

BOOKNEWS from

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS

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

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.

Holiday Store Hours

M-F 10 AM-7 PM Sat 10 AM-6 PM Sun 12-5 PM

Closed at 5 PM December 24 and 31

Closed all day December 25 and January 1

Our Top Gift Suggestion: [The Poisoned Pen Gift Card](#). Can be for any amount or for a specific book or a journal or PP merchandise, and can be emailed or picked up at the store. For last minute shoppers, this is the way to go.

Please remember that Monday December 16 is likely the last safe shipping day via USPS or UPS within the US. Alaska and Hawaii will take longer so think December 5. International orders probably December 5.

That also means we will run out of time to order additional stock so again, please order early from this Booknews, the [November Booknews](#), and our [Gift Catalogue](#). Thank you

TUESDAY DECEMBER 3 6:30 PM Live Event

Brett Battles discusses [Stuart Woods' Golden Hour](#) (Putnam \$30)

Teddy Fay ex CIA with a boost from Stone Barrington

Brian Andrews & Jeff Wilson discuss [Tom Clancy Defense Protocol](#) (Putnam \$32)

Jack Ryan, Sr.

MP Woodward signs [Tom Clancy Shadow State](#) (Putnam \$32)

Jack Ryan, Jr.

And our host **Don Bentley** signs [Vince Flynn Capture or Kill](#)

(Atria \$29.99)

Mitch Rapp

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 4 7:00 PM Live Event

James Sallis discusses [Bright Segments: The Complete Short Fiction](#) (Soho \$35)

THURSDAY DECEMBER 5 7:00 PM Live Event

Dr. Ian K. Smith discusses [Eagle Rock](#) (Amistad \$24)

Chicago private eye Ashe Cayne

SATURDAY DECEMBER 7 2:00 PM Live Event

Jennifer Dornbush discusses [Frozen Lives](#) (Blackstone \$17.99)

The Coroner's Daughter Mysteries

Paige Shelton discusses [Perfect Storm](#) (St Martins \$28)

Wild Alaska series

SUNDAY DECEMBER 8 2:00 PM Live Ticketed Event

Sara Cate discusses [Keep Me](#) (Sourcebooks \$17.99)

Contemporary Romance

Tickets: \$20 includes one copy of the book

MONDAY DECEMBER 9 6:00 PM Virtual Event

Candace Robb discusses [A Snake in the Barley](#) (Severn House \$29.99)

A new Owen Archer investigation in 1377 York

Signed books available and check out the first 14 in series in unsigned paperbacks as linked in Signed Books

TUESDAY DECEMBER 10 6:00 PM Ticketed Live Event

Sarah Chapelle discusses [Taylor Swift Style](#) (St Martins \$35)

Fashion through the Eras

Location: The Poisoned Pen

Tickets: \$40 includes one copy of the book

THURSDAY DECEMBER 12 7:00 PM Live Event

Marcia Clark discusses [Trial by Ambush](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$28.99)

True Crime

SATURDAY DECEMBER 14 Live & Virtual Event

Croak and Dagger Discussion Club Christmas Party

The Club discusses Hannah Dennison's [A Killer Christmas at Honeychurch Hall](#) (\$17.99)

An English country house murder

THURSDAY DECEMBER 19 7:00 PM Live Event

Hardboiled Crime Club discusses Charles Williams' [Nothing in Her Way](#) (Stark House \$19.95)

FRIDAY DECEMBER 20 7:00 PM Live & Virtual Event

SciFi Friday Discussion Club discusses Jasper Fforde's [The Eyre Affair](#) (\$18)

A classic satirical mystery introducing Thursday Next

TUESDAY DECEMBER 24 All day and night at your home
Enjoy *Jólabókaflóð*. This “flood of books” is an Icelandic tradition that features gifting books on December 24, and settling in to read those books with a cup of hot chocolate! Treat yourself to this

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 25
Merry Christmas We are closed

SATURDAY DECEMBER 28 11:00 AM Live Event
The Cookbook Club discusses Anna Jones’ [Easy Wins](#) (Harper \$35)
Bring a recipe or holiday leftovers to share

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 1
Happy New Year. We are closed

OUR DECEMBER BOOK SUBSCRIPTION CLUB PICKS

We select a book and charge it to you. Free shipping to US Customers.

It’s a Book in a Box treat each month. We do ask that you sign up for a minimum of 3 months.

Email Pat@poisonedpen.com to join

British Crime Club One Unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Fowler, Deborah. [A St. Ives Christmas Mystery](#)

Cozy Crimes Club One Unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Prose, Nita. [The Mistletoe Mystery](#)

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

Smith, Ian K. [Eagle Rock](#)

First Mystery Club One Signed First Printing per month

Roy, Nayantara. [The Magnificent Ruins](#)

Hardboiled/Noir Club One Signed First Printing per month

Meyer, Deon. [Leo](#)

Historical Fiction Club One First Printing per month
King, Crystal. [In the Garden of Monsters](#) (Mira \$30)

Historical Fiction Paperback Club One Unsigned paperback per month

Farrell, Kathleen. [Mistletoe Malice](#)

Notable New Fiction One Signed First Printing per month

Roy, Nayantara. [The Magnificent Ruins](#) (members of the First Mystery Club will get an alternate selection: King, Crystal. [In the Garden of Monsters](#) (Mira \$30)

Romance and Relationships One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Waters, Martha. [Christmas Is All Around](#)

GIVE SOMEONE THE GIFT OF A BOOK IN A BOX

Sign up yourself or someone on your list for one of our monthly Book Subscription Clubs.

We select a book and charge it to you. Free shipping to US Customers

Note that from January forward the First Mystery selection for each month will only be available to members of the First Mystery Club.

To check out the clubs please go to our [Subscription Clubs Page](#)

Or consider our Book of the Month Club tailored to individual taste. Book of the Month is ideal for the reader of nonfiction, memoirs, sci-fi, romance(tasy), etc. It does not come with free shipping. Paperback selections welcome.

For information on our Book of the Month Club or to sign up please email Pat@poisonedpen.com

SIGNED BOOKS

Andrews, Brian/Jeff Wilson. [Tom Clancy Defense Protocol](#) (Putnam \$32). Lower on violence than many military thrillers, very high on a looming threat. Chinese president Li Jian Jun plans a sneak attack on Taiwan tapping the Jack Ryan administration to stop him without going to war. Li announces a naval exercise, but his real plan is Operation Sea Serpent, the lightning reunification of Taiwan. His minister of defense, Admiral Qin Hāiyū, thinks the idea is crazy because a great number of people would die, but he can’t safely say so. Li has already had one of his ministers executed. But Qin wants to stop the war before it begins. Perhaps he can get word to the Americans so they can cut off the mad scheme? A Western asset nicknamed the Spider helps facilitate his attempt to leave China, and authorities in Beijing don’t know if he’s been kidnapped or has defected, i.e. patriot or traitor? Can the US extract Qin, defy a People’s Republic blockade, and avoid a blood showdown? Enjoy Series regulars like John Clark and Ding Chavez and new, a big part for Katie Ryan, a lieutenant commander with the Office of Naval Intelligence who’s deployed to Taiwan. Maybe the Jack

Ryan, Jr. series will now have to account for his sister Katie?

Andrews and Wilson are also the authors of the [Sons of Valor Series](#) and we’ll have a few on hand.

Battles, Brett. [Stuart Woods Golden Hour](#) (Putnam \$ \$30). I like Teddy Fay, and here he’s the lead character here in a spy drama where Stone Barrington lends a hand. In fact the whole Barrington clan are players as Teddy accepts his recall by the CIA. Teddy, who faked his own death to exit the spy game years ago, is tasked with hunting whomever is killing off agents. His cover? Embarking on a European press tour of Peter Barrington’s hot new movie *Storm’s Eye*. From Venice and Budapest to their last stop at a film festival in Berlin, Teddy must dodge excited fans, enamored women, and a few too many assassins intent on revenge upon his former colleagues in a mission called Golden Hour.

Carlisle, Kate. [The Knife Before Christmas](#) (Berkley \$28). Christmas has come to Lighthouse Cove, but business hasn’t slowed down for Shannon Hammer. She’s been contracted to

renovate a local hotel owned by the Garrisons, a family that's so devoted to the holidays they serve a seven-course dinner every night from Thanksgiving through Christmas. Last year's festivities featured a train that transported guests around the breathtaking Cliffside property. This year, Shannon and her crew have been commissioned to build a Victorian-style carnival midway with games and prizes galore. Everyone in town loves the hotel's spirit, except the Garrisons' children and their spouses, who are hum-bugged by the money being wasted on holiday cheer while their inheritance goes up the chimney. Then things turn nasty when a mischief-maker close to the family is found dead.

Carr, Jack. Red [Sky Mourning Special Shot Through Edition](#) (Atria \$30). This edition featuring a bullet hole through the title page as shot by Jack was originally destined for bookstores not on his tour last June. But now we have the entire balance of these Signed and Shot Through First printings for you, a unique gift for the Carr fan. We also have all [6 Terminal List thrillers](#) signed by Jack in a single set for you at \$180 with free shipping to the US. Or you can order individual Signed titles at regular price with shipping.

Cate, Sarah. [Keep Me](#) (Sourcebooks \$17.99). Ok, this is an "extra spicy romance", publishing code for watch for a lot of hot sex. *PW* says the story "pairs a feisty American with a reclusive Scottish billionaire in the red-hot enemies-to-lovers romance that opens her Sinful Manor series. Sylvie Devereaux travels to Scotland with her boyfriend, Aaron, to connect with his family's roots. This mission leads her to break into his family's ancestral home—where she's caught and gets into a blistering argument with the new owner, Killian Barclay, who uses the house to host lavish BDSM parties. Upon returning home to New York City, Sylvie's life goes up in flames: she's out of money and catches Aaron having sex with her best friend. Relief comes when Killian's sister Anna calls her with an unusual job offer: marry and spy on Killian as part of a scheme to get Barclay manor into the hands of his siblings instead. If the house is transferred out of Killian's ownership by the end of the year, Sylvie will receive \$10 million. So...."

Library Reads adds: "Killian is a brute who let his past dictate his life until he met Sylvie. She's entitled and has a foul mouth according to Killian, but she is the only woman he'd consider entering into a fake marriage with. Sylvie agrees, knowing that \$10 million await at the finish line. What neither of them expected was to actually fall in love."

Chapelle, Sarah. [Taylor Swift Style](#) (St Martins \$35). Subtitled Fashion through the Eras. Called a Best Book of 2024 and an excellent gift idea, "*Taylor Swift Style* brilliantly chronicles, critiques, and contextualizes an icon's clothing evolution, from a teenager who found happiness in a little black dress to a red-lipped classic woman dressing for revenge. Not unlike Taylor Swift's iconic bridges, Sarah Chapelle bridges her knowledge of the Swiftie fandom with her love for fashion history, offering readers a trip down memory lane that is as cerebral as it is celebratory. Taylor's style may be the centerpiece, but Chapelle's understanding of and enthusiasm for the subject matter shines through in her writing style. Casual fans and serious Swifties alike will delight in the beautiful photos, lyrical language, and era-by-era breakdowns that will allow readers to see the sartorial highlights, the parties, the ball gowns in a way they never have

before." – Kate Kennedy. Secure your ticket to an amazing evening December 10.

