”—*PW*. I like this series by now local bestseller Brennan and look forward to reading a new chapter.

Brody, Kate. [Rabbit Hole](#) (Soho \$25.95). “Teddy’s family fell apart when her sister disappeared. Her father never stopped searching, and ends his life on the ten-year anniversary. Against her best intentions, Teddy falls deep into the same search. A taut story of family and letting secrets go.” That’s the Indie Next Pick for January. If you are concerned about the voyeurism encountered on line, and how a person twisted by grief—or actually how anyone at all—can fall down digital rabbit holes, become bewitched by a person or a group, and gradually lose touch with reality and a moral compass, this story of Teddy, she of a gun-nut boyfriend, a lost half brother, a missing sister

Angie, an obsession with conspiracy theories from Reddit, all the while keeping up with colleagues at the prestigious high school where she teaches English, this debut is for you. It is reasonably compared to *Gone Girl* and reminds me of why I stay off all social media. But then, a missing sister would change up my position.

Burke, James Lee. [Harbor Lights](#) (Grove \$28). The title story revolves around James Broussard, a middle-aged oil and gas engineer in 1942 Louisiana who remains traumatized by his combat duty in WWI France. When Broussard and his young son, Aaron, witness a capsized tanker burning in the Gulf of Mexico, he reports the calamity anonymously without explaining why to Aaron. Later, at a restaurant, two federal agents attempt to intimidate Broussard into keeping silent about the tanker. Instead, he pokes a hornet’s nest by telling the local newspaper. In “The Assault,” a history professor is outraged after police refuse to investigate his daughter’s beating at a bar, which happened while she was drunk. He takes matters into his own hands, and ends up facing a difficult moral choice. “Throughout, Burke manages to conjure his characters’ worldview in a few artful brushstrokes. These impressive stories establish that Burke doesn’t need a whodunit plot to catch a reader’s attention.”

Donovan, Kemper. [The Busy Body](#) (Kensington \$27). Library Reads says of our **January First Mystery Book of the Month**: “A very talented ghostwriter signs on to help a failed female presidential candidate (shades of you know who!) write her memoir. Their initial work weekend is going well—Dorothy Chase Gibson’s staff, security, and son all on board—until there is a mysterious drowning in the unusual Crystal Palace estate next door.” Dorothy, a sturdy 69-year old Maine politico based (respectfully) upon Margaret Chase Smith, feels called upon to investigate, taking her ghostwriter along—a Watson to her Holmes. The narrative voice is refreshing, the plot clever, the wintry Maine landscape enchanting, and all of the asides re politics, celebrity, and publishing, are both fun and insightful. Fans of the late Sarah Caudwell will recall how she never revealed the sex of her narrator Hilary; Donovan never lets know the name of the ghostwriter/narrator. You could in many ways call this a cozy (no recipes) but dig deeper into the satire and hope Donovan, host of the “All about Agatha” podcast and in his way penning a tribute to Christie, has started a series.

Fredericks, Mariah. [The Wharton Plot](#) (St Martins \$28). It’s January 1911, and novelist David Graham Phillips has been shot on his way out of the Princeton Club in New York. Wharton met the man once, at the Belmont Hotel, and found him “arrogant, entitled, belittling,” and undeniably handsome. After Phillips’s death, his sister urges Wharton to read his soon-to-be-published novel and perhaps champion it upon release. Wharton agrees, and the more she talks to Phillips’ sister, the more she becomes convinced he was targeted deliberately. Fredericks is in no hurry to identify a culprit, preferring to pepper her narrative with appearances from Wharton’s old friend Henry James, scenes depicting Wharton’s disintegrating relationship with her paramour Morton Fullerton, dazzling glimpses of the social lives of the Vanderbilts, and a phone call to Mary Roberts Rinehart to ask the mystery writer’s opinions on how to investigate a murder. I’m not a Wharton reader—note, she is the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction—but I loved the biographical and psychological elements and agree with the *LJ* Starred Review:

“Thanks to a literary plot laced with arch wit and precise put-downs, appearances by Wharton’s famous friends (including Henry James and the Vanderbilts), and an eclectic assortment of the upper crust in the waning days of a varnished era, Fredericks hits this one out of the park.”

Grumley, Michael C. [Deep Freeze](#) (Tor \$26.99). The accident came quickly. With no warning. In the dead of night, a precipitous plunge into a freezing river trapped everyone inside the bus. It was then that Army veteran John Reiff’s life came to an end. Extinguished in the sudden rush of frigid water after his heroic actions to save many. But then, he wakes up in a hospital setting. Struggling to move, or see, or even breathe. But the doctors assure him that everything is normal. That things will improve. And yet, he has a strange feeling that there’s something they’re not telling him. As Reiff’s mind and body gradually recover, he becomes certain that the doctors are lying to him. And—he’s right. “A fast-paced juggernaut of a story, where revelations pile upon revelations, building to a stunning conclusion that will leave readers clamoring for more. It has everything I love in a story: fascinating scientific speculation, hell-bent action, and characters you’ll be rooting for with every turn of the page. Not to be missed!” —James Rollins, echoed by Douglas Preston, Dirk Cussler, and Steve Berry. I really hated the opener where Reiff dies and look forward to what comes next for him. If anything.

Hawkins, Rachel. [The Heiress](#) (St Martins \$29). Our **January Crime Book of the Month** is a stunning Gothic and set in one of my favorite places, North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville. And it features an estate worthy of *Rebecca*. “A glamorous widow, a mountain top mansion haunted by the past, secrets, the power of money and privilege to corrupt — all woven into settings vividly painted. The perfect book to curl up with on a weekend retreat.”

Yes, it’s “a delicious tale of murder, greed, and the ties that bind. The flamboyant Ruby McTavish, who was famous in her home state of North Carolina for surviving a kidnapping as a child and burning through four husbands as an adult, controlled a vast family fortune until her death. Camden, Ruby’s adopted son and sole heir, is now a high school English teacher living in California. He has not been back to Ashby House, his mother’s estate, since she died, nor has he spent any of the money she left behind on himself. Instead, he puts the inheritance toward the upkeep of his deteriorating family manse and his cousins’ dubious business enterprises. An email from one of those cousins brings Camden back to Ashby House so he and the others can finally hash out the details of Ruby’s will. Camden’s wife, Jules, urges him to go, not fully understanding the snake pit that awaits them in North Carolina. Alternating Ruby’s frank, funny letters with chapters narrated by Camden and Jules, Hawkins does an excellent job keeping readers off-balance throughout.”

Hunter, Stephen. [Front Sight: Three Swagger Novellas](#) (Atria \$28.99). Joy, I am saving this one by the superb Hunter to read when I finish this newsletter. What he gives us is three generations of Swaggers in three interconnected novellas: In “The Night Train” grandfather Charles Swagger is on the hunt for notorious bank robber Baby Face Nelson when he traces a tip to the Chicago stock yards. While there, he’s brutally assaulted and discovers that the madman who attacked him is involved in a nearby narcotics ring with plans to spread its new drug to the

residents of the disenfranchised 7th District of Chicago. Worse, this is no ordinary drug. Earl Swagger investigates a violent bank robbery in “Johnny Tuesday” that left two dead and a fortune missing in small-town Maryland. At every turn, however, he’s met with silence and hostility from the townsfolk, which makes sense when he uncovers municipal corruption, working-class exploitation, gang politics, jaded aristocrats, scheming gamblers, a hitman, a femme fatale. And a whole bunch of men with guns. Luckily, Earl has brought his own. Finally, in “Five Dolls for the Gut Hook,” a thirty-two-year-old Bob Lee Swagger is back from Vietnam nearly broken over good men lost for nothing. He’s turned hard down that whiskey road to hell. But one afternoon he’s wakened from his nightmares by two men with a problem. As nearby Hot Springs tries to retool its image from gambling paradise to family resort, a butcher has begun to prey on the city’s young women, a figure straight out of a horror movie. Hot Springs Homicide is baffled. “I’m a sniper,” says Bob, “not a detective.” But.....

Kayode, Femi. [Gaslight](#) (Mulholland \$29). Not signed. Patrick and I admired [Lightseekers](#) (\$28), Nigerian Kayode’s 2021 mystery with its strong writing and global tilt where psychologist Dr. Philip Taiwo solved the Okriki Three murders. And now a shadow has fallen over the megachurch in Ogun State, Nigeria: the beloved Bishop Dawodu has been arrested for the murder of his wife Sade, although no body has been found. Hmmm, *habeas corpus*? Sade, young, impulsive, and outspoken, is no favorite of the congregants. She has also been known to disappear for long stretches of time. As Taiwo and his trusted associate, Chika plunge into the investigation, they unearth secrets that go beyond the missing persons case, ones that if leaked, threaten to shatter not only the Bishop, but the church itself. Taiwo quickly begins to feel like a hired gun, put up to the task with the express purpose to clear the bishop’s name rather than find the naked truth. As Taiwo strives to crack the vast conspiracy he’s up against, he’s tugged away by the demands of family life, and derailed by systemic challenges: in Nigeria, cash is king, there are no viable databases, and records are sparse. It highlights the way the state is in bed with the church, and the difference between police corruption in Nigeria and America, where Philip has been living for over two decades. We have discontinued our International Crime Club from lack of interest but this would be the January Book for sure.