Clark, Marcia. [Trial by Ambush](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$28.99). This masterful True Crime by former prosecutor Clark who is now in appellate work argues for the defense, and is well done. For fans of TV's *The Lincoln Lawyer*, Claire highlights the issue of prosecutorial misconduct of Season 3. Here's a Starred Review to go with mine:

"Clark brings new insights to a sensational killing from the 1950s in this standout true crime narrative. In 1953, Mabel Monahan, a 64-year-old widow living alone in Burbank, Calif., died during a home invasion. A confidential tip pointed police to career criminal Baxter Shorter, who admitted to plotting the burglary and threw Barbara Graham, the girlfriend of another violent criminal, under the bus for Monahan's killing. Graham, who allegedly pistol-whipped Monahan during the break-in, quickly became a tabloid fixture, thanks to her portrayal as a "vicious and cold-blooded, albeit beautiful, murderer." She was convicted of the crime and executed in 1955 at San Quentin; the saga inspired the 1958 film *I Want to Live!*. Clark, however, convincingly argues that Graham faced an unfair trial. She draws on courtroom transcripts and previously withheld testimony to reveal that the prosecution tampered with key evidence and sought to entrap Graham while she was in jail. Impressive research, combined with breakneck pacing and a trenchant critique of the media circus surrounding Graham's arrest, bring the verdict down decisively in Clark's favor."

REPEAT REVIEW Dean, Will. [Ice Town](#) (Hodder UK \$42). Just in from London, a new book in the European bestselling Tuva Moodyson Scandi Noir series with its deaf, bisexual reporter protagonist. She's investigated earlier crimes. And now a deaf teenager goes missing in Esseberg. Mountain rescue are launching a search party but conditions hinder their efforts. The tunnel is being kept open all night as an exception. When Tuva reads this news alert she knows she must join the search. If this teenager is found, she will be able to communicate with him in a way no one else can. Esseberg lies on the other side of a mountain tunnel: there is only one way in and one way out. When the tunnel closes at night, the residents are left to fend for themselves. And as more people go missing, it becomes clear that there is a killer among them.... This is a chilling winter read on the run up to the holidays, a counter to an overabundance of cheer.

Dornbush, Jennifer Graese. [Frozen Lives](#) (Blackstone \$17.99). Chicago surgeon Emily Hartford has never quite shaken off the dust of her hometown in Michigan. She may be a professional success and have a princely boyfriend in the Windy City, but she can't seem to let go of being "the coroner's daughter" from Freeport. Once again, she finds herself pulled back to her hometown when Jeremiah—the eleven-year-old son of her best friend, Jo—goes missing on the frigid shores of Lake Michigan. To everyone's relief, Jeremiah turns up days later, alive and unharmed. But tensions remain high, and suspicions of every sort continue to grow. Jeremiah's account of his abduction doesn't add up, and Emily worries about Jo's unraveling marriage. Jeremiah's recovery, it turns out, is not the end of their terrifying tale. It's just the beginning of the havoc wreaked by a wolf in sheep's clothing who leaves a trail of rack and ruin, heedless of the damage in his wake ... and the bodies he leaves behind.

REPEAT REVIEW: Evanovich, Janet. [Now or Never](#) (Atria \$29.99). Plum #31. Stephanie said yes to Morelli. She said yes to Ranger. Now she has two fiancés and no idea what to do about it. While Stephanie stalls for time, she buries herself in her work as a bounty hunter, tracking down an unusually varied assortment of fugitives from justice. There's Eugene Fleck, a seemingly sweet online influencer who might also be YouTube star Robin Hoodie, masked hero to the homeless, who hijacks delivery trucks and distributes their contents to the needy. She's also on the trail of Bruno Jug, a wealthy and connected man in the wholesale produce business who is rumored to traffic young girls alongside lettuce and tomatoes. Most terrifying of all is Zoran—a laundromat manager by day and self-proclaimed vampire by night with a taste for the blood of pretty girls. When he shows up on Stephanie's doorstep, it's not for the meatloaf dinner. With timely assists from her stalwart supporters Lula, Connie, and Grandma Mazur, Stephanie works to reel everyone in...or out.

REPEAT RAVE: Idov, Michael. [The Collaborators](#) (Scribner \$29.99). Scribner is the home to many a fine spy novelist like Joseph Kanon or the late, much missed Jason Matthews. And now this debut described as "*Slow Horses* [Mick Herron] meets *Red Sparrow* [Matthews] in this sharp, freshly conceived, thoroughly entertaining spy thriller featuring a brilliant young intelligence officer and a troubled heiress who stumble into a global conspiracy that pits present-day Russia against the CIA." In his novel, Idov delivers a gut-punch answer to the biggest geopolitical question of our time: how, exactly, did post-Soviet Russia turn down the wrong path? Don't miss out on a Signed First Printing.

King, Crystal. [In the Garden of Monsters](#) (Mira \$30) pulls you into a Gothic novel set in Italy's real and strange Sacro Bosco. "A luscious and sensual story about passion and power and food and art with Salvador Dali wrapped in classical mythology," says Hank Phillippi Ryan, the mythology being the tale of Hades and Persephone. I admit I dove into this our **December Historical Fiction Book of the Month** in part because I was immersed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' splendid Dali show at the time I read it. Also because King is lauded for her passion for food with history as in her [The Chef's Secret](#) (\$21.99) which I recommend too.

Here's one rave review: 1948. "Amnesiac Julia Lombardi makes a living as an artist model while studying to be a painter. When an opportunity to sit for Salvador Dalí arises, Julia jumps at it, eager to witness a master at work. The gig takes her to Palazzo Orsini in Bomarzo, where the mysterious Ignazio hosts her and the dismissive, misogynistic Dalí. Julia is simultaneously drawn to and repelled by Ignazio, and he is equally obsessed with her. As painting sessions begin in the Sacro Bosco, Julia experiences strange things: the garden's many monster statues appear to move, there's a green glow in the woods at night, and visions of ghosts haunt her. All the while, Dalí refers to her as Proserpina, the subject she's portraying in his painting, and tempts her with pomegranate seeds. While the core of the myth remains the same, King makes the familiar tale feel fresh with her unusual and enthralling setting, which eerily blurs the real and the surreal. This is an exciting reinterpretation."

REPEAT RAVE: List, David. [What Are the Odds?](#) (Blackstone \$26.99). This debut caught my fancy and Patrick's and the author has now kindly signed copies for us. "In his fiction debut, screenwriter List's skill set is on display from the opening scene of his fiction debut: Tough-as-nails retired NYPD detective

Raymond Dawson is flummoxed and frustrated to find himself "bloodied, bound, and buck-naked" in the middle of nowhere, while next to him sits owlish ex-Amco Oil executive Wilbur Bailey, a fellow captive who watches a scorpion crawl over his shoe. The story rolls back from this vivid tableau to the road these two protagonists followed to get there. Wilbur's dealings with shady Russian Mika Salko have landed him in the crosshairs of dogged IRS agent Phil Dancourt. Ray, a divorced ex-marine who took early retirement from the NYPD after being wounded on the job a handful of times, feels professionally adrift until he finds a lifeline in alluring Stephanie Morego. Wilbur, devastated by a cancer diagnosis and feeling heat from the law, goes on the run. A casual meeting between Wilbur, Ray, and Stephanie in an elevator begins a series of mishaps that eventually put Wilbur and Ray on a perilous path littered with a gallery of oddballs, with Phil in dogged pursuit as interpolated flashbacks fill in their backstories. List's title aptly foreshadows the erratic plot "full of sharp character portraits and droll details" that make up an entertaining, possibly outlandish, thriller.

REPEAT REVIEW: Meyer, Deon. [Leo](#) (Hodder \$44). Also just in from London, a new thriller by the wonderful South African writer Meyer, an author much admired by Michael Connelly and Patrick. He writes mainly in Afrikaans and is translated. I have visited Stellenbosch with its vineyards and amazing wine. But Meyers' two leads are not on the tourist map.

True, Detectives Benny Griessel and Vaughn Cupido remain on duty in beautiful Stellenbosch, but run-of-the-mill police work in a leafy university town famed for its vineyards is a far cry from their previous life in Cape Town fighting crime at the highest level. For now, Benny has more pressing things to worry about: it's the countdown to his wedding day on 12 June. When a student is found dead on a mountain trail, and the key suspect, a local businessman, is found murdered in what looks like a professional hit delivering a message—suffocated by fast-action filler foam sprayed down his throat—Griessel and Cupido both know this the work of professionals. Benny also knows he needs a cool head which is not his strength...

Murray, James S. [You Better Watch Out](#) (St Martins \$28). The Impractical Joker asks here, is Christmas really the best time of year? Forty-eight hours until December 25, Jessica Kane wakes up with blurred vision, ears ringing, and in excruciating pain. A gash in her head and blood running down her face, the last thing she remembers is going for a run and something or someone hitting her in the head. It doesn't take her long to realize she is trapped in an unknown, deserted town with five other strangers who share similar stories of being attacked and stranded there. Unsure why and how they got there, she knows one thing for certain, she has to find a way out. The fenced-in town is the killer's very own playground and there's nowhere left to hide.... Murr drops by to sign on December 6 or 7 so we recommend you order NOW as we could easily sell out fast.

REPEAT RAVE: Qiu, Xiaolong. [Conspiracies of the Empire](#) (Severn \$29.99). A Judge Dee Mystery set in China's Tang Dynasty. Xiaolong's novels, the first of which won the 2003 Anthony Award, remain among my favorite mysteries whether in Shanghai with Inspector Chen, a poet, or historical China, with Judge Dee. One thing to love in this novel is all the poetry, much from the period, some from Judge Dee himself, which Xiaolong, a noted poet, has translated and included at the end of the novel.

“Qiu’s vivid second historical mystery featuring Judge Dee Renjie after [The Shadow of the Empire](#) (\$17.95) plunges the seventh-century Tang Dynasty sleuth into a politically fraught search for a missing poet. Empress Wu has risen to power from her humble beginnings as “palace female talent” for the late Emperor Taizhong, then concubine to his son, Gaozhong. Wu has just squashed an uprising inspired by poet Luo Binwang, when news arrives that Luo has gone missing. Though many believe Luo died in the rebellion, Wu sends Dee—one of her ministers—to track him down. Dee’s inquiry gets complicated after one of his key witnesses is found murdered, causing him to question whether Wu is the virtuous ruler he’s always believed her to be. Qiu effortlessly constructs a dense, multilayered suspense plot, while leaving plenty of space for evocative period detail and fascinating historical asides. It’s another winner from Qiu.”

* Robb, Candace. [A Snake in the Barley](#) (Seymour House \$29.99). 1377 York is remote from London and the riots during which the Duke of Lancaster’s Savoy Palace was attacked. Lancaster was effectively regent during the last months of King Edward III’s reign. The commons disliked him. The feeling was mutual. So that’s the political background while in York Owen and Lucie Archer’s neighbor Tom Merchet, who with his wife Bess runs the neighboring York Tavern, is missing. This sets off several sinister events including Tom’s visits to a woman who keeps deplorable company and who may play a role in his disappearance. Is Tom missing? Or is he dead?

You can order all 14 of the previous [Owen Archer Mysteries](#) in paperback. I recommend it and reading them in order. I’m a longtime fan of this well researched series, one of the few remaining of the formerly many medieval mysteries by such as Ellis Peters, Michael Jecks, Paul Doherty (he too is still writing)....

Speaking of the late and truly great Ellis Peters, Brother Cadfaels are hard to find but we can source [A Rare Benedictine](#) (\$25), a Christmas tale of robbery and attempted murder in Shrewsbury, which I recommend. And, joy, you can start his career in his first investigation, [A Morbid Taste for Bones](#) (\$14.95), which takes him from Shropshire into Wales. Continue with [One Corpse Too Many](#) (\$14.99), the second. After that they are difficult to find.

Rose, Jeneva. [The Perfect Marriage Collector’s Edition](#) (Blackstone \$32.99—the original was a paperback from 2020). Sarah Morgan is a successful and powerful defense attorney in Washington D.C. As a named partner at her firm, life is going exactly how she planned. The same cannot be said for her husband, Adam. He’s a struggling writer who has had little success in his career and he tires of his and Sarah’s relationship as she is constantly working. Out in the secluded woods, at the couple’s lake house, Adam engages in a passionate affair with Kelly Summers. But one morning everything changes. Kelly is found brutally stabbed to death and now, Sarah must take on her hardest case yet, defending her own husband, a man accused of murdering his mistress.

Roy, Nayantara. [The Magnificent Ruins](#) (Algonquin \$29). This debut, our **December First Mystery Subscription Club Book of the Month and Notable First Pick for those who don’t also belong to the FMC**, is an interesting choice taking you from the world of NY publishing and corporate takeover to an aged,

sprawling family mansion in Kolkata where family members have to rub along amidst its five floors and are shocked to discover that its recently deceased patriarch has left the home to his Brooklyn-based granddaughter. She’s shocked too. So Lila De, fiction editor at a career crossroads, takes her surprise inheritance that includes managing the estate fund that supports the household, and reunites with her estranged family. “Roy puts heritage at the book’s center — not only the brick and mortar of the Kolkata mansion that binds the family, but also the specter of inherited trauma,” says the *NY Times Book Review*. There is, eventually, a murder.

Per the *Kirkus Review*, “29-year-old Lila is understandably saddened to hear of her grandfather’s death in India, the country she left at age 16. But she’s also shocked to learn she has inherited his enormous, historic, decaying mansion, still inhabited by generations of the Lahiri family, including her volatile, sometimes toxic mother, Maya, who divorced Lila’s father when she was an infant.... Back in India, Lila is quickly swallowed up by family, responsibility, and memories.”

“Roy’s roomy novel draws us deep into the way family history is inscribed on buildings. She proves herself a daring architect, taking full advantage of this sprawling plot to explore a family shaken to its foundation... I’m smitten... Eight thousand miles doesn’t feel so far away when we’re traveling with a writer this inviting.”—Ron Charles, *Washington Post*

Sallis, James. [Bright Segments: The Complete Short Fiction](#) (Soho \$35). James Sallis moves with ease among genres and modes: novels, stories, poetry, criticism, musicology, biography, translation. Best known perhaps as a crime writer—author of *Drive* and the six Lew Griffin novels along with others—his first acclaim came in the 1960s from groundbreaking short stories in science fiction publications like Michael Moorcock’s *New Worlds*, for which he served for a time as editor, and Damon Knight’s *Orbit* anthologies. Published over the six decades of Sallis’ storied career, the complete collection in this handsome doorstop size volume contains 154 stories, 12 of which are exclusive to this volume.

Shelton, Paige. [Perfect Storm](#) (St Martins \$28). Shelton winds up her Wild Alaska series by bringing Beth Rivers, who fled to tiny Benedict to hide from an abusive boyfriend called Travis who kidnapped her before she escaped, forced to face her past. She is snookered into peril when she and current love Tex head out to camp in the woods only to go by the Blue Mine community where they end up bringing the widow of a recently murdered man to Benedict Police Chief Gril. But the woman vanishes and then....

Smith, Ian K. [Eagle Rock](#) (Harper \$24). I enjoy this series set in contemporary Chicago that is filled with a love of the city and vibrant descriptions as well as history, plus sports figures and lots of golf (the author, a #1 bestselling physician, is addicted to the game which explains why he’s visiting us here in December), and lots of action. Ashe Cayne, once with the Chicago PD, is a private investigator working as he likes from a prominent Black family with lots of connections. His father is a distinguished psychiatrist. So when billionaire developer Elliott Kantor, age 77, a widower and now something of a player, is found dead in a hidden residence in bizarre circumstances, Kantor’s son Simon hires Ashe.

I did not make this our **December Crime Subscription Club Book** for the plot although there's plenty of action. In fact I think the resolution is weak. But I love it for Smith's affection for and knowledge of a city too few authors write about, for the fun despite the ugly crimes, and because I have enjoyed his first three cases and want you to get to know Ashe Cayne in [The Unspoken](#) (\$15.95); [Wolf Point](#) (\$15.95); and [The Overnights](#) (\$17.95). I have not ordered his #1 Bestselling nonfiction regarding diet and health but you can request copies if you wish.

Woodward, M P. [Tom Clancy Shadow State](#) (Putnam \$32). The vibrant economy of the new Vietnam is a shiny lure for Western capital as companies race to uncover ideal opportunities. Hendley Associates has sent their best analyst, Jack Ryan, Jr., to mine for investment gold. And he may have found some in a rare earth mining company—GeoTech. But a trip with a Hendley colleague to the Highlands to observe the company's operations takes a treacherous turn when their helicopter is shot down. The Chinese will ruthlessly keep Jack from finding the truth about what exactly is being processed at the isolated factory.... We have supported the Ryan universe from the days when Grant Sutherland and Mark Greaney stepped in, and now look forward to this new generation of authors writing Jack Ryan, Sr., and Jr.

GIFT IDEAS

Our Top Gift Suggestion: [The Poisoned Pen Gift Card](#). Can be for any amount or for a specific book or a journal or PP merchandise, and can be emailed or picked up at the store. For last minute shoppers, this is the way to go.

[Bonfire](#) You can order a variety of merchandise like tees, sweatshirts, mugs, etc in the Poisoned Pen store on It's an on-line vendor and there is a donation option as well as a small revenue sharing one that benefits the bookstore. My guess is time to do so to get holiday delivery is very short.

We also have [PP Logo merchandise](#) for you: Mugs, Pens, Caps, Tees, etc.

The most popular is our [Poisoned Pen Book Bag](#) aka Canvas Tote. It's excellent for carrying your shopping or you can use it to package up gift books.

For free, here's a list of "[The 100 Best Books of the 21st Century](#)" as compiled by the *NY Times Book Review* from surveying "hundreds of literary luminaries." So one gift idea might be to print out the list and include it in one of the recommended books. Or buy a [journal](#) as shown in this partial list to go with the list so your recipient can write down reviews of their own of the books as they are read.

Here's one journal: the [Bibliophile Readers Journal](#) (\$15.95). Our most popular: [The What I Read Mini Journal](#) (\$9) in rich red, a perfect stocking stuffer.

For practice in writing things down, and for its benefits: Allen, Roland. [The Notebooks](#) (Biblioasis \$19.95). Where did they come from? How did they revolutionize our lives? And how can using a notebook help change the way you think? The physical act of putting pen or pencil to paper not only reinforces memory but is a versatile tool for creative thinking, giving it space. The everyday act of moving a pen across paper, he finds, can have profound consequences.

SHELF WEALTH

Why not add beautifully produced books reasonably priced to your shelves? The stories fall mostly into Romantasy and its subclasses like CottageCore, but it's moving into Historical Fiction and more. For many more examples of Shelf Wealth for you or for gifting, consult our [Gift Catalogue](#). And there are some new volumes—click on the links and most of the order pages will show you how the book looks.

Start with this one:

Holloway, Jane. [Stories of Books and Libraries](#) (Everyman's Library Pocket Classics \$25). This gem, a perfect stocking stuffer, is produced with full-cloth cases with two-color foil stamping, decorative endpapers, silk ribbon markers, European-style half-round spines, and a full-color illustrated jacket.

PUZZLES

Benedict, Alexandra. [The Christmas Murder Game](#) (\$16.99). Twelve clues. Twelve keys. Twelve days of Christmas. But how many will die before Twelfth Night?

Karber, GT. [Murdle Volume 1](#) (\$16) is a collection of 100 murder mystery puzzles helmed by the inscrutable Deductive Logico. Marrying its author's fondness for classic crime to a fiendish intellectual challenge reminiscent of Wordle or Sudoku, Murdle invokes codes, maps, illustrations and more to create the perfect gift for all armchair detectives and fans of whodunits. As do [Murdle Volume 2](#) (\$16), and [Murdle Volume 3](#) (\$18), 100 more puzzles each. This series of brain teasers is so hot it keeps going out of stock so my advice is order it now. Perfect for whiling away a winter night by you armchair detectives. Give someone all three.

Karber, GT. [Murdle Jr.](#) (Little Brown \$12.99). Join four junior detectives—and earn your own Murdle Jr. badge—in this puzzle book packed with illustrations, clues, codes, and a helpful mystery-solving logic grid. Kids can go it alone or it can become a family thing.

Karber, GT. [Murdle: The School of Mystery](#) (St Martins \$18). Here's a new way to test your wits in 50 murder mystery logic puzzles set at the dark and mysterious Deduction College. Can you crack these cases before the final bell?

Meanwhile you can give a set of the original, all 3 award-winning and Poisoned Pen bestselling [Murdle Volumes](#) (\$16 each). We can hardly keep them in stock. These are not only fun but exercise the brain in helpful ways.

Moore, Gareth. [The Murder Mystery Club Puzzle Book](#) (Andrews McNeel \$14.95). Clearly modeled on the success of the hugely bestselling [Murdle series](#) with Detective Logico, here is the first book in the brand-new Murder Mystery Club Puzzle Book series. ***Murder in the Village is all the brain-teasing fun of a classic murder mystery game in a convenient travel-sized paperback with flaps, a handsome production.*** It's one mystery with over 70 clues. Puzzle solving needs:

Deductive logic; Mastermind-style combination and safe cracking; Location tracking; Visual puzzles including spot the difference and hidden pictures; Date, time, and other event ordering tasks.