Koontz, Dean. [Bad Weather Friend](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$28.99). Postponed to February 1, but please order now. Dean writes me that “For those of us wedded to physical books, it’s a beautiful edition, with decorated boards and gorgeous endpapers and unique art at each part division.”

Benny Catspaw’s perpetually sunny disposition is tested when he loses his job, his reputation, his fiancée, and his favorite chair. He’s not paranoid. Someone is out to get him. He just doesn’t know who or why. Then Benny receives an inheritance from an uncle he’s never heard of: a giant crate and a video message. All will be well in time. How strange—though it’s a blessing, his uncle promises. Stranger yet is what’s inside the crate. He’s a seven-foot-tall self-described “bad weather friend” named Spike whose mission is to help people who are just too good for this world. In the company of Spike and a fascinated young waitress-cum-PI-in-training named Harper, Benny plunges into a perilous high-speed adventure, the likes of which

never would have crossed the mind of a decent guy like him. Trademark Koontz—expect the unexpected.

Krentz, Jayne Ann. [Night Island](#) (Penguin \$28). John writes, Seven months ago, Talia March, Pallas Llewellyn, and Amelia Rivers were all victims in an experiment designed to “enhance” their psychic abilities. Now a mysterious informant named Phoebe Hatch contacts Talia hinting to her that a list of similar victims exists. But before Talia can get her hands on said list, Phoebe vanishes, forcing Talia to team up with Luke Rand, a hunted and haunted man chasing after the same information. The two of them become the targets of a determined killer. Krentz’s latest ingeniously inventive paranormal-tinged suspense novel is an addictively readable combination of killer vegetation, killer vegetarian cooking, and a killer wit, making this a real treat for fans new and old of the consistently entertaining author of countless bestsellers.

Lawhon, Ariel. [The Frozen River](#) (Knopf \$28). Our **January Historical Fiction Book of the Month** and a Reece’s January Pick, Lawhon’s fifth work of historical fiction is inspired by the true story and diaries of midwife Martha Ballard of Hallowell, Maine, a character she brings to life brilliantly here. As Martha tells her patient in an opening chapter set in 1789, “You need not fear....In all my years attending women in childbirth, I have never lost a mother.” This track record grows in numerous compelling scenes. “Martha Ballard is asked to help determine the cause of death for Joshua Burgess, an accused rapist whose body was found frozen in the river. Martha is convinced that Burgess was beaten and hanged before he was thrown into the water. Several months earlier, she treated a woman named Rebecca Foster for injuries sustained from rape, and Rebecca told her the assailants were Burgess and Joseph North, a judge. After a court determines there’s not enough evidence against North for a rape charge, despite Martha’s testimony about Rebecca’s injuries, a trial is arranged on different charges, but North disappears. Martha attempts to prove Burgess was murdered, hoping to bring scrutiny to North as a suspect in the killing, whose motive may have been to keep Burgess from testifying against him about the rape. Lawhon combines modern prose with the immediacy of her source material, making for an accessible and textured narrative. This accomplished historical powerfully speaks to centuries-old inequities that remain in the present day.”

Lief, Katia. [Invisible Woman](#) (Grove \$27). In 1990, producer Lou Pridgen drugged and raped actor Val Graham at a Hollywood party she crashed with filmmaker Joni Ackerman. Val and Joni kept quiet about the incident to protect their nascent careers. Eventually, Val moved home to Philadelphia and Joni married TV megaproducer Paul Lovett, trading moviemaking for motherhood. Three decades later, Joni and Paul are living in Brooklyn when the Pridgen news breaks. It includes hints of another man behind Pridgen. “Rediscovering Patricia Highsmith’s novels, Joni begins to lean into the darkness of her own soul.... Caught in the nefarious web of the patriarchy at every turn, she finds in Highsmith a way to fight back and reclaim some of her own agency. Absolutely a novel of its time—and a novel of women’s stories across time.”—*Kirkus* Starred Review

Marlantes, Karl. [Cold Victory](#) (Grove \$28). Tip ins. 1946 Finland as the Cold War is heating up. Arnie Koski is a taciturn Finnish American and champion skier assigned as the military attaché

to the American legation in Helsinki. His wife, Louise, is an Oklahoman and former sorority president whose guilelessness contrasts with the savvy machinations of American and Soviet agents who are spying on them. At their first embassy party, Arnie and his Soviet counterpart, Mikhail Bobrov, who met as allies during the war, get drunk and challenge each other to a clandestine ski race through Northern Finland. As they prepare for the 500-kilometer course (“their own little Olympics”), Louise attempts to befriend Mikhail’s glamorous and wary wife, Natalya, and raise money for a Finnish orphanage. Owing to Louise’s carelessness, the ski race gets picked up by the press and spun into a proxy battle between democracy and communism. All are unprepared for the dire stakes that rise as Mikhail’s death is all but certain should he lose and embarrass the Soviet Union.

Marshall, Kate Alice. [No One Can Know](#) (Flatiron \$28.99) plunges readers into the precarious world of expectant mother Emma Palmer, whose husband, Nathan, has just lost his job. Faced with eviction, the couple returns (at Nathan’s insistence) to Emma’s childhood home of Arden Hills, jointly owned by Emma and her two sisters, which she has not visited since the murder of her parents 14 years earlier. No one was ever arrested for the crime, but many locals—including a police detective—believe Emma was responsible. At that time, Emma and her younger sisters, Juliette and Daphne, were separated, with the two younger girls going into foster care. Emma’s return stirs up old animosities, frightening memories, and a killer’s instincts. When another murder occurs shortly after Emma arrives, the sisters reunite to finally address what really happened to their parents, sharing long-buried secrets in the process. Marshall shrewdly interlaces past and present timelines, alternating perspectives between the three sisters to shed new light on old information. Even genre veterans will have trouble sussing out the culprit. Skillful misdirection and urgent plotting make this a winner.

Patterson, James. [Holmes, Marple & Poe](#) (LittleBrown \$30). Signed bookplate. A realtor is about to close down an open house at a decrepit building in Brooklyn when three potential clients arrive: a Brendan Holmes; a Margaret Marple, and an August Poe. Brain. Eyes. Muscle. It turns out they wish to act in concert, purchase the building and its history, and open Holmes, Marple, & Poe Investigations. Their unorthodox methods run afoul of the mayor and the police commissioner. The NYPD’s Helen Grey is soon running an investigation into the three private eyes, but meanwhile they are solving cases. You can’t take this seriously but at least one of their investigations is soundly done.

Pease, Amy. [Northwoods](#) (Atria \$27). This is my other candidate for January Mystery of the Month. It’s a powerful book with a Midwest setting. I ended up with the Kemper Donovan debut above because I felt we should start off a contentious 2024 with a clever and amusing mystery that nonetheless explores some serious and relevant issues.

Eli North, a former elite investigator with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service suffering from PTSD after a stint in Afghanistan that left him wounded, addicted to alcohol, and plagued by delusions and thoughts of suicide, is newly separated from his wife and barely getting by as a sheriff’s deputy under the supervision of his mother, Marge, who has been sheriff in the town of Shaky Lake for decades. When he’s called to investigate a noise disturbance at an empty cabin, discovering the body of an adolescent boy and learning that a teenage girl is also missing,

he rallies enough to investigate with the aid of FBI agent Alyssa Mason. Eli, Marge, and Alyssa discover a complex plot involving a pricey local drug rehab center, a resort with financial problems, and a prescription drug company and its representatives. In her debut novel, Pease brings the community to vivid life, from the bar where the locals drink cheap beer to the palatial homes of the summer people from Chicago.

“Amy Pease powerfully shatters the myth of tranquility in the beautiful north country of Wisconsin. Murder, drugs, and PTSD are among the demons that populate rural Sherman County, where lake resorts abound and the sheriff’s department is underfunded and understaffed. Pease’s brilliantly told story of a beleaguered mother-son law enforcement team is a compelling and heartbreaking debut that marks a new and important voice in the mystery genre.”—William Kent Krueger.

Perry, Thomas. [Hero](#) (Penzler \$27.95). Lesa reviews a classic Perry cat-and-mouse thriller: Justine Poole drifted into her job as a private security agent. Now, in her mid-20s, she provides security for the wealthy and famous of Los Angeles. One night, things go wrong. Five men follow an older couple onto their property, but Justine is already there. She shoots and kills two of the men, and the others are arrested. The media is hungry for Justine’s name and photo, wanting to make her a hero, but her boss wisely realizes that the media might turn on her, branding her a murderer. This plays right into the hands of Mr. Conger, a bad boss who’s angry that a young woman has killed two of his crew, harming his credibility. So he hires Leo Seal, who will kill anyone for a price, to hunt her down. Leo doesn’t count on the evasive smarts of a wily young woman who knows the LA streets and how to hide from a stalker. After he kills her boss, Justine can only rely on herself in a deadly, though oddly leisurely, game of cat-and-mouse.

Plantinga, Adam. [The Ascent](#) (Grand Central \$30). Kurt Argento is an ex-Detroit street cop who can’t let injustice go—and who has the fighting skills to back up his idealism even if his body is battered. Heading towards the Pacific, sees a young girl being dragged into an alley and goes to her rescue. But this a small, very corrupt Missouri town. The cops brutally beat him, frame him for assault, and he’s thrown into a maximum-security prison. Julie Wakefield, a grad student who happens to be the governor’s daughter, is about to take a tour of the prison. But when a malfunction in the security system releases a horde of prisoners, a fierce struggle for survival ensues. Argento must help a small band of staff and civilians, including Julie and her two state trooper handlers, make their way from the bottom floor to the roof to safety. All that stands in their way are six floors of the most dangerous convicts in Missouri.

Quinn, Cate. [The Clinic](#) (Sourcebooks \$27.99). An undercover investigation! Yes, but this twisty thriller is all about addiction, and draws, so she says, on Quinn’s own experiences with it. Haley is a famous actress who, as is so often the case, is in rehab. The place—a remote clinic in the Pacific Northwest where she’s under pressure to quit the drugs and booze. Her sister Meg works in LA at a casino, catching cheaters and, it must be said, popping pain pills, and she’s a drunk. Then come reports of Haley dying at the clinic, possibly by suicide. Meg can’t believe it and so decides to check herself in as a patient, battling her own addictions while she tries to figure out what really has happened

to Haley. “Quinn does a terrific job creating quirky characters, narrating from different points of view, and keeping readers guessing. The unexpected twists and eerie location make this a great pick for readers in the mood for atmospheric suspense!” Also in paperback: [The Clinic](#) (Sourcebooks \$16.99)

Sanmartino, Alexander. [Last Acts](#) (Scribner \$27). Out in January, Signed here on February 15. In this debut novel, the owner of a Phoenix gun store hatches a plan to resurrect his struggling business following his son’s near-death experience. George Saunders, Mary Karr, and Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah have all heaped on praise, and Jenny Offill finds it “hard to believe *Last Acts* is a first novel.” But it is true that it will be our **February Notable New Fiction Book of the Month**. Here is Saunders’ take: “What a taut, energetic, tender, and wholly original debut novel Alexander Sammartino has written. He knows something deep about the dark heart of America that somehow doesn’t stop him from writing about it with genuine, goofy love. Somewhere, Denis Johnson and Saul Bellow are smiling because their lineage—that of honest, highwire, virtuosic writing that summons up the world with all its charms and hazards, has found a worthy heir.”

Santlofer, Jonathan. [The Lost Van Gogh](#) (Sourcebooks \$32 or \$16.99). Rumors of a final self-portrait made by Vincent van Gogh on his deathbed have tantalized art historians and collectors since the artist’s death, but the painting is widely believed to be lost forever. Our **January Notable New Fiction Book of the Month** is “Ingeniously plotted, irresistibly readable, brimming with inside information about the high-stakes art world of theft, forgery, and murder, and comes with a few drawings by Santlofer, an artist himself.” So it’s something of a mystery—did Van Gogh kill himself, was it an accident or a murder?—but what I find fascinating is the way the story, “tracks the history of a missing self-portrait by Van Gogh against the background of the notorious Nazi campaign against ‘degenerate art.’” —Joyce Carol Oates. Historic European locations are another plus. Luke Perrone is an artist and great-grandson of the man who stole the Mona Lisa; his girlfriend Alexis Verde is the daughter of an art thief. Together, they discover a portrait that might be the missing van Gogh, but then it disappears from their hands. Reuniting with INTERPOL agent John Washington Smith, the trio set off to Europe to recover the missing painting in the hopes of answering questions about van Gogh’s final days.

We have discounted the hardcover price to \$32 (it’s outrageous and intended for libraries). AND if you are interested in more on Van Gogh’s life, you can order [The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh](#) (Penguin Classics \$19).

Stevenson, Benjamin. [Everyone on This Train Is a Suspect](#) (Harper \$30). Not Signed but you want this one! The Australian author of the international hit [Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone](#) (\$18.99) returns with a sequel like “Murder on the Orient Express,” except this train, barreling through the Australian desert, is full of crime writers, agents, editors, and fans. So, a locked room...er, train...mystery and on a real train, known as The Ghan, that travels from Darwin in the north to Adelaide in the south. Ernest Cunningham is back, struggling to write his second book. He hits the jackpot, so to speak, when a murder is committed on the train hosting the Australian Mystery Writers Society festival he is attending. He now has his new topic and narrates developments. “Full of quick dialogue, clever clues, and odd characters, this off-beat offering will be much fun for

the right reader.” The narrator understood that just because he was telling the story, it didn’t make the story about him. Every character was given a story arc that also directly connected to the whole! So good!”—Indie Next Pick. I add that this Stevenson story can be read alongside Alex Michaelides *The Fury* (see Some January Hardcover) and you can decide which you find more believable, or enjoyable. Not that you have to choose!

Swierczynski, Duane. [California Bear](#) (Mulholland \$29). Patrick writes “I’m so excited that Duane Swierczynski is back with a new novel, just when we need him most.

Forty years after he disappeared, the prolific serial killer known as the California Bear has seemingly returned, and an unlikely quartet of vigilantes have decided to hunt him down. Jack Queen is recently freed from prison thanks to retired LAPD cop Cato Hightower, but in exchange Hightower has a special job for the ex-con. A fifteen year-old girl has recently been diagnosed with leukemia, but this potentially devastating news doesn’t keep the teen from investigating whether or not her father is guilty of murder. Finally, Hightower’s soon to be ex-wife, an arborist and genealogist, has become caught in a scheme that has brought the Bear out of hiding. Don’t miss this one.”

Talton, Jon. [The Nurse Murders](#) (Poisoned Pen \$16.99). You can’t beat Talton for a detailed and irreverent (if loving) history of Phoenix. It’s 1936. In his 2nd 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).

Taylor, Brad. [Dead Man’s Hand](#) (Harper \$32). **Our copies come with special a special extra from the publisher, a mini flashlight.** Brad Taylor served as US Army Special Forces officer for more than twenty years, including eight as a commander in 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment—Delta, commonly known as the Delta Force. He brings this authenticity to the page of a thriller on the cutting edge of actual events. To finally end the war between their nations, a rogue Ukrainian band of partisans known as the Wolves teams up with members of Russia’s military intelligence to assassinate Vladimir Putin. But Putin is aware of the traitors in his midst and assigns the loyal commander of the Russian National Guard to root them out. It’s a mission Victor Petrov is expected to undertake after he prevents Sweden from joining NATO—by assassinating a deputy minister of foreign affairs. After receiving intelligence about the threat in Sweden, the U.S. sends Pike Logan

to identify Victor’s target—only for him to get caught in the crossfire between Putin’s agents and the Wolves. When the smoke clears, Pike makes no effort to stop the Wolves on their ultimate mission, believing it just, until he discovers that their operation has unimaginable consequences. For Putin is preparing a devastating endgame: activating the Dead Man’s Hand nuclear response that will launch Russia’s missiles in the event of his death....

Willingham, Stacy. [Only If You’re Lucky](#) (St Martins \$29). Shy, careful Margot, usually relegated to the role of sidekick, is enrolled at a liberal arts college in South Carolina. She has a nice, unadventurous roommate and they lead pretty boring lives, Margot staying within the shell she’s built since her high school bestie Eliza died three weeks after their graduation. Eliza was the reason Margot is at this college, adrift. Then one day the wild child, magnetic, addictive, probably dangerous Lucy Sharpe, suddenly singles Margot out and suggests they spend the summer off campus rooming with three other girls. Oddly Margot and Lucy become close and stick to it. And then by the middle of their sophomore year living together, one of the frat boys from the house next door is murdered. And Lucy Sharpe has disappeared. I’m going to admit that this experience of college is radically removed from my own although the grip of wishing to belong and to rule-busting at this age is not.

CLASSICS

Carr, John Dickson. [The Problem of the Wire Cage](#) (American Mystery Classics \$15.95). Death and tennis! And gain insights from *Knives Out* film director Rian Johnson’s introduction to this volume. Among all of Carr’s ingenious crime scenes, the present case is one of his best known: a dead man is found strangled in the middle of a clay tennis court, just after a storm. In the damp dirt, there is one set of footsteps—his own—leading back to the grass; the court is otherwise untouched. There are no trees above from which the body may have fallen and no other visible means by which it may have been transported to its final resting place. Before determining the perpetrator of the strangulation, the local authorities are first confronted by the utter implausibility of the location—two interlocking questions puzzling enough to stump even the most seasoned inspector. The bafflement is reaching a harried volley by the time amateur sleuth Dr. Gideon Fell gets involved, but he soon shows that the knotted plot is no match for his deductive powers. Test your own during January evenings.

✎ Fleming, Ian. [Thunderball](#) (Harper \$18.99). Upon M’s insistence, James Bond takes a two-week respite in a secluded natural health spa. But amid the bland teas and tasteless yogurts Bond stumbles onto the trail of a lethal man with ties to a new secret organization called SPECTRE. When SPECTRE hijacks two A-bombs, a frantic global search for the weapons ensues, and M’s hunch that the plane containing the bombs will make a clean drop into the ocean sends Bond to the Bahamas to investigate. Inevitably all paths lead to Ernst Stavro Blofeld.