PLAYING CARDS

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

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

AND SPECIAL BOOKS

My top pick for the perfect book to give a reader:

McMurtry, John, ed. [Literary Journeys](#) (Princeton University Press \$29.95.). My top suggestion for an amazing gift to any reader. It starts with *The Odyssey* and covers over 75 classic works involving journeys depicted by authors like Chaucer, Paul Bowles, Jerome K. Jerome, Steinbeck, Kerouac or Amor Towles, Vilhelm Moberg or Alejo Carpentier, so some 2500 years in span. Books from lots of different countries and cultures. I learned a lot. Not oversized, loaded with color illustrations and little bios and essays that place the cited works in their actual and historical context. Truly this is a winner for any reader!

Comfort Reading

There are many comfort reading books coming from Japan.

My favorite is Aoyama, Michiko. [What You Are Looking For Is in the Library](#) (Hanover Press \$21.99). I love this little book. Set in Japan, it shows in a series of charming vignettes how the perfect book recommendation can change a readers' life. Of course this requires a gifted librarian...

Ishida, Syou. [We'll Prescribe You a Cat](#) (Penguin \$25). Tucked away in an old building at the end of a narrow alley in Kyoto, the Kokoro Clinic for the Soul can only be found by people who are struggling in their lives and genuinely need help. The mysterious clinic offers a unique treatment to those who find their way there: it prescribes cats as medication. Patients are often puzzled by this unconventional prescription, but when they "take" their cat for the recommended duration, they witness profound transformations in their lives, guided by the playful, empathetic, occasionally challenging yet endearing cats.

Kawaguchi, Toshikazu. [Before We Forget Kindness](#) (Hanover Square \$21.95). The fifth entry in the series Before The Coffee Gets Cold takes you to the mysterious café where customers arrive hoping to travel back in time, welcomes four new guests who wish to go back to the past to allow a better future, but who must follow the café's strict rules and come back to the present before their coffee goes cold.

And from Germany:

Henn, Carsten. [The Door to Door Bookstore](#) (Hanover Square \$18.99). Small-town German bookseller Carl Kollhoff delivers his books to special customers in the evening hours after closing time, walking through the picturesque alleys of the city. These people are almost like friends to him, and he is their most important connection to the world. When Kollhoff unexpectedly loses his job, it takes the power of books and a nine-year-old girl to make them all find the courage to rebuild their bonds with each other. A bestselling phenomenon internationally, and called by NPR "An unabashedly sentimental, determinedly uplifting novel about friendships forged through books."

MORE MIXED BAG SUGGESTIONS

Beard, Mary. [Emperor of Rome](#) (\$21.99). In her international bestseller *SPQR*, Mary Beard told the thousand-year story of ancient Rome, from its slightly shabby Iron Age origins to its reign as the undisputed hegemon of the Mediterranean. Now, drawing on more than thirty years of teaching and writing about Roman history, Beard turns to the emperors who ruled the Roman Empire, beginning with Julius Caesar (assassinated 44 BCE) and taking us through the nearly three centuries—and some thirty emperors—that separate him from the boy-king Alexander Severus (assassinated 235 CE). Yet *Emperor of Rome* is not your typical chronological account of Roman rulers, one emperor after another: the mad Caligula, the monster Nero, the philosopher Marcus Aurelius. Instead, Beard asks different, often larger and more probing questions offering a finely nuanced portrayal of sex, class, and politics, *Emperor of Rome* goes directly to the heart of Roman fantasies (and our own) about what it was to be Roman at its richest, most luxurious, most extreme, most powerful, and most deadly. There are lessons here for the moment.

Brotton, Jerry. [Four Points of the Compass](#) (Grove/Atlantic \$27). The Unexpected History of Direction, one central to how we move through the world. North, south, east, and west: almost all societies use these four cardinal directions to orientate themselves and to understand who they are by projecting where they are. For millennia, these four directions have been foundational to our travel, navigation, and exploration, and are central to the imaginative, moral, and political geography of virtually every culture in the world. Yet they are far more subjective and sometimes contradictory than we might realize.

Gaiman, Neil. [Norse Mythology: The Illustrated Edition](#) (Norton \$35). Award-winning illustrator Levi Pinfold brings Gaiman's bravura rendition of the Norse gods and their world to life.

Graham, Elyse. [Book and Dagger](#) (Harper \$30). Such a great title, who can resist? And the book is about How Scholars and Librarians Became the Unlikely Spies of World War II. In other words, an Information War was created by forming the OSS, the precursor to the CIA, Graham draws on personal histories, letters, and declassified OSS files to tell the story of a small but connected group of humanities scholars turned spies. Read this [expanded review](#) to see why Elyse Graham's rescuing a cast of scholar-spies from obscurity is recommended.

Haddon, Mimi. [Palace Costume: Inside Hollywood's Best Kept Fashion Secret](#) (Chronicle Books \$29.95). It's actually a business in LA that has amassed a horde of dresses, gowns, shoes, hats, accessories, jewelry and more and ranging over historical periods allowing moviemakers to rent enough to clothe big casts. I note it mostly because of the incredible bursts of color on every page as actors, designers, and more recount their experiences with owner Melody Barnett and her business.

Jacobsen, Rowan. [Wild Chocolate](#) (Bloomsbury \$28.99). One taste of an artisanal chocolate bar launched Jacobsen's journey through Central and South America in pursuit of wild and heirloom cacao beans whose flavors are influenced by the earth in which they grow. The James Beard Award-winning food writer's engaging narrative history doubles as an adventure tale, taking readers from Montezuma's treasure vaults to shrewd profiteers' warehouses.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. [The Serviceberry](#) (Scribner \$20) is recommended as a bold and inspiring vision for how to orient our lives around gratitude, reciprocity, and community, based on the lessons of the natural world.

Murakami, Haruki. [The City and Its Uncertain Walls](#) (Knopf \$35). **Our copies come with a nifty overlay art print while supplies last.** Murakami's latest novel explores a walled city imagined by the protagonist and his teenage sweetheart. She works in the city's library, while he becomes a reader of the dreams that are archived there. Decades later, in the real world, the protagonist leaves Tokyo and becomes a librarian in a small town, where he forms friendships that may help him reconnect with the strange city of his youth.

Natsukawa, Sosuke. [The Cat Who Saved Books](#) (Harper \$27.99). Speaking of Shelf wealth, here's a Deluxe Gift Edition of the #1 Japanese bestseller—featuring sprayed edges, foil stamping and other special design features—a celebration of books, cats, and the people who love them.

Bookish high school student Rintaro Natsuki is about to close the secondhand bookstore he inherited from his beloved bookworm grandfather. Then, a talking cat named Tiger appears with an unusual request. The feline asks for—or rather, demands—the teenager's help in saving books with him. The world is full of lonely books left unread and unloved, and Tiger and Rintaro must liberate them from their neglectful owners. Their mission sends this odd couple on an amazing journey, where they enter different mazes to set books free.

Pamuk, Orhan. [Memories of Distant Mountains](#) (Knopf \$40) as translated by Ekin Oklap. Pamuk, a winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, shares more than a decade's worth of personal writings and journal entries, which are illustrated with his paintings. Notes on the creative process, teaching, politics and travel are included here, giving readers glimpses of the writer's internal life. I first encountered his work with his brilliant historical [My Name Is Red](#) (\$19), the Nobel winner, set amid the splendor and religious intrigue of sixteenth-century Istanbul and one of my all time favorite fictions.

Sacks, Oliver. [Letters](#) (Knopf \$40) as edited by Kate Edgar. Sacks, the renowned neurologist and best-selling author of books about the brain's maladies and mysterious pathways, was also a dedicated letter writer throughout his life. This entire collection is worthwhile, but the first third is especially magical as we see him moving in 1960 from England to San Francisco to find his way as a doctor and, not least, as an enthusiastic observer and participant in various subcultures. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Sacks and doing an event with him over two decades ago and am now delighted to spend more time with him.

Wohlleben, Peter. [The Hidden Life of Trees, A Graphic Adaptation](#) (Grand Central \$35) presents compelling, abridged selections from the original international bestseller and stunning, large-format photographs of trees from around the world. It is amazing. With its rich illustrations and graphic novel format Wohlleben narrative, often playful, shows trees in all their glory and diversity, and their social community. Through rich language highlighting the interconnectedness of forest ecosystems, the book offers fascinating insights about the fungal communication highway known as the “wood wide web,” the difficult life lessons learned in tree school, the hard-working natural cleanup crews

that recycle dying trees, and much more. Beautiful images provide the perfect complement to Wohlleben words, with striking close-ups of bark and seeds, panoramas of vast expanses of green, and a unique look at what is believed to be the oldest tree on the planet.

Yen, Dennis. [Slurp](#) (Tra Publishing \$22). From dan dan noodles to dumplings, slow-cooked broths to instant ramen, this accessible cookbook includes slurp-friendly recipes for all levels. Check the November Booknews for a big list of cookbook and food-related volumes we offer this season.

Zehme, Bill. [Carson the Magnificent](#) (Simon & Schuster \$30) centers mostly on Johnny Carson's role as a benevolent cultural overseer; it takes, if not the high road, the yellow brick one, with Carson's Midwestern background left in dusty black and white while the nitty-gritty of show business is buffed to a high Emerald City sheen and the messy personal details stay largely behind the curtain. Carson's work was to keep the show going, not to dwell on unpleasant topics (including politics), and Zehme follows suit. For many years, closing out the day by watching *The Tonight Show* with Carson as host capped it and made for shared riffs and conversations with friends and family.

Zuckerman, Esther. [Falling in Love at the Movies](#) (Running Press Books \$28). With Romantasy and romance bookstores booming, here's a touchstone to enjoy. If romantic comedies are the love letters of cinema, this book is a love letter to romantic comedies. In a brief and upbeat style, entertainment journalist Zuckerman covers rom-coms from 1930s to today, focusing on key elements of the genre. Through dozens of perfect examples, she explores tropes like the “meet-cute”; Relatable Queens vs. Spitfires (Meg Ryan or Jean Arthur vs. Reese Witherspoon or Katharine Hepburn); the essential side characters of the Best Friend (often played by Judy Greer) and the Man in Crisis (many of John Cusack's roles); the art of deception in *Some Like It Hot* and *Tootsie*; realistic but unhappy endings like those in *Broadcast News* or *My Best Friend's Wedding*; LGBTQIA+ films (*Jeffrey*; *The Wedding Banquet*); and, of course, the high school classics (*Sixteen Candles*; *Clueless*). One chapter focuses on three archetypal rom-com couplings: Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, Doris Day and Rock Hudson, and Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Wisely, Zuckerman also explores the degree to which many of these films haven't aged well (see: the sexism of the Hepburn/Tracy pictures and the outlandish plots of the Day/Hudson films). But still....

SOME HOLIDAY READING

* Christie, Agatha. [Hercule Poirot's Christmas](#) (\$18.99). A classic country house murder set on Christmas Eve at Gorstan Hall where the tyrannical Lee family patriarch is foully murdered, repackaged and always worth (re)reading for the structure of the mystery. This is the original 1938 title, changed in the US to *Murder for Christmas* and in 1947 for awhile to *A Holiday for Murder*. I've always thought that the patriarch had a death wish when he invited his potential heirs under his roof to disinherit them.