✎ Harvey, WF. [The Mysterious Mr. Badman](#) (Poisoned Pen Press \$14.99). Hurray, a bibliomystery from 1934 and set in the landscapes of Yorkshire. Lesa writes, “This classic mystery by Harvey (1885–1937) was first published in 1934. While his nephew, Dr. Jim Pickering, considers taking over a local doctor’s practice, Athelstan Digby holidays nearby in Yorkshire. When Mr. Digby’s landlords need to attend a funeral, he offers to watch their bookshop for the day. That afternoon, three customers (a

vicar, a chauffeur, and a stranger to the area) all ask for a copy of the same book, John Bunyan's *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*. Late in the day, a young boy shows up with books to sell, including the Bunyan. Digby takes it to his room to check it out and finds a letter stuck between the pages. He realizes the contents of the letter could change the course of English politics. When the book and letter are stolen, Digby, his nephew, and the stepdaughter of the Home Secretary set out to recover them. The trio faces a wily foe who won't hesitate to use blackmail, kidnapping, and murder to achieve his goal." Score another gem for the British Library Crime Classics program.

COZIES

Connelly, Lucy. [Death at a Scottish Wedding](#) (Crooked Lane \$29.99). Dr. Emilia McRoy left the pressure cooker atmosphere of a Seattle ER for Sea Isle, Scotland, and in a short time made many friends and helped solve a murder. Now her friend Angie is getting married in a castle belonging to Ewan Campbell, laird, mayor, and constable of Sea Isle, who hired Emilia as coroner but has a fraught relationship with her. Still Emilia is delighted to accept an invitation to her friend Angie's wedding at a remote Scottish castle owned by uber rich Constable Ewan Campbell's family. Soon after she arrives, a blizzard knocks out all modes of communication, isolating the wedding party. While wandering through the castle's turret, Em stumbles across a body: the bride's abusive ex, who was not invited to the festivities and hasn't been in touch with anyone in the family for years. After several more suspicious accidents and close calls, Em realizes she and the rest of the wedding party have been trapped with a killer. With no way out of the snowbound castle, and no certainty about who to trust, she teams up with Ewan to investigate. 2nd in series.

Delany, Vicki. [The Sign of Four Spirits](#) (Crooked Lane \$29.99). When a psychic fair arrives in West London, Gemma Doyle, owner of the Sherlock Holmes Bookshop and Emporium, wants nothing to do with it. But somehow, at the urging of Donald Morris, an enthusiastic Sherlockian, she finds herself talked into attending a séance. But wait—she's banned and shown the door. Curious, she listens in from outside the room. The medium informs a disappointed Donald that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle will not be able to make it tonight. Then, Gemma hears a voice cut off, a cry for help, a scream. Gemma bursts into the library to see that someone has collapsed on the table—dead. The windows are all locked, and Gemma was guarding the only door. Someone in this room is a murderer. But who?

Fletcher, Jessica. [Murder, She Wrote: Fit for Murder](#) (Penguin \$27). Former editor of the *Cabot Cove Gazette* Evelyn Phillips is back to check on an old friend. She demands that Jessica come with her to see Bertha Mae, who is a bit dithery. Jessica does become somewhat concerned when Bertha Mae starts to talk about her new neighbor, Martin Terranova. He is quite charming and very health conscious and he teaches yoga and meditation in his pool house. Maureen Metzger says that she and Bertha Mae became friends in Terranova's class and mentions how solicitous he is to his older clients. Jessica attends one of his classes and does notice that Terranova is flirtatious with several elderly clients, especially Bertha Mae. Then he turns up dead in his weighs room making Evelyn the prime suspect....

Fluke, Joanne. [Red Velvet Cupcake Murder](#) (\$14.95). A reissue from 2013.

Hall, Traci. [Murder at a Scottish Castle](#) (Kensington \$16.95). With the summer days getting shorter in the seaside village of Nairn, the annual bagpiping competition at Ramsey Castle promises to be quite the end-of-season blowout. Paisley has snagged a special invitation from the dowager countess, who wants to showcase her cashmere goods in the castle gift shop, and she's brought her son Brody, Grandpa, and their black Scottish terrier Wallace. There's a fierce rivalry between Robert Grant, the Earl of Lyon, and last year's winner Jory Baxter, with Grant loudly vowing to show up the blowhard Baxter and claim clan bragging rights. But the reigning champion has barely put the reed to his lips when he turns red and collapses, soon to take his dying breath. DI Zeffer suspects foul play. And won't welcome Paisley's sleuthing.

SOME NEW HARDCOVERS FOR JANUARY

If you are looking for nonfiction, this roundup for January in [The Millions](#) highlights many titles. We can order any of them for you on request.

✦ Ailes, Kat. [The Expectant Detectives](#) (St Martins \$28). Over the years I've found it's more productive to tell you about good books than waste space on sniping at bad ones. But here is an exception. The title is cute. It's a debut. It thus gets favorable attention. I read it as a potential Cozy Crimes Club Pick and soon quit. Unless you want way too much information about the body when pregnant, about birthing classes, about scrungy life in a cottage and village herbalists and a story that murders every mommy cliché, British style, do not waste your time and \$ on this. I am astonished at the word "witty" thrown at it but I recognize that broad British humor can miss its mark with me.

Atrek, Inci. [Holiday Country](#) (Flatiron \$28.99) "is a gorgeous and poignant bildungsroman of womanhood, motherhood, identity, and the nuances that stitch them together set against the resplendent Aegean Coast. A book to keep close to your chest in the cold months ahead." So says Indie Next in a January Pick.

Burns, Amy Jo. [Mercury](#) (Celadon \$29). It's 1990 and seventeen-year-old Marley West is blazing into the river valley town of Mercury, Pennsylvania. A perpetual loner, she seeks a place at someone's table and a family of her own. The first thing she sees when she arrives in town is three men standing on a rooftop. Their silhouettes blot out the sun. The Joseph brothers become Marley's whole world before she can blink. Soon, she is young wife to one, The One Who Got Away to another, and adopted mother to them all. As their own mother fades away and their roofing business crumbles under the weight of their unwieldy father's inflated ego, Marley steps in to shepherd these unruly men. Years later, an eerie discovery in the church attic causes old wounds to resurface and suddenly the family's survival hangs in the balance. Indie Next says, "An extraordinary novel! *Mercury* is the lyrically written, unputdownable story of the Joseph brothers and the women who hold them together. I adored this family's remarkable journey through love and loyalty, loss, and forgiveness."

Burton, Tara Isabella. [Here in Avalon](#) (Simon & Schuster \$28.99) is a New York City fairy tale about two sisters who fall under the spell of an underworld cabaret troupe that might be a dangerous cult—but one that makes the materialist world left in its wake feel like a sinister cult itself.

Chan, Vanessa. [The Storm We Made](#) (Ricci \$27). This ambitious and sweeping debut novel explores the fallout of a Malayan mother who resents British rule's decision to become a spy for Japanese forces during World War II. Seduced by promises of an "Asia for Asians," she instead helps usher in a brutal occupation with devastating costs for her family. "An incredible book from a strong new voice, focusing on the choices that a mother makes in the middle of colonial occupation during WWII. Chan touches upon the murky grey areas of survival in a time of oppression and upheaval." I really look forward to reading this and exploring more of the Asian history of WWII. It should pair well with Eng's [The House of Doors](#) (Bloomsbury \$28.99 SIGNED) which I devoured.

Elston, Ashley. [First Lie Wins](#) (Penguin \$28). OK, here's one I wish I had gotten to sooner. It's very good. Evie Porter has everything a nice, Southern girl could want: a perfect, doting boyfriend, a house with a white picket fence and a garden, a fancy group of friends. The only catch: Evie Porter doesn't exist. It's all a con. Once she's given a name and location by her mysterious boss Mr. Smith, she learns everything there is to know about the town and the people in it. Then the mark: Ryan Sumner. The last piece of the puzzle is the job. Evie isn't privy to Mr. Smith's real identity, but she knows this job will be different. Ryan has gotten under her skin, and she's starting to envision a different sort of life for herself. But Evie can't make any mistakes—especially after what happened last time. But as someone has stolen her true identity, she's determined to shed her aliases and become herself again. "Propelled by blackmail, double lives, and a touch of found family, *First Lie Wins* stands out."

Gonzalez James, Elizabeth. [The Bullet Swallower](#) (Simon & Schuster \$26.99). Infusing the spaghetti western with magical realism, the novel follows a Mexican bandito on a cosmic journey generations in the making.

Goodwin, Daisy. [Diva](#) (St Martins \$29). "Readers get behind the scenes of Maria Callas' life and her complicated relationships. She'd hoped to marry Aristotle Onassis, but instead he wed Jackie Kennedy. Callas ended up alone, even with all the money and accolades for her phenomenal soprano voice. This fictional portrait takes some creative license, but that doesn't detract from this well-researched portrait of an international superstar. I am certain that at least one opera will be written about this operatic life. I was privileged to see her live when I was young and she and Renata Tebaldi, very different temperaments, were rivals for Diva. It is our **January Romance & Relationships Book of the Month.**

Graff, Andrew J. [True North](#) (Harper \$30) is "an engaging, character-driven portrait of a marriage under pressure from financial deception and conflicting desires. Graff writes about the outdoors, particularly rivers and river rafting, with an immersive blend of knowledge and passion."—Charles Frazier on a novel *Booklist* says in its Starred Review "h will appeal to anyone who can relate to giving everything you've got to one last plan." The heart of this novel is inspired by Graff's own coming of age on the rapids of the Menominee River in Wisconsin. "What I loved most about whitewater, and still do, is the way the river has become a metaphor for so much more in my life, particularly the ways in which learning to yield is often more powerful than strength," he explains. "Now in my early forties, I still guide rafts

part time in summer. I am beginning to learn to yield in that boat, or at least am experienced enough to know I should. And in *True North* I wanted to explore all of these things."

✦ Hall, Araminta. [One of the Good Guys](#) (Zando \$28). Desperate to escape the ghosts of his failed marriage, Cole upends his life. He leaves London behind for a remote stretch of coast, relishing the respite from the noise, drama, and relentless careerism that curdled his relationship and mental health. Leonora has made the same move for similar reasons. She's living a short walk from Cole's seaside cottage, preparing for her latest art exhibition. Though Cole still can't figure out what went wrong with his marriage, and Leonora is having trouble acclimating to the hostile landscape, the pair forges a connection on the eroding bluff they call home. Then, two young women activists raising awareness about gendered violence disappear while passing through. Cole and Leonora find themselves in the middle of a police investigation and the resulting media firestorm when the world learns of what happened. And as the tension escalates alongside the search for the missing women, they quickly realize that they don't know each other that well after all.

✦ Hallett, Janice. [The Mysterious Case of the Alperton Angels](#) (Atria \$27.99). In this Fleet Street thriller, rival journalists racing to cash in on a true-crime scoop find themselves drawn into a mystery far darker and twistier than they imagined. With her signature collage narrative style — composed of snippets of emails, text messages and newspaper articles — Hallett once again composes a modern-day epistolary novel with her signature humor and sneaky twists. I am such a fan

Haynes, Natalie. [Divine Might: Goddesses in Greek Myth](#) (Harper \$30). Once Percy Jackson jump started a renewed interest in Greek mythology authors have dug deep into ancient feminist figures which include mortals like Clytemnestra as well. [John](#) has dived deep into this genre so you can email him for recommendations. Meanwhile here's a volume to dip into. I'm enjoying all this since reading Bullfinch's *Age of Fable* in elementary school was foundational to my reading life. Paperback: [Divine Might](#) (\$18.99).

Kahler, Abbott. [Where You End](#) (Holt \$27.99). A very dark and intriguing thriller where one cannot rely on memory. After lies are uncovered, the mirror twins, so rare, still must work together to survive a cult after one of them is left in a coma following a car accident. The pacing and character development are excellent and will keep you turning the page." I will explore this one more.

Khan, Shubnum. [The Djinn Waits a Hundred Years](#) (Penguin \$28). "A once magnificent mansion is suffused with sadness. The lives of the tenants, past and present, have been destroyed by love. A young woman seeks assurance that love can be real and that real love can last. In gorgeous prose, Khan weaves a gripping tale." And there is this take: "Hoping for a fresh start after tragedy, Sana and her father move into a South African apartment building with a host of quirky neighbors. Sana becomes fascinated by the story of Meena, a former resident when it was the estate of a wealthy troubled family. A lonely girl, a heartbroken djinn, and long-buried secrets come together in this gorgeously gothic tale of love and grief."

Magrs, Paul. [Puss in Books](#) (Harper \$15.99). You feline fanciers will enjoy a volume where various authors write about their well-loved cats.

Michaelides, Alex. [The Fury](#) (Celadon \$28.99) is a devious mystery as is always true with Michaelides who lives in Cyprus. Lana Farrar is a reclusive ex-movie star and one of the most famous women in the world. Every year, she invites her closest friends to escape the English weather and spend Easter on her tiny, idyllic private Greek island. I tell you this because you may think you know this story. You probably read about it at the time — it caused a real stir in the tabloids, if you remember. It had all the necessary ingredients for a press sensation: a celebrity; a private island cut off by the wind...and a murder. But who am I? My name is Elliot Chase, and I'm going to tell you a story unlike any you've ever heard....." There is some chance of signed copies; order and we will upgrade if we score them.

Miller, Derek B. [The Curse of Pietro Houdini](#) (Avid Reader Press \$28). Pat King is a serious fan of Miller's work. I quote *Kirkus* on his latest, which I can't wait to read (think Mark Sullivan and Kristin Hannah's WWII epics). "Orphaned by the Allied bombing of Rome, a 14-year-old boy is taken under the wing of a wily art restorer determined to prevent the Nazis from carting off precious paintings stored at the abbey of Montecassino. The artist, a pontificating, grandiose soul calling himself Pietro Houdini, gives the boy, Massimo, an eye-opening education in art and survival. He shares his plan of painting over three undiscovered masterpieces by Titian and somehow sneaking them out of the abbey—'the first art heist inside an art heist in the history of the world.' Massimo shocks himself by becoming involved in acts of violence against the Nazis, a number of whom are roaming the abbey among the monks in search of paintings and manuscripts to haul away in trucks. Midway through the novel, Houdini, secretly tormented over a decision he made regarding his activist wife, confesses a family secret and Massimo reveals something even more surprising about himself.... Narrated from 40 years in the future, the novel works equally well as wartime tale, heist thriller, coming-of-age story, and sweeping history and art lesson. It's also a brilliant set piece in which the abbey, 'a fortress in the clouds,' is a major character. And let's hear it also for Ferrari, the mule who overcomes injuries to lend his own brand of heroism in this brilliantly imagined World War II saga."

✎ Peacock, Francesca. [Pure Wit: The Revolutionary Life of Margaret Cavendish](#) (Pegasus \$29.95). A proto-feminist, science-fiction pioneer, and divisive public figure, the 17th Century's Margaret Cavendish is endlessly fascinating, and Peacock's debut gives her the rigorous, in-depth treatment that she deserves. This excellent review in the [Wall Street Journal](#) reveals in part why we know so little of Margaret who wrote poems on 'the new science' of atomism as well as pioneering works of fiction. "Peacock argues that Virginia Woolf's agitated assessment of the duchess unfairly cast out this remarkable writer from canons created by subsequent feminists. Woolf endorsed Mary Wollstonecraft, describing her as a person for whom the French Revolution was 'an active agent in her own blood,' a dolphin not a minnow, a highhanded, hot-blooded experimenter in life. Yet she dismissed Cavendish, who had lived through the English Civil War more than a century earlier, as a self-deceiving, foolish person, whose one desire was fame and whose books 'moulder in the gloom of public libraries.' Woolf crowned Wollstonecraft as a mother of English feminism and banished Cavendish to the mausoleum of unread books. This was Woolf at her most snobbishly limited, as

Ms. Peacock's fine book shows." Honestly, there's nothing ever really new: this reads like the Goodreads scandal where a debut author created some 67 bots to trash other authors' work.

✎ Pook, Lizzie. [Maude Horton's Glorious Revenge](#) (Simon & Schuster \$27.99). Constance Horton, 20, disguises herself as a cabin boy to join the *Makepeace* on its 1849 journey to the Arctic in search of missing explorer Sir John Franklin, who had sought the fabled Northwest Passage linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Two years later, Constance's sister, Maude, receives a letter stating only that Constance died by "misadventure." Maude refuses to accept such a vague explanation, even though the British Admiralty is reluctant to provide her with further details. Eventually, a clerk surreptitiously hands over the diary that Constance kept while aboard the *Makepeace*. In it, Maude finds entries that cast suspicion on expedition scientist Edison Stowe. Maude decides to shadow Stowe and joins him on a new venture he's started to capitalize on the murder mania that has all of London in a frenzy—a travel company that takes guests around the country via train to witness public hangings—to extract the truth about Constance from him in any way possible. As tensions and dangers mount, it ultimately falls to Maude to enact the ultimate revenge to get justice for her sister. Emma Stonex observes, what we have here is "that rare thing — a gripping adventure story and an intelligent, richly textured portrait of a moment in history. Every page is steeped in atmosphere, from the gallows of Victorian London to the perils of polar exploration aboard the great ship *Makepeace*, as Pook combines impressive research with fine-tuned characterization, a galloping plot and absolute command of her story. This is a glorious creation indeed."

Reid, Kiley. [Come and Get it](#) (Penguin \$29). Millie is a 24-year-old RA in a dorm of typical college girls. All she wants is to get through her delayed senior year, start saving for a home to call her own, and find a good job for when she graduates. When she makes some increasingly bad choices, she puts all of that in jeopardy and has to face the fact that she may not like the person she is becoming."

Robb, J D. [Random in Death: An Eve Dallas Novel](#) (St Martins \$30). An alarmingly rapid series of random attacks on young women in the eerily recognizable 2060s sends Lt. Eve Dallas and her NYPSD peeps into overdrive. Aspiring singer Jenna Harbough, who's followed the band Avenue A for years, has come to Club Rock It to hear them play and to pitch her own demo video to her idol, lead singer Jake Kincade. Instead, she dies in Kincade's arms after a stranger jabs her arm with a hypodermic needle filled with nasty toxins and flees during the time it takes the authorities to arrive. The perp, who's evidently planned his murderous assault carefully, has left so little evidence that the only thing Dallas is confident of is his gender. More evidence follows the very next night, but at a high cost: the death of Arlie Dillon, who turned out with her friends to hear the band Arrow. This time the friends can offer more clues about the killer....