* Coles, Richard. [Murder under the Mistletoe](#) (Hodder \$21). The British idea of cozy is sharper and darker than the American and here's an example. The Reverend Coles is a literary hit in the UK and here he (late in the game) has a murder in the holiday mix that you Anglophiles will enjoy for the biting edge.

Elliot, Amanda. [Love You a Latke](#) (Berkley \$19). Our John told me I'd enjoy his November Romance Book of the Month—and he was right. Think home for the challah-days with Abby Cohen. She's roped by the tourist board—actually the pushy chairman—of her small Vermont town into heading a fledgling Hanukkah Festival it's hoped will be a magnet for visitors. Desperate for support from people who don't think a Nativity scene will fit, she puts out a call for help and suddenly—Seth. His price? His parents have been badgering him to bring a Nice Jewish Girlfriend home to New York City for Hanukkah. If Abby can survive his incessant, irritatingly handsome smiles, he'll introduce her to all the vendors she needs to make the festival a success. But over latkes, doughnuts, and winter adventures in Manhattan she may see fake boyfriend Seth in different lights....

* Farrell, Kathleen. [Mistletoe Malice](#) (Faber \$15.95). The fire is on, sherry poured, presents wrapped, and claws are being sharpened. In a seaside cottage perched on a cliff, one family reunites for Christmas. While snow falls, a tyrannical widowed matriarch presides over her unruly brood. Her niece tends to her whims, but fantasizes about eloping; and as more guests arrive, each bringing their secret truths and dreams, the Christmas tree explodes, a brawl erupts, an escape occurs.... A dysfunctional post-war family reunites for the Christmas holiday from hell in this rediscovered festive classic with fangs for fans of Barbara Pym.

* Peters, Ellis. [A Rare Benedictine](#) (\$25), a Christmas tale of robbery and attempted murder in Shrewsbury for Brother Cadfael to solve. See more about one of my favorite sleuth's current availability under Candace Robb's series in Signed Books.

Rishoi, Ingvild. [Brightly Shining](#) (Grove \$20). This little hardcover encases a Norwegian Christmas tale of sisterhood, financial hardship, and far-off dreams, beloved by readers across Europe, where it has been a major bestseller. Christmas is just around the corner, and Ronja and Melissa's dreamer of a father is out of work again. When ten-year-old Ronja hears about a job at a Christmas tree stand near where the family lives in central Oslo, she thinks it might be the stroke of luck they all need. Soon, the fridge fills with food, and their father returns home with money in his pocket and a smile on his face. But one evening he disappears into the night under the pretense of buying Christmas gifts—and the daughters know he has gone to his favorite local pub. Melissa decides to secure the job at the Christmas tree stand, working before and after school in the December afternoon dark, and brings along Ronja, who quickly charms all the middle-class customers. On rare breaks the sisters dream of a brighter place of kindness and plenty, and find help from some of those around them—but both understand that their family structure is a precarious one....

Stevenson, Benjamin. [Everyone This Christmas Has a Secret](#) (Harper \$19.99 with **Signed Bookplate**). Shame on me—I assumed from the price this Christmas mystery by Australian Stephenson was a paperback but no, it's a slim hardcover intended for gifting.

In it, Stevenson has subverted the Golden Age form to a contemporary Christie-puzzle mystery with his sleuth Ernest Cunningham in a fast-paced, homicidal mystery set in Australia's sweltering December on their wish lists. Ernest Cunningham, the sleuth-narrator, is begged for help by his sleepwalking ex-wife,

accused of murdering her second husband. Mr. Stevenson plays with the tropes of several crime classics, though it would spoil the fun to name them. The plot contains a sinister Secret Santa, a victim who announces his death in advance, a stage performer seemingly decapitated by a piece of paper—and not too much gore: “This is a Christmas story, after all,” says Ernest. He ads, “I used to be a fan of murder mysteries until I found myself with a haphazard career getting stuck in the middle of real-life ones. I'd hoped, this Christmas, that any self-respecting murderer would take it easy over the holidays. I was wrong. So here I am, backstage at the show of world-famous magician Rylan Blaze, whose benefactor has just been murdered. My suspects are all professional tricksters: masters of the art of misdirection....”

Willems, Mo. [Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Sleigh](#) (Union Square Kids \$18.99. SIGNED even if it's hard to find the signature). Ages 3-5. Kids love Willems' graphics with words.

Williams, Niall. [Time of the Child](#) (Bloomsbury \$18.99). Williams' latest is a companion to his acclaimed 2019 novel, [This Is Happiness](#) (\$18). This time readers follow two outcasts in a small Irish village who begin taking care of a baby they find abandoned one Christmas season — a development that gives them the opportunity to right past wrongs and changes their lives for the better. Ann Patchett is a Williams fan.

COZIES

Brannigan, Ellie. [Death at an Irish Wedding](#) (Crooked Lane \$29.99). Following up [Murder in an Irish Castle](#) (\$22.95), wherein Rodeo Drive, California, bridal wear designer Rayne McGrath, broke and jilted, unexpectedly inherits a rundown family castle and has to turn it into some kind of profit making venture or the entire village will be ruined, now faces an epic failure. Rayne accidentally burned down the castle tower and wrecked the budget. Luckily a bridalwear client from LA gets in touch. McGrath Castle is the perfect destination for the exclusive and intimate wedding party of heiress Tori Montgomery and her fiancé, heartthrob actor Jake Anderson. But this white veil occasion turns into a nightmare when Tori's best friend's assistant, Tiffany Quick, is found dead. It's feared Tiffany jumped from the tower, but that theory is quickly put in doubt as secrets within the wedding party come to light. And as the villagers protest this new wedding venue venture, Rayne begins to wonder if she will succeed in her endeavor or lose it all. This will appeal to fans of Hannah Dennison but it's jumping the season for Irish themed mysteries by such as Carlene O'Connor.

Bowen, Rhys. [The Proof of the Pudding](#) (\$19). Her Royal Spyness investigates a poisoning with the aid of Agatha Christie who is at the fatal dinner. See Our December Large Paperback Picks for more.

Carlisle, Kate. [The Twelve Books of Christmas](#) (\$19) takes San Francisco book-restoration expert Brooklyn Wainwright and her hunky security-expert husband, Derek Stone, to a castle in Scotland for the holidays where they confront a puzzling theft and murder.

Also new by Carlisle, [The Knife Before Christmas](#) (Berkley \$28 SIGNED In this Fixer Upper Mystery, contractor Shannon Hammer hopes for a peaceful Christmas with her fiancé, Mac, until murder throws a wrench in her holiday plans.

Day, Maddie. [Deadly Crush](#) (Kensington \$27). It's the beginning

of a new year, and for widowed single mom and recent L.A. transplant to California wine country, Cece Barton, that means green hillsides, flowing streams from winter rains, pruned vineyards—and a murder to solve....

* Fowler, Deborah. [A St. Ives Christmas Mystery](#) (Allison & Busby \$28) starts a series and makes our **British Crime Subscription Book of the Month**. Fiftyish family solicitor Merrin McKenzie was recently widowed when police officer husband C I McKenzie was killed on the job. She just can't face staying in her empty house in bustling Bristol, continuing her practice, or filling her days and friends in with what her student daughter Isla is up to at Oxford. So Merrin and her African Grey Parrot (Horatio)—a great character—elect to uproot and move back to St. Ives, Cornwall, where Merrin grew up. There she reconnects with childhood friends weathering Isla's ire at losing her convenient family home. An old friend in the village is a lifeline but also pressures Merrin into helping out by cleaning between rentals at a holiday house on a temp basis. And there Merrin finds the body of a young man neatly tucked into bed. He's dead. This brings Inspector Louis Peppiat into her life as well as an ugly abandoned dog called William. Things get livelier when a second person is murdered. Merrin, a keen investigator, develops theories and tests them despite the Inspector's skepticism, introducing her to surprisingly sinister forces hiding beneath the festive surface of the charming seaside town. This is a leisurely read with enjoyable characters where the animals often steal the show, but also paints a sort of second coming of age when the life you had vanishes.

Frost, Jacqueline. [I'll Be Home for Mischievous](#) (Crooked Lane \$29.99). For the fifth year in a row there is a murder in Mistletoe, Maine, at Christmas time and to make matters worse at Reindeer Games Tree Farm, this murder has thwarted Holly's mother's chance at breaking a world record for baking the largest Gingerbread Man. After a man that Holly has known since childhood is accused of the murder, she sets out to find the real killer.

Hall, Traci. [Murder at a Scottish Christmas](#) (Kensington \$17.95). The holidays in the charming seaside village of Nairn hold bright hope for sweater shop owner and knitting enthusiast Paislee Shaw. But the New Year's fireworks celebration provides cover for a killer. During Hogmanay, when the Scots welcome in the New Year with dancing, bonfires, and midnight fireworks, the police station receptionist Amelia Henry's brother McCormac, collapses as the sky brightens in a blaze of color. A shooter has used the noise to hide a gun's blast. Amelia is inconsolable, and Paislee vows to do whatever she can to help DI Zeffler solve the murder....

James, Amy. [A Five Letter Word for Love](#) (Avon \$18.99). "What starts off as a novel with a fun premise transforms into a richly told story about a young woman trying to find her place in the world and defining her own happiness. Themes of growing up and growing older, personal growth, friendships, and career choices are explored thoughtfully in this romance that's a cozy read in every sense of the word. This heartfelt novel will surely garner an enthusiastic following for debut author James."—*LJ Starred Review*.

I was drawn to this charmer by the idea that an unlikely couple falls in love over a shared delight in Wordle which I play

every day and recommend to anyone as brain exercise. And the Wordle bits are fun and somewhat challenging if you can beat Emily to the daily solution. But this is really an exploration of the themes noted above, plus the charms of small town life on Prince Edward Island, one of my favorite places (oysters!), and of a young woman who values rather than dismisses older people she meets and aids.

Ireland, Liz. [Mrs. Claus and the Nightmare Before New Year's](#) (Kensington \$17.95). April Claus is looking forward to relaxing with her hubby, Nick (aka THE Santa Claus), in the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve. But just after Santa departs for his deliveries, an elf pulls into Santaland with three people he found lost in the frozen wilderness. The survivors of a scientific expedition are injured, but their presence endangers the future of Santaland. So, while the strangers recuperate at the infirmary, April convinces Christmastown to pull off its grandest, most impossible, most magical feat yet...pretend to be normal! Posing as a touristy, albeit Christmas-centric, arctic town, the elves cover their ears, snowmen take a vow of silence, and the reindeer keep their hooves on the ground. But as New Year's Eve draws closer, hiding their true selves becomes harder to do, especially when one of the uninvited guests dies under highly suspicious circumstances.