✎ Westerson, Jeri. [The Twilight Queen](#) (Severn House \$29.99). Ordered Upon Request. "It's lucky for Will Somers that the notoriously hot-tempered Henry VIII favors and protects him, for Will knows plenty of secrets that could get him killed.

Although he's happily married to Marion, the bastard daughter of Lord Robert Heyward, Will still has a taste for men. After a night of entertaining Henry and his court, Will is approached by handsome courtier Nicholas Pachett for a night of dalliance. Upon leaving Pachett, Will is directed to the Queen's quarters, where Queen Anne begs him to remove a dead body left in her room by one of her many enemies. Henry famously cast off Queen Catherine to marry Anne Boleyn, but now that she's produced only another daughter, the king is already looking with favor on Jane Seymour, encouraged by Thomas Cromwell, who hates Anne. Recognizing the dead man as a musician newly arrived in court, Will drags his body through a secret passage to the gardens. Because he already solved a murder during the time of Queen Catherine, he knows that he has to find the real killer if everyone's to escape without losing their heads.... Historical details mixed with a puzzling mystery make for a fine read, with several more wives to go."—*Kirkus Reviews*

JANUARY LARGE PAPERBACK PICKS

Bartz, Julia. [The Writing Retreat](#) (\$17). Aspiring novelist Alex—the narrator of Bartz's audacious psychological thriller debut—idolizes button-pushing feminist horror writer Roza Vallo, so she's elated when Roza selects her to attend an exclusive, all-female writing retreat at Blackbriar, Roza's remote Adirondacks estate. Upon arriving, Alex and the other four invitees learn they must each conceive of and complete an entirely new book in the next 28 days. Roza will eject anyone who doesn't make their daily word count, but her editor will publish the best finished manuscript and pay its author a \$1 million advance. With Roza's encouragement, Alex begins a fictionalized account of the bizarre, unsolved deaths of Blackbriar's builder and his occultist wife. But soon she sees she should focus less on fiction and more on survival. Indie Next says, "This story takes 'never meet your heroes' to a whole new level. I loved the use of tension in the book, and how the author played with supernatural elements while still keeping the story grounded in reality. Twisty, dark, and even fun!"

Bennett, Michael. [Better the Blood](#) (\$17). This is a terrific debut I enjoyed discussing with Bennett last January. Bennett writes about Maori culture and history with generosity and care, reflected in the final acknowledgments paid to those in his community who lent him additional insights and guidance. It "explores themes of colonization and Indigenous culture by way of New Zealand. A serial killer looking to avenge the 160-year-old murder of a Maori chief is pursued by police detective Hana Westerman, whose Maori ancestry makes the case personal."—*Christian Science Monitor*

Christie, Agatha. [Murder on the Orient Express: The Graphic Novel](#) (Harper \$25.99). Experience classic Christie in a new way with a graphic novel adaptation featuring stunning, full color art work by Bob Al-Greene. As critic Oline Cogdill, who includes it in her Best of 2023 writes, "Beautifully illustrated, this latest incarnation captures the full story of what happened on that train, using the Branagh film as its base. It may inspire one to re-read the novel."

Douaihy, Margot. [Scorched Grace: A Sister Holiday Mystery](#) (\$17). Sister Holiday Walsh, the narrator of poet Douaihy's stunning fiction debut and series launch, calls herself 'the first punk nun.' This cursing, chain-smoking queer nun who wears

gloves and a heavy scarf to hide her tattoos is unlike any nun encountered on the page or in real life. Yet Holiday is most sincere about her faith in God, her devotion to the Catholic Church, and finding a home among the Sisters of the Sublime Blood in New Orleans. When Saint Sebastian's School where she teaches is targeted by an arson attack in which a beloved janitor dies, Holiday turns sleuth to find the attacker and save the school, which is in danger of being closed by the diocese. More fires—and deaths—occur as Holiday's investigation heats up, pitting her against her fellow sisters and staff...."—*PW Starred Review* for a 2023 First Mystery Book of the Month. This is not a cozy, not a Father Brown sort of story, but steeped in a dark New Orleans, punchy, and ultimately surprising.

Fesperman, Dan. [Winter Work](#) (\$18). We've been devoted to the elegant, mostly wrenching spy stories of Fesperman, as we have those of Joseph Kanon, from the very beginning with his award winning debut [Lie in the Dark](#) (\$15.95). His latest upholds his high standards, as that Mr. Kanon points out: "*Winter Work* vividly captures those chaotic first months after the Berlin Wall came down, with East Germany in free fall and once feared Stasi officers running for cover—into the hands of their former enemies." In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the final coda to the Cold War and ushered in massive geopolitical and social change.... This evocative murder mystery vividly captures what happened on the Eastern side of the wall on a political level—including how the cache of secrets ultimately found its way to the CIA—and a personal one, from the perspective of an unusual protagonist, a sympathetic East German spy with a complicated and messy home life.

Harper, Jordan. [Everybody Knows](#) (\$18.99). "Edgar winner Jordan Harper's second novel delivers a scorching look at what happens when uber power and uber wealth collide and morals wither, if they even existed. That's where "black-bag publicists" come in, not just to clean the dirty laundry of L.A.'s elite, but to sanitize despicable actions, taking them to the ultimate pristine state to avoid negative publicity. Just about any hint of bad behavior can be spun away with the right approach. Harper's dark vision — and it is very dark — imbues "Everybody Knows" with a tight plot that is on fire from the first sentence and believable characters one wants to root for. Harper's noir vision of L.A. sees the city at its worst but with a sense of hope for its future, enhanced by his evocative writing. The various vignettes that comprise the plot are based on snippets of real events."—Oline Cogdill (see her Best of 2023 list above).

Hendrix, Grady. [How to Sell a Haunted House](#) (\$18). "Imagine returning to the hometown you couldn't wait to leave, then staying in a haunted house while you're there. Now imagine horror, humor, and entirely believable characters" and you are set for the perfect January read.

Hillerman, Anne. [The Way of the Bear](#) (\$18.99). Fossil harvesting, ancient lore, greed, rejected love and murder fuel this 8th investigation by Navajo cops Bernie Manuelito and Jim Chee (Joe Leaphorn is, wait for it... away on a real vacation). And it mostly takes place in Utah's Bears Ears, the on-again, off-again national park that's been the subject of so much political turmoil in recent years. Chee is there to meet with Hosteen Desmond Grayhair and help persuade interested scientist Chapman Dulles to make a sizable donation to the Navajo Nation's Fallen Officers

Memorial Fund. On a solitary evening walk in the Valley of the Gods, Bernie is targeted by a truck that nearly runs her down shortly after she discovers that some of the valley's ancient petroglyphs have been defaced. On top of all this, she's called on to deliver the baby of Hannah Black, whose husband, Roper, has just tendered his resignation as Dulles' security chief. Since Chee's buddy Officer Ajax Becenti is away from his desk at the Bureau of Land Management, Bernie reports the damaged petroglyphs to Becenti's partner, Ranger Cassidy Kingsley, a California import who seems indifferent. The tale picks up steam with the discovery of missing paleontologist Kyle Johnson's body and the disappearance of Dulles, who leaves an unidentified corpse behind on his front porch. Anne joins us on April 21 with a new book.

Kubica, Mary. [Just the Nicest Couple](#) (\$18.99). Jack Hayes vanishes after a ferocious fight with his wife, Nina, who's now looking for him frantically. Nina's friend and coworker Lily thinks she's the last person to have seen him before he wisped away like smoke. But Lily and her husband agree they can't tell anyone. Why not? This thriller is about deception where we least expect it and the danger of a lie tumbling out of control. Kubica wastes no time dropping her characters into an impossible situation and then ratchets up the tension, one twist after another, until the last, shocking conclusion.

Marshall, Kate Alice. [What Lies in the Woods](#) (\$18.99). At age 11, Naomi Shaw was left for dead in the woods outside her tiny Pacific Northwest hometown of Chester, stabbed 17 times by her would-be killer. With her friends Olivia and Cassidy—who were also in the woods at the time—she provided the damning evidence that put a dangerous serial killer behind bars. Now, 22 years later, that man has died in prison, resurrecting unwanted memories for the three women. Liv, in particular, is completely overwrought, insisting she has more that she wants to share. At the same time, Ethan Schreiber, an eager and persistent true-crime podcaster, is asking lots of questions, and when Naomi engages with him on several ill-advised levels, the scene is set for an explosive outcome, as decades of secrets begin to emerge. Marshall does a terrific job of maintaining a palpable current of tension throughout the book, and her depictions of the intricately tangled relationships inherent in small-town life are excellent. Elevating this novel beyond the plethora of other thrillers is terrific writing....”—*Kirkus* Starred Review. Kate joins us again on January 24 with her second adult thriller. Yay.

Perry, Thomas. [Murder Book](#) (\$16.95). This is one of Perry's ingenious plots that starts out slowly and spins you into a whirlwind of crime. I especially love the small Midwestern towns as the target areas for the crooks. When a sudden crime wave hits several of them, the U.S. Attorney for the region calls on Harry Duncan to investigate. An ex-cop known for his unorthodox methods, Duncan is reluctant to go up against a widespread criminal organization—but the attorney in question is Ellen Leicester, the wife who left him fifteen years earlier, and to her, he can't say no. Initially brought in as a consultant to determine if the racketeering is severe enough to require an all-out investigation by the FBI, Duncan quickly finds himself in conflict with a syndicate far more violent than first suspected. As the investigation develops, he begins compiling a “murder book,” the notebook in which a detective keeps records, interviews, photos—everything he needs to build his case (OK, all your

Harry Bosch fans know about murder books). But his scrutiny of the gang soon makes Duncan a target. And Ellen, too.

Stabenow, Dana. [Not the Ones Dead](#) (\$16.99) once again pits criminal forces against Kate Shugak's tight-knit Alaskan community. After nine people die in a plane crash, PI Kate and her partner, former state trooper Jim Chopin, investigate reports of drones flying near the crash site. When a journalist gets tipped to the presence of a 10th, unidentified, body, a tangled web of criminality and competing law enforcement interests emerges. Anchorage-based FBI agent James G. Mason shows up, revealing to the local detectives that a group of white supremacists has been operating in town. More digging reveals that another federal agency has been monitoring the group, and that Mason, hoping to avoid a violent showdown, had an agent keeping tabs on the sinister new arrivals. “Before long, Kate taps into her rich network of sources and figures out that the unclaimed body is part of a government cover up that won't allow for an easy resolution.”—*PW*. New readers can start here with ease.

Can be Signed by Dana if ordered and shipped by January 31.

Stevenson, Benjamin. [Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone](#) (\$18.99). A mandatory family reunion at an Australian ski resort jumpstarts the plot. And yes, everyone in this family really has killed someone. Indie Next: “This is the best mystery I've read. The narrator understood that just because he was telling the story, it didn't make the story about him. Every member of this family was given a story arc that also directly connected to the whole! *So good!*” Critic Oline Cogdill agrees: Benjamin Stevenson's background in the publishing industry and as a stand-up comedian come into play in this unique mystery that riffs on the genre while respecting it, resplendent in sophisticated wit and characters with myriad motives. Adroit plotting indulges in clichés while avoiding the predictable.” The sequel is found in Some Signed Books for January.

Yamashita, Iris. [City Under One Roof](#) (\$17). In her debut Yamashita imagines a version of an isolated Christie country house with a uniquely situated community on the Alaskan coast. In Point Mettler, all 205 full-time residents live in one high-rise. The setting alone is evocative, based on the real city of Whittier, but Yamashita adds the discovery of body parts in a cove, the disappearance of a family and the arrival of an Anchorage detective. Then, a blizzard and avalanche block the tunnel that's the only way in or out of the area. Look up our zoom conversation from last February and plan to attend Yamashita's live event at The Pen with a new book on February 7. The thrill of meeting a new author never fades.

SOME LARGE PAPERBACKS FOR JANUARY

Bardugo, Leigh. [Hell Bent](#) (\$19.99). Wealth. Power. Murder. Magic. The Ivy League is going straight to hell. “*Ninth House* was a dark, explosive introduction and *Hell Bent* expands on the world with even more mystery and magic. This book is every bit as addicting as the first.” Yes, bestseller, Best Book for many, Historical fantasy, and so exciting.

Berry, Steve. [The 9th Man](#) (\$19.99). Teaming up with Grand Blackwood, Berry expands his Cotton Malone universe by giving the Magellan Billet's Luke Daniels a leading role into an investigation about what really happened on November 22, 1963, in Dallas. It involves a DC insider kingpin and a race from

Belgium to Luxembourg to Louisiana bayous and Wyoming wilderness. Berry returns to *The Pen* on February 19 to launch his new Cotton Malone thriller. Details including an exclusive preorder extra to come.

Clark, Mary Higgins/Alafair Burke. [Let Me Call You Sweetheart](#) (\$17.99). Mary may be gone but her co-author Alafair keeps the suspense coming. Prosecutor and aspiring judge Kerry McGrath can kiss the judgeship appointment goodbye if she snoops into the murder of the beautiful Suzanne Reardon. Ten years earlier, the seemingly open-and-shut case propelled political careers and doomed the husband, Skip Reardon, to a 30-year sentence despite his desperate pleas of innocence. While sitting in the waiting room of a plastic surgeon, Dr. Smith, Kerry sees a patient who looks exactly like Suzanne Reardon. Kerry's shock is surpassed days later when she sees another. Questioning Dr. Smith wildly ruffles his feathers, and when Kerry learns that the doctor's testimony helped convict Skip Reardon, she teams up with Reardon's attorney and scours the world of gem thieves, murderers, child stalkers, the Irish Mafia, and more to solve the mystery.

Cosimano, Elle. [Finlay Donovan Jumps the Gun](#) (\$18). Cosimano's zany third Finlay Donovan caper finds accidental hit woman Finlay—budding romantic suspense novelist, harried divorced mother of two young children, and reluctant criminal—trying valiantly to keep her new year's resolutions: no more junk food, no more men, and no more bodies in her minivan. This won't be easy, as she's being pressured by Russian mob boss Feliks Zhironov to locate and possibly dispose of a mysterious contract killer known as EasyClean, who's been cultivating hit jobs through one of Zhironov's websites. Finlay believes that EasyClean may be a local Virginia police officer, so she jumps at the chance to participate in a citizens' police academy course organized by the Fairfax County PD.... *PW* says, "Finlay's strong narrative voice carries the reader through the colossal silliness." Or put another way, "If you're a fan of crazy off-the-wall antics and hysterical comedy, sexy tension laden chemistry, and an outstanding who's-the-bad-guy mystery, [this] is for you!"

Fredericks, Mariah. [The Lindbergh Nanny](#) (\$19). "A compelling, fast-paced, and always humane keyhole view of the kidnapping, murder, and criminal investigation of golden-boy aviator Charles Lindbergh's son—from the below-stairs nanny, Betty Gow—who must find the real killer to avoid being charged herself. A fresh, penetrating, and profound take on "the crime of the century."—Susan Elia MacNeal. I recommend it too.

Goldman, Matt. [Broken Ice](#) (\$18.99). A reissue of the second PI Nils Shapiro case which I recommend—the whole series in fact beginning with [Gone to Dust](#) (\$17.99). The disappearance of 17-year-old high school student Linnea Engstrom after a hockey game in Warroad, Minnesota, has Linnea's parent hiring Nils, who soon learns that another student, 18-year-old Haley Housh, went missing after the same game, though the girls weren't together. Haley's body turns up in a cave outside St. Paul, and Nils is shot in the shoulder with an arrow outside it. Nils knows he ought to be resting from his serious injury, but he also realizes he has little time to find Linnea before it's too late. Divorced and involved in a failing relationship as well as a struggling business, Nils is a deeply flawed but good-hearted everyman. He's supported by a cast of wonderfully quirky characters,

including the former Canadian Football League player turned nurse practitioner hired by his ex-wife to care for his wounded shoulder. I hope the whole series reissues and that Goldman writes more about Nils, a truly creative lead character.

Kapoor, Deepti. [Age of Vice](#) (\$18). "A potent and moving crime drama set in India, *Age of Vice* takes a magnifying glass to the corruption and violence caused by wealth. Sweeping in scope yet attuned to the minute details of everyday life, this is a novel that's not to be missed."

Maden, Mike. [Clive Cussler Fire Strike](#) (\$18). Wow, who knew when the hardcover published last June that Maden's Oregon Files adventure would come to echo real life? When Juan Cabrillo is hired to extract an undercover operative in Kenya, he finds himself on the trail of a deadly international plot. A Saudi prince seeks to unleash a deadly assault on U.S. forces, sparking a new war in the Middle East and ultimately destroying Israel.

Mosley, Walter. [Every Man a King: A King Oliver Novel](#) (\$18.99). "Mosley's second "King Oliver" title after 2018's [Down the River unto the Sea](#) (\$18.99) has its former-cop-turned-PI protagonist, Joe King Oliver, swimming in shark-infested waters. He is hired by Roger Ferris during a legal battle with his children over control of their multibillion-dollar company. Complicating matters is Brenda, Joe's grandmother, who happens to be Roger's girlfriend. Summoned to Ferris's mansion, Joe assumes the topic of discussion will be the takeover. Instead, Ferris tells Joe about a man who has been "detained" by the government—a man whom he owes a debt. Then Joe's ex-wife Monica calls, begging him to help her new husband—the man who convinced her to let Joe sit and rot in jail instead of paying bail. But Joe loves their daughter, so he dives into this case. Soon, Joe's neck-deep in white supremacists, Russian mobsters, and shadow organizations, all looking to put him in a body bag. Mosley demonstrates once again why he is a master of the craft, weaving a searing look at the concepts of race and social justice into a page-turning crime novel."—*LJ* Starred Review. Highly recommended by Patrick too.