Lynch, Christina. [Pony Confidential](#) (Penguin \$28). I'm giving another shout out to this humorous cozy where a pony overcomes the pain of being sold by Penny's family when she's moved up in age and size to a horse, and saves the day when Penny is accused of murder. A casual conversation with some of Pony's animal confidants reveals that Penny did not, in fact, abandon him, and he sets out to find her. Along the way, he learns of the arrest and refashions himself as an equine gumshoe. What follows is a cross-country investigation in which Pony chats with horses, owls, dogs, and an ill-tempered goat, who help point him toward the killer. Meanwhile, Penny sits in an Ithaca, N.Y., jail, her fate in the hands of a novice public defender. Her eventual trial is truly memorable.

Nelson, P J. [Booked for Murder](#) (St Martins \$28). A series start by a pseudonymous author sounded promising—a young woman inherits a small town bookstore in tiny Enigma, Georgia from her loved and eccentric Aunt Rose. The store is housed in an old Victorian in this college town and is equally eccentrically organized. Madeleine is puzzled by the inheritance but, her career on stage going nowhere, game to become a bookseller. And then the gazebo in the back garden is set on fire, an anonymous caller threatens to burn the whole thing down, and then there's a murder in the store, the murder of what is, IMHO, easily the best character in the book. From there I lost interest along with the plot....

Osler, Rob. [The Case of the Missing Maid](#) (Kensington \$27). When Harriet Morrow reports for her first day at the Prescott Detective Agency in 1898, she's determined to make a success of it and leave her dull bookkeeping career behind. Yet from the minute Harriet walks through the door, she's met with skepticism from her male colleagues. Only the boss, Theodore Prescott, believes in her, but even he gives her an apparently toothless assignment: report to the home of Pearl Bartlett, an elderly and often confused widow, to follow up on her complaint that her maid, Agnes Wozniak, has disappeared. While Pearl has a

reputation for crying wolf, Harriet believes her this time and suspects that Agnes has been abducted. As Harriet digs deeper into the case, she also grapples with escalating hostility at the detective agency, wariness among Agnes's peers in Chicago's Polish community, and fears that her secret life as a lesbian might be exposed and used against her. As the intrepid, bike-riding lady detective plunges into Chicago's seedy gay clubs and criminal hangouts, Osler doles out well-placed clues that set the table for a knockout conclusion bolstered by lush historical detail, optimistic but plausible gender politics, and an unforgettable heroine.

Prose, Nita. [The Mistletoe Mystery](#) (Random House \$22. Molly Gray has always loved the holidays, especially as celebrated by her beloved Gran. This year a Secret Santa gift exchange at the Regency Grand Hotel raises questions about who Molly, a maid there, can and cannot trust. It thrusts her into a mystery. Plus Molly has a bad feeling about things, and she starts to wonder: has she yet again mistaken a frog for a prince? Note: **Our last of our Signed copies go to the Cozy Crimes Subscription Club for the December Book of the Month.**

* Russell, Leigh. [Poppy's Christmas Cracker](#) (Oldcastle Books UK \$16.99). A Christmas cozy crime set in the village of Ashton Mead. Hannah, owner of the Sunshine Tea Shoppe, feels threatened by the opening of a French patisserie. So when the owner is killed, Hannah is an obvious suspect. No luck in clearing Hannah's name until her friend Emily's little dog Poppy, an energetic Jack Tzu, makes a discovery.... Poppy has her own series of which this appears to be the 4th.

Safier, David. [Murder at the Castle](#) (Camden \$19.99). I mention this because of the TV series and because you may be interested in a cozy translated from the German—and so the German idea of a cozy.

Angela Merkel can finally put her feet up. With her quantum-chemist husband Achim, her bodyguard Mike and their new pug Putin, she has retired to the idyllic north German village of Kleinfreudenstadt-on-Dumpfsee. But it isn't easy to settle into country life. Baking and hiking just aren't as exciting as global financial meltdowns or deranged American presidents. And Angela's fellow villagers all seem to want something, from her xenophobic AfD-voting namesake to the local aristocrat desperate to bury her family's Nazi past. So when the eccentric Baron von Baugenwitz is found poisoned in a castle dungeon locked from the inside, new life stirs in Angela. Finally, a problem to solve!

CLASSICS

The holidays are the perfect time to curl up with Golden Age mysteries as published by the British Library Crime, the Library of Congress, and American Mystery Classics. The [NY Times Book Review](#) looks at five in depth.

Brand, Christiana. [Suddenly at His Residence](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.99). I think, as do many, that [Green for Danger](#) (\$14.99) is Brand's gem. So does the *NY Times* saying "Christianna Brand is one of those British crime writers who remain terminally underrated, perhaps because she began a little later than the legendary queens of detective fiction and earlier than stars like Ruth Rendell and P.D. James. But Brand had an exacting sense of human frailty and a wicked way with crime novel plots; I still think about the twist in *Green for Danger*." But here, Inspector Cockrill, feared and revered around Kent for his exploits, makes his third appearance, this 'dusty little old sparrow arrayed in a

startlingly clean white panama hat ... hopping and darting this way and that, in search of crumbs of information,' investigates the deadly poisoning of a rich patriarch by one of his squabbling grandchildren. Brand paints a merciless portrait of the potential suspects, and saves her reveal of the locked-room mystery for the very last line."

Carr, John Dickson. [He Who Whispers](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.99). When Miles Hammond is invited to a meeting of the Murder Club in London, he is met instead with just two other guests and is treated to a strange tale of an impossible crime in France years before; the murder of a man on a tower with only one staircase, under watch at the time at which the murder took place. With theories of levitating vampires abounding, the story comes home to Miles when he realizes that the librarian he has just hired for his home is none other than Fay Seton, a woman at the heart of this bizarre and unsolved past murder. Carr considered this novel one of his best works, and it is easy to see why when experiencing its ingenious plot delivered with an astounding pace and masterfully drawn characters including none other than the great detective Dr. Gideon Fell. Giving this British Library Crime Classic a Starred Review, Booklist says, "Fiendishly ingenious... originally published in 1946, Carr upends the standard locked-room mystery by setting a murder in a totally exposed space: the top of a tower, in broad daylight, and with witnesses below."

Lorac, ER. [The Theft of the Iron Dogs](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.99). The December British Library Crime Classic was first published in 1946. Set in the fell country of Lunesdale over the course of a rainy September, it is the very picture of a cozy crime mystery and showcases Lorac's masterful attention to detail and deep affection for both Lunesdale and its residents. While hot on the heels of serial coupon-racketeer Gordon Ginner, Chief Inspector MacDonald of Scotland Yard receives word of an intriguing incident up in Lancashire – the summer cottage of local farmer Giles Hoggett has been broken into, with an assortment of seemingly random items missing which include a complete reel of salmon line, a large sack, and two iron dogs from his fireplace. A body is then found in the river – the body of Gordon Ginner. So neither a simple break in nor a hotly contested land grab but something more....

White, Ethel Lina. [The Wheel Spins](#) (\$15.99). Iris Carr's holiday in the mountains of a remote corner of Europe has come to an end, and since her friends left two days before, she faces the journey home alone. Stricken by sunstroke at the station, Iris catches the express train to Trieste by the skin of her teeth and finds a companion in Miss Froy, an affable English governess. But when Iris passes out and reawakens, Miss Froy is nowhere to be found. The other passengers deny any knowledge of her existence and as the train speeds across Europe, Iris spirals deeper and deeper into a strange and dangerous conspiracy. First published in 1936 and adapted for the screen as *The Lady Vanishes* by Alfred Hitchcock in 1938, Ethel Lina White's suspenseful mystery remains her best-known novel and now, a British Library Crime Classic.

Rinehart, Mary Roberts. [The Door](#) (American Mystery Classics \$15.95). Elizabeth Bell runs a quiet household, with no family and no more than the usual number of servants. She passes her time thinking about crime and working on her biography of a relative. When a young cousin comes to stay, life in the house

becomes uncharacteristically lively. First, cousin Judy burns a hole in Miss Bell's desk. Next, they spy a burglar on the staircase—a shadowy figure who vanishes without a trace. And finally, Sarah, the nurse, takes the dogs for a walk and never returns. But these mysterious goings-on take a dark turn when the vanished woman is found savagely murdered. More deaths follow, and the entire staff begins to look more threatening than the old lady ever could have imagined. This atmospheric whodunit bursting with family secrets and period details exemplifies the sort of aristocratic intrigue that made Mary Roberts Rinehart one of the bestselling and most beloved authors of her day.

Treat, Lawrence. [V As in Victim](#) (Poisoned Pen \$18.99). Turning to the Library of Congress Crime Classics, the *NY Times* notes that “the police procedural has been a staple of crime fiction for almost 80 years; racial reckonings and real-life abuses haven't altered this. It was strangely refreshing to go back to near-first principles with Lawrence Treat's 1945 novel brought out by the Library of Congress Crime Classics series which examines day-to-day investigations of murder and other crimes through the lens of the detective Mitch Taylor, a cop who knows it's a job, not a calling. Paperwork is Mitch's biggest bane until he's summoned, along with the mercurial lab technician Jub Freeman, to the scene of a hit-and-run; together they link that crime with a dead cat and a murdered man. Treat's laconic style clearly foreshadows Ed McBain's wonderful 87th Precinct series.”

NEW IN HARDCOVER

Aldridge, Mark. [Agatha Christie's Miss Marple: Expert on Wickedness](#) (Harper \$30). Dame Agatha Christie's publishers used to urge consumers to purchase “a Christie for Christmas.” A fine book this season for those who wish to continue that tradition would be this “engaging guide to the novels, stories, plays, movies, radio, audio and television adaptations involving the swift-knitting crimesolver from the village of St. Mary Mead. Mr. Aldridge doesn't drop a stitch in tracing the protagonist's multimedia progress from 1927 to the present.”

Aleman, Daniel. [I Might Be in Trouble](#) (Grand Central \$29). Background: A few years ago, David Alvarez had it all: a six-figure book deal, a loving boyfriend, and an exciting writing career. His debut novel was a resounding success, which made the publication of his second book—a total flop—all the more devastating. Now, David is single, lonely, and desperately trying to come up with the next great idea for his third manuscript, one that will redeem him in the eyes of readers, reviewers, the entire publishing world...and maybe even his ex-boyfriend. Now, “When struggling novelist David wakes up next to a dead body after a hookup with a stranger, he realizes inspiration for his next book may have finally struck. But he'll need his agent's help to move the body and avoid the blame first. This mystery thriller is funny, suspenseful, and surprisingly touching,” says Library Reads.

* Armstrong, Jess. [The Secret of the Three Fates](#) (St Martins \$28). Another Gothic—see our December Large Paperback Picks for her first, *The Curse of Penryth Hall*—by Armstrong appealed to me less despite its atmospheric Scottish setting. But then I'm not enamored of séances. American heiress Ruby Vaughn still hasn't entirely forgiven her octogenarian employer and housemate Mr. Owen for bringing the occult into their lives

during her recent trip to Cornwall (see above). He claims their journey to Manhurst Castle in the Scottish Borders is simply to appraise and acquire illuminated manuscripts for their rare books shop, however when Ruby discovers there are no manuscripts and receives news of a séance to be held that very night, she begins to grow suspicious about the true reason why they have come. The Great War left grieving families willing to sacrifice anything for the chance to say goodbye to a lost loved one. Mr. Owen is no exception. He is desperate to speak to his son, and so, eager for a séance. The past reveals more than he wishes, and leads to murder.