✉ Penrose, Andrea. [The Diamond of London](#) (Kensington \$16.95). Any reader of Georgette Heyer already knows the name Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839). Now, in her new historical novel, Penrose digs deep into the life of the British aristocrat, antiquarian, and adventurer who defied all conventional strictures of what a woman could and couldn't do during the Regency era. "Real-life Regency adventuress Lady Hester Stanhope may very well have been the prototype for every historical heroine who despises rules, rides astride, falls in love as she pleases, and courts adventure in ballrooms and battlefields alike—and Andrea Penrose brings her to glittering life.... Hester bucks convention at every turn, rejecting marriage to become her Prime Minister uncle's political hostess and take her place on the world stage, but war and heartbreak will force her to ask what future she really wants."—Kate Quinn. It turns out what she wanted to become an archaeologist and pioneer of Western travel to the Middle East. Leaving England for good in 1810, she eventually adopted Ottoman dress, took a lover, and settled in Lebanon. She was the first English woman to enter the Great Pyramid and to visit Palmyra before she died of natural causes, essentially bankrupt. It wasn't all glamour and adventure—a single woman had few resources, especially financial. **Our January Historical Fiction Paperback.**

Quartey, Kwei. [Last Seen in Lapaz](#) (\$16.95). Emma Djan, of the Sowah Private Investigators Agency in the Ghanaian capital of Accra, goes looking for a missing girl and finds a whole lot more. PI Emma is charged with finding a missing young Nigerian woman, Ngozi, whose family suspects she has eloped with her older boyfriend Femi. Tracking down Ngozi and Femi drags Emma into a world of prostitution and sex trafficking. Femi turns out to be a con artist who convinces victims that they are being smuggled into Germany or Italy to begin new lives while in reality selling them in a trafficking network. It comes to light that Femi may also be swindling his partners and has enemies who would not hesitate to torture and murder to keep their money flowing. As Emma goes undercover to get to the truth, she puts herself directly in the path of Femi's enemies. An excellent book taking you across West Africa and interesting to read with Nigerian Femi Kayode's work.

Santlofer, Jonathan. [The Last Mona Lisa](#) (\$16.99). What might have happened to the Mona Lisa when it was stolen from the Louvre in 1911 and stayed missing for two years? Art historian Luke Perrone has been obsessed with the history of the Mona Lisa ever since learning that his great-grandfather Vincenzo Peruggia was the man who stole it from the Louvre. When he's contacted by an Italian professor who claims to know the location of Vincenzo's journal, Luke immediately drops everything and flies to Florence. There, he becomes drawn into two mysteries: one from the past (why did Peruggia steal the painting?) and one from the present (why has everyone who's recently encountered the journal died?). As he unravels the story of the first, he becomes more deeply embroiled in the second and begins to fear for his own safety. "Suspenseful, lush with Florence's glorious art and architecture, sexy, and emotionally complex, Santlofer's multifaceted tale of how a passion for art can turn criminal contrasts the genuine with the fake and asks if beauty and love can truly be transcendent." —*Booklist* Starred Review for 2021 Crime Book of the Month. Santlofer joins us January 22 with a look at a lost Van Gogh and WWII predations on art.

Scottoline, Lisa. [Loyalty](#) (\$19). "Scottoline brings nineteenth-century Sicily alive in this historical thriller...Every scene is a full sensory experience, as Scottoline weaves lemon-scented breezes, the ocean's sounds, and sun-baked piazza stones into a timeless, tragedy-strewn story of love, power, and redemption. History fans will appreciate the novel's well-researched foundation, especially concerning the origins of the Sicilian Mafia and early mental-health institutions." —*Booklist* on the novel of Lisa's heart. She joins us March 27 with a new mystery and we will talk about his as well.

Shroff, Parini. [The Bandit Queens](#) (\$18). A young Indian woman finds the false rumors that she killed her husband surprisingly useful—until other women in the village start asking for her help getting rid of their own husbands—in this razor-sharp debut. "A rebuke of misogynistic violence and a rollicking romp through an erstwhile crime spree, *The Bandit Queens* is incisive, yet funny and sweet in its sharpness. This tongue-in-cheek celebration of women's solidarity is not to be missed."

Small, Anna. [Bird Life](#) (Scribe \$18) is, as the author says, "a retelling of *The Magic Flute* set in contemporary Tokyo. It's about grief, madness, friendship, and the redemptive power of doughnuts."

Willingham, Stacy. [All the Dangerous Things](#) (\$18). Willingham quickly became a star with her debut [A Flicker in the Dark](#) (\$17.99). Now here she pens a new standalone. Unable to sleep but for the occasional quick nap after her toddler was taken from his crib a year previously, Isabelle Drake is willing to do anything to discover what happened to him—including being interviewed by a true-crime podcaster. But the way he probes into Isabelle's past is making her nervous.

OUR JANUARY SMALL PAPERBACK PICKS

Baldacci, David. [Dream Town](#) (\$10.99). Aloysius Archer #3. World War II veteran and private investigator Aloysius Archer becomes enmeshed in a lethal, extended web of murder and deceit in 1953 Los Angeles.

✦ Beaton, M C. [Death of a Traitor](#) (\$8.99). Hamish Macbeth #35. When the nosiest neighbor in Lochdubh is seen lugging a heavy suitcase to the bus stop, town residents are pleased, until they discover she's gone missing.

Carson, Scott. [Where They Wait](#) (\$10.99). Out-of-work war correspondent Nick Bishop takes a job writing a profile for a new mindfulness app called Clarity, which induces nightmares that begin to permeate his waking life and leads him to the discovery that no one with Clarity has any interest in his article—only in him.

Davis, Krista. [The Dog across the Lake](#) (Penguin \$9.99). Paws and Claws #9. Holly Miller arrives at her cousin Josh's campsite to return his wayward pooch only to discover he is nowhere to be found and a guest of the Sugar Maple Inn is dead in his tent, prompting her and her Jack Russell Terrier, Trixie, to sniff out a sneaky killer.

Rose, Karen. [Beneath Dark Waters](#) (\$9.99). New Orleans #2. Public prosecutor J.P. "Kaj" Cardozo has only lived in New Orleans for six months, and he's already working on a high-profile celebrity sexual assault case that's made headlines all over the country. But when his son becomes the target of a kidnapping attempt as a threat to Kaj, he is desperate to keep him safe and turns to a private investigative firm famous for their protection services.

Shelton, Paige. [Fateful Words](#) (\$8.99). Scottish Bookshop #8. After leading a literary tour around Edinburgh, bookseller Delaney Nichols investigates after a local inn manager is killed and a tour group member disappears.

JANUARY SMALL PAPERBACKS

Deaver, Jeffery. [The Empty Chair](#) (\$10.99). Reissue. Lincoln Rhyme #3. When the North Carolina police ask wheelchair-bound criminologist Lincoln Rhyme to help out with two local kidnapping cases, he has no idea that the kidnapper will come between him and everything he holds dear, especially his protégée and love, Amelia Sachs.

Evanovich, Janet. [Going Rogue: Rise and Shine Twenty Nine](#) (\$10.99). Plum #29. After tracking down fugitive Oswald Wednesday with a fellow apprehension agent, Stephanie Plum faces a new obstacle as she tries to bring in her latest bounty.

Gudenkauf, Heather. [Little Mercies](#) (\$9.99). Reissue. When her life unexpectedly collides with ten-year-old Jenny Briard, a homeless girl struggling to survive on her own, veteran social

worker and mother Ellen Moore discovers that one small mistake can have life-altering consequences.

Hannah, Darcie. [Murder at the Blarney Bash](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Beacon Bakeshop #5. While baking up a storm for the grand opening of the Irish import gift shop owned by her boyfriend's eccentric uncle, Finnigan O'Connor, Lindsey Bakewell needs the luck of the Irish when Finn is arrested for bludgeoning a man dressed as a leprechaun.

Hendricks, T R. [The Instructor](#) (\$9.99). Derek Harrington #1. A retired Marine Force Recon and SERE instructor barely scraping by as a wilderness survival trainer, Derek Harrington, taking on a job that seems too good to be true, finds himself embroiled with a fringe group led by charismatic man who could be the leader of a domestic terrorist cell.

King, Stephen. [The Talisman](#) (\$11.99). Reissue. Twelve-year-old Jack Sawyer braves the mysterious dangers of the Territories, a surreal parallel world, in his quest—across the United States—for the Talisman, the only hope for his dying mother and for his own survival.

Mann, Michael/Meg Gardiner. [Heat 2](#) (\$9.99). One day after the end of *Heat*, Chris Shiherlis (Val Kilmer) is holed up in Koreatown, wounded, half delirious, and desperately trying to escape LA. Hunting him is LAPD detective Vincent Hanna (Al Pacino). Hours earlier, Hanna killed Shiherlis's brother in arms Neil McCauley (Robert De Niro) in a gunfight under the strobe lights at the foot of an LAX runway. Now Hanna's determined to capture or kill Shiherlis, the last survivor of McCauley's crew, before he ghosts out of the city.

Murphy, Catie. [Death by Irish Whiskey](#) (Kensington \$8.99). Dublin Driver #5. When rivalries and revelries during the competition for the best whiskey in Ireland lead to a double murder, Dublin limo driver Megan Malone, with her relationship on the rocks, takes a shot at solving the case.

✂ Paris, B A. [The Prisoner](#) (\$9.99). When she is kidnapped, Amelie, a billionaire's wife, wonders why she has been taken, who her mysterious captors are and why she feels safer here, imprisoned, than with her husband.

Patterson, James. [Escape](#) (\$10.99). In this companion to *The Black Book*, Detective Billy Harney chases down a billionaire crime boss and a prison escape artist while a young girl's life hangs in the balance.

Unger, Lisa. [Crazy Love You](#) (\$10.99). Reissue. Enjoying a successful career at the side of a destructive friend who helped him escape bullies in childhood, Ian fears for his life when his friend becomes irrationally angry about Ian's new relationship.