Boyd, William. [Gabriel's Moon](#) (Grove \$28) is a wonderfully styled throwback to the best of the 1960's era spy novels. “Gabriel is a kind of Evelyn Waugh naif caught in a Graham Greene plot, and one of the book's pleasures is his entirely plausible resourcefulness as challenges grow more perilous. While Boyd craftily ramps up the complications for his reluctant spy, he also gives him a full life apart from intelligence errands... A highly entertaining book. If only Boyd were visiting the US in December!

Here's a bit of a rave review of “an electric espionage thriller that calls to mind the best of John le Carré and Len Deighton. As a child, Gabriel Dax was caught in a house fire that killed his mother, and insomnia-inducing nightmares of the tragedy have followed him into adulthood. By 1960, Gabriel has become a travel writer who, through a stroke of good luck, is assigned to interview Patrice Lumumba, the prime minister of the newly independent Republic of the Congo. Shortly after their conversation, Lumumba is overthrown by a Congolese colonel, and though Gabriel's editor tells him the tapes are “yesterday's news,” unknown parties are bent on acquiring them.” Secrets emerge. “Boyd's prose is crisp, his dialogue zings, and the heaps of dramatic irony he places on Gabriel's stumble into spyhood buoys the narrative.”

Cook, Robin. [Bellevue](#) (Putnam \$30). Michael “Mitt” Fuller starts his surgical residency with great anticipation at the nearly 300-year-old, iconic Bellevue Hospital, following in the footsteps of four previous, celebrated Fuller generations. The pressure is on for this newly minted doctor, and to his advantage he's always had a secret sixth sense. But quickly one patient after another assigned to his care begin to die from mysterious causes. As he tries to juggle these inexplicable deaths with the demands of being a first-year resident, things rapidly spiral out of control. Visions begin to plague Mitt. As bodies mount and Mitt's stress level rises, he finds himself drawn to the monumental, abandoned Bellevue Psychopathic Hospital building, which to his astonishment has somehow defied the wrecking-ball and still stands a few doors north of the modern Bellevue Hospital high-rise. Forcing an unauthorized entry into this storied but foreboding structure, Mitt discovers.... Unread by me but I note it for fans of Cook and medical thrillers.

Craven, MW. [Nobody's Hero](#) (Flatiron \$29.99). The conceit of British author Craven's Ben Koenig action thrillers is that Koenig cannot feel pain. [Google Urbach-Wiethe disease]. Here, in Craven's exhilarating and darkly comic follow-up to [Fearless](#) (\$18.99), a woman murders two pickpockets and abducts an elderly woman in a London park. The CCTV footage triggers an alert that points investigators toward a top secret CIA file. Inside is a reference to “the Acacia Avenue Protocol” and a list

of four names—three dead men and Ben Koenig. Ben knows nothing about the Protocol, but upon reviewing the video footage, he recognizes the killer as a woman he helped assume a new identity a decade earlier. Though he still doesn't understand the full scope of that mission, he knows she's privy to ultrasensitive American intelligence. Ben and his brutally efficient CIA handler race to find the woman, unwittingly getting in the way of father-daughter assassin duo Stillwell Hobbs and Harper Nash, who have been tracking down and killing everyone involved with the Protocol. "Craven effectively mixes the unvarnished brutality and high body count of Lee Child with the black humor of Mick Herron." Many fans compare Koenig to a darker, more brutal Jack Reacher.

Dunlap, A. Rae. [The Resurrectionist](#) (Kensington \$28). Unread by me. Library Reads recommends "This gothic novel is a delightfully atmospheric tale of an English medical student come to Scotland to study surgery/turned grave robber, set amidst the dark alleyways of 19th-century Edinburgh. The combination of historical fiction and murder mystery with plenty of medical history will make this a crossover hit with several audiences including the LGBTQ+."

French, Paul. [Her Lotus Year](#) (St Martins \$30) argues in a new biography, the future Duchess of Windsor's year in China was less lurid than her critics knew. French refocuses attention on the year she spent living in China. She was 28 years old and married to her first husband, the American Navy officer Win Spencer. Later, after she began her affair with the Prince of Wales, this period would become an endless source of lurid speculation. It was widely believed that British intelligence had compiled a "China Dossier" on Simpson, which alleged that she had had an abortion, posed for pornographic photographs, seduced husbands, conducted an affair with an Italian fascist, smoked opium, gambled and worked for Chinese gangsters. French not only dismisses the existence of a China Dossier, but credits the rumor to a British intelligence officer named Harry Steptoe, who aimed to scuttle the relationship between Simpson and Edward VIII at a time when the king's love for an American divorcée was seen as an existential threat to the monarchy. French's book—beautifully told through meticulous historical research and examination of contemporary literature and film—gives the reader a vivid picture of what China must have been like for an American expat in the 1920s. French, who lives in China and has written extensively on the country, understands how to describe the immense political and cultural change of the 1920s. He captures the romance of Beijing and the tedium of colonial social life. He also clearly points to the Sinophobia and racism underpinning the ugly rumors, a colonial and exoticized idea of China as a place so morally bankrupt that a woman could be corrupted simply by breathing its air.

* Ellis, Kate. [Coffin Island](#) (LittleBrown \$28.99). The long-running DI Wesley Petersen policing series get a new entry. It's in short supply so we can't promise stock unless you order quickly.

Despite many years living in South Devon, the DI has never visited the tiny island of St Rumon's. That is until erosion from a storm reveals three bodies buried outside the local churchyard. Two are ancient skeletons, but one is far more recent, and Wesley realizes he has uncovered a case of murder. But whose remains are they? And who killed them? The island has only a small number of inhabitants. Yet one resident keeps

cropping up in Wesley's investigation: the author and self-styled academic, Quentin Search. Meanwhile Wesley's friend, archaeologist Neil Watson, becomes fascinated by the remains of the island's old priory. His discovery of a journal, written by a sixteenth century cleric, reveals an eerie tale of strange rituals and disturbing death.

Hall, Rachel Howzell. [The Last One](#) (Entangled \$32.99). This is Hall's debut Romantasy in a limited run featuring spray-painted edges with a stenciled design, as well as gorgeously detailed endpapers.

Thrown into a desolate land of sickness and unnatural beasts, Kai wakes in the woods with no idea who she is or how she got there. All she knows is that if she cannot reach the Sea of Devour, even this hellscape will get worse. But when she sees the village blacksmith fight invaders with unspeakable skill, she decides to accept his offer of help. Too bad he's as skilled at annoying her as he is at fighting. As she searches for answers, Kai only finds more questions, especially regarding the blacksmith who can ignite her body like a flame, then douse it with ice in the next breath. And no one is what—or who—they appear to be in the kingdom of Vinevridth, including the man whose secrets might be as deadly as the land itself.

Higashino, Keigo. [Invisible Helix: A Detective Galileo Novel](#) (St Martins \$29). Galileo, the lead in Higashino's Edgar nominated [The Devotion of Suspect X](#) (\$19), returns in a tricky case bound by nearly invisible threads. The body of a young man is found floating in Tokyo Bay. Ryota Uetsuji was shot. He'd been reported missing the week before by his live-in girlfriend Sonoko Shimauchi, but when detectives from the Homicide Squad go to interview her, she is nowhere to be found. And when the detectives learn that she was the victim of domestic abuse, they presume that she was the killer. But her alibi is airtight. But if Sonoko didn't kill her abusive lover, then who did? A thin thread of association leads them to their old consultant, brilliant physicist Manabu Yukawa, known in the department as "Detective Galileo".... An author of children's books figures into the plot.

* Lovesey, Peter. [Against the Grain](#) (Soho \$28.95). 'Lovesey concludes his long-running series featuring Bath detective Peter Diamond with a bang, delivering an ingenious fair-play whodunit set in the small English village of Baskerville as the annual harvest festival approaches. While Diamond contemplates retirement, his former colleague, Julie Hargreaves, summons him to Baskerville to investigate a potential miscarriage of justice. Claudia Priest, heir to a local dairy farm, threw a party in which her male colleagues were tasked with finding a hidden garter. Claudia's ex-boyfriend, art dealer Roger Miller, tracked the item down inside a grain silo, but when he reached for it, the surface of the grain collapsed, and he was sucked under and suffocated. Though Claudia insisted the garter was placed there by somebody else, she was convicted of manslaughter – but Julie's instincts tell her the killer is still at large. Intrigued, Diamond begins interviewing Julie and Claudia's neighbors, leading him to try out a variety of identities before tracking the culprit to the annual festival. Lovesey derives genuine emotion from Diamond's potential retirement, and his golden-age style plotting is as tight as ever.

Oates, Joyce Carol. [Flint Kill Creek: Stories of Mystery and](#)

[Suspense](#) (Penzler \$26.95).

Patterson, James. [Raised by Wolves](#) (\$19.99). Two teens appear out of nowhere, ransacking a small-town grocery and attacking the police officers who come to investigate. Their clothes are torn and filthy, their hands and bare feet calloused, they have fangs. They're sister and brother, alone against the world. Where did they come from? The mystery of their upbringing brings dark and powerful forces to Kokanee Creek, tearing the town apart and threatening the lives of everyone they love. How will anyone, human or wolf, survive? There is [a hardcover edition](#) (\$32).

Pham, Jacque. [Those Opulent Days](#) (Grove \$27). A complex murder mystery set in 1928 Vietnam explores the prejudice, inequality, and violence of French colonization. So, a mystery with an agenda. Duy, Minh, Phong, and Edmond are close friends at one of the most prestigious boarding schools in 1917 Vietnam when they sneak out on a forbidden visit to a fortune teller. What starts as a young boys' lark ends on a dark note when they receive a prophecy: "*The four of you. One will lose his mind. One will pay. One will agonize.... One will die.*" A decade later, three survivors are left to determine which of them is a murderer—and which of them will pay the price for their friend's death. "Pham leaves tantalizing clues for readers to figure out the identities of the murdered and murderer."

Reid, Taylor Jenkins. [The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo Deluxe Edition](#) (Atria \$35). A deluxe edition with sprayed and stenciled edges, a note from "Evelyn," etc.

Segura, Alex. [Alter Ego](#) (Flatiron \$28.99). Crime and comics make for a lively mix in Segura's enticing follow-up to [Secret Identity](#) (\$18.99). Comic book artist turned filmmaker Annie Bustamante has been offered the opportunity of a lifetime: lead artist on a reboot of *The Legendary Lynx*, the superhero saga that inspired her to become a comics artist. The series ended after the financial collapse of its publisher, Triumph Comics, in 2007. Now, Bert Carlyle, son of Triumph's founder, hopes to revive Triumph as a multimedia company. Initially thrilled, Annie soon becomes skeptical about Carlyle's intentions for the project, and walks away from the deal when conflicts arise over creative control. After she begins investigating who actually created and owns the rights to the *Legendary Lynx*, she receives anonymous threats of physical violence unless she stops her digging. Then the murders begin....

Shaara, Jeff. [The Shadow of War](#) (St Martins \$30). **This is the December Jack Carr Book Club Pick so you get 15% off the cover price.** In 1961, the new president John F. Kennedy, inherited an ill-conceived, poorly executed invasion of Cuba that failed miserably and set in motion the events that put the U.S. and the Soviet Union on a collision course that nearly started a war that would have enveloped much of the world. Shaara brings to life the many threads that lead to the building crisis between the Soviet Union and the United States in 1962.

Tremayne, Peter. [Prophet of Blood](#) (Severn House \$29.99). The 34th Sister Fidelma mystery, ordered Upon Request. Autumn, AD 672. While out walking, Abbot Brocc was shocked to encounter the sinister apparition of a young woman, cloaked entirely in grey, who foretold his impending death. Dismissing the soothsayer's words, Brocc nevertheless felt concerned enough to ask for Sister Fidelma's advice on the matter. But by the time Fidelma and her companions arrive at the remote abbey of Dair

Inis, Brocc has been found dead in the abbey's sweat house—as the mysterious propheticess had predicted. Plunged into a world of uncertainty, where believers of the Old and New Faiths are violently opposed, Fidelma, Eadulf and Deigo embark on a puzzling and perilous quest....

* Wilde, Darcie. [The Matter of the Secret Bride](#) (Kensington \$27). King George IV is petitioning Parliament for a divorce from his queen on the grounds of her adultery. But rumor has it that the king secretly married Maria Fitzherbert—long before he married the queen. Now Mrs. Fitzherbert has been robbed—and she's frantically calling on Rosalind Thorne, that Useful Woman of the Regency, for help. Because what those thieves took is proof that she and King George did really marry. That single piece of paper could destroy Mrs. Fitzherbert and her family—or it could prove the king guilty of bigamy. Rosalind races to investigate. With her ex-Bow Street officer, Adam Harkness, with whom Rosalind shares a complex and rapidly intensifying bond. But a case of theft soon turns to murder....

NEW IN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

Sanderson, Brandon. [Wind and Truth](#) (Tor \$39.99). We're sorry that all our Signed copies of Book Five of the Stormlight Archive are bespoke. But the book reads the same and presents "the explosive climax to the first arc of the Stormlight Archive." Dalinar Kholin challenged the evil god Odium to a contest of champions with the future of Roshar on the line. The Knights Radiant have only ten days to prepare—and the sudden ascension of the crafty and ruthless Taravangian to take Odium's place has thrown everything into disarray.

And....

Evans, Davinia. [Rebel Blade](#) (Orbit \$19.99).

Guanzon, Thea. [A Monsoon Rising](#) (Harper \$32)

Lackey, Mercedes. [Miss Amelia's List](#) (Astra \$28)

Marcello, Nicolo Mulas. [Video Games: From Pong to the PS5](#) (Abbeville \$29.95)

Mulford, A K. [A Sky of Emerald Stars](#) (Harper \$28.99)

Ruocchio, Christopher. [Disquiet Gods: The Sun Eater: Book Six](#) (Astra \$26)

Van Dyken, Rachel. [Fallen Gods \(Standard Edition\)](#) (Entangled \$29.99)

Wagner, Erin K. [Mechanize My Hands to War](#) (Astra \$28)

White, Alex. [Ardent Violet and the Infinite Eye](#) (Orbit \$19.99)

OUR DECEMBER LARGE PAPERBACK PICKS

* Armstrong, Jess. [The Curse of Penryth Hall](#) (\$19) was a December, 2023, First Mystery Book of the Month. And here is this Gothic debut set in picturesque Cornwall now in paperback. American expat and bookseller Ruby Vaughn is sent by her employer to deliver a trunkful of rare volumes to a folk healer in a small Cornish village. There Ruby visits her estranged friend and former lover Tamsyn Chenowith, who left Ruby to marry Edward, the wealthy lord of Penryth Hall. Trapped in an unhappy marriage, Tamsyn wants to reconnect with Ruby, but their reunion takes a dark turn when Edward is found murdered in Penryth's orchard, his face gruesomely disfigured. Locals are sure Edward's death is the work of a mysterious curse that has

plagued Penryth Hall for years, and Tamsyn fears she'll be the next victim. Ruby teams up with Ruan Kivell, the town "pellar," or witch who had ordered the book delivery, to solve the mystery before anyone else dies; in the process, she sheds her skepticism of all things supernatural. Ruby is a wonderful concoction, world-weary and reckless, and Armstrong outfits her with a moody, gripping mystery.

* Bowen, Rhys. [The Proof of the Pudding](#) (\$19). Lady Georgiana Rannoch has yet another murder to solve. This time she gets some help from Agatha Christie. Georgie, cousin to King Edward VIII, and her husband, Darcy O'Mara, who does something secret for the Crown, are expecting their first child shortly. Despite their aristocratic connections, they're not wealthy. Living at Eynsleigh, the Elizabethan house of Georgie's godfather, they await the arrival of a French chef while surviving on the stodgy food cooked by Georgie's former maid Queenie, a walking disaster. The long-awaited chef, Pierre, is handsome, and Queenie agrees to act as his assistant. Despite some misunderstandings over language and other matters, their first dinner party is such a smashing success that mystery author Sir Mordred Mortimer asks Georgie to let Pierre cook for a dinner to raise money for South African orphans. Mortimer seems a bit of a poseur, but his house and gardens, especially the poison garden, are a subject of considerable interest. The guests at his well-attended soiree include his children, along with some neighbors, some social climbers, an old school friend, and Laurence Olivier and Agatha Christie. When a fruit tart poisons a guest and the chef is arrested, Agatha, an expert on poisons, joins Georgie to investigate.

Donovan, Kemper. [The Busy Body](#) (\$17.95). A very talented ghostwriter signs on to help a failed female presidential candidate (now there are two) 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.

Last year when making this our January 2023 First Mystery Book of the Month, I wrote: 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. And yay, he has! He'll be with us again on January 27 with book two, [Loose Lips](#) (Kensington \$28), wherein our ghost writer sets sail on a cruise ship with her longtime frenemy, a popular bestseller.

French, Tana. [The Hunter](#) (\$19). Cal Hooper, met earlier in [The Searcher](#) (\$18), is an American emigré like French herself and has moved to a ferociously insular Village in the West of Ireland. He's a retired Chicago police detective in a town that makes its own law. He's settled in, fallen in love, and become the mentor and protector of a valuable but not always valued teenager named Trey Reddy. Now Trey's long-absent father reappears, bringing along an English millionaire and a scheme to find gold

under Ardnakelty, and suddenly everything the three of them have been building is under threat. Cal and Lena are both ready to do whatever it takes to protect Trey, but Trey doesn't want protecting. What she wants is revenge.

Harvey, Samantha. [Orbital](#) (\$17). Winner of the 2024 Book Prize, this slim novel is praised for the quality of its prose "which imaginatively constructs the day-to-day lives of six astronauts aboard the International Space Station. *Orbital* is the strangest and most magical of projects, not least because it's barely what most people would call a novel but performs the kind of task that only a novel could dare . . . [Harvey writes] like a kind of Melville of the skies." — James Wood, *The New Yorker*

Higashino, Keigo. [The Final Curtain](#) (\$19). Tokyo police detective Kyoichiro Kaga discovers an unsettling personal connection to a tricky murder case in the brilliantly twisty fourth entry in Higashino's series. Kaga's cousin, Shuhei Matsumiya, a detective with a separate division of the Tokyo police, suspects that two strangulation murders may be linked, despite no evidence of a connection between the victims. In the first, an unidentified homeless man was believed to have perished in a fire until an autopsy revealed smoke-free lungs and strangulation marks on his neck. A few weeks later, cleaning contractor Michiko Oshitani's decomposing remains are discovered in a spartan Tokyo apartment hundreds of miles from her home with apparent strangulation marks around her neck. Though the crimes are outside Kaga's jurisdiction, Matsumiya seeks his cousin's assistance.... "Higashino metes out the plot's surprises slowly, prioritizing Kaga's emotional response to the investigation. This poignant fair-play whodunit is sure to thrill fans of golden age detective fiction."—*PW* Starred Review. See New in Hardcover for the crackerjack sequel.

Oyebanji, Adam. [A Quiet Teacher](#) (\$18.99). A turncoat Russian spy battles his demons and solves a baffling murder in the narrow world of snowbound Pittsburgh, PA. A Black teacher at a very white school, Greg focuses on conversational Russian and prefers reading Pushkin novels to socializing. Then the murder of a student's mother on school grounds shreds Greg's protective bubble of culture and literature. Unprepared for the attention the murder case brings to Calderhill, Greg is dismayed to see the academy's racist tendencies and administrative inefficiencies come to the fore. But those revelations are nothing compared to Greg's secrets, such as the personal vice that he refers to as the Devil. The more he tries to help, the less private his life becomes. When Greg's closest friend is arrested for the murder, he decides he must draw on his experiences in his dangerous former life to prove her innocence. Reluctantly drawn into the case by tunnel-visioned police investigators, Greg is soon using the skills from his former life to sort the suspects and solve the crime while carefully avoiding his dogged Russian pursuers

Pek, Jane. [The Rivals](#) (Knopf \$18). In 2022, Pek introduced readers to the quirky, clever Claudia Lin, a book-loving, bike-riding English major in search of a meaningful career. And now she reimagines the spy story to explore the nature of relationships in a digital age: the follow-up to Jane Pek's "thoroughly modern twist on classic detective fiction." *The Rivals* picks up seven months after the [The Verifiers](#) (\$17). Veracity co-owners Claudia, Becks, and Squirrel are hired by New Yorkers to vet their matches on dating websites, but the agency's true mission is surveilling

the bots those sites use to manipulate their subscribers. When a potential Veracity client, Pradeep Mehta, suspects his disgruntled ex of creating a fake profile on the popular app Let's Meet using Pradeep's private information, the Veracity team suggests he file a spam report. Then Pradeep dies, and the trio comes to suspect Let's Meet of co-opting user data to instruct their bots, then killing to keep the practice quiet. Desperate for proof, Claudia tries to cozy up to the app's developers while navigating her own fraught relationships. Pek builds a story arc, at once aware of its tropes and seamlessly threading them into a tightly woven plot that grows ever more complex from start to cliffhanger finish.

Siger, Jeffrey. [At Any Cost](#) (\$18.99). Lesa reviews the latest in a series renowned for its gorgeous descriptions of Greece and accurate portrayals of how things work. "It's never a simple investigation for Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis's Special Crimes Unit. This time, the Greek team is assigned to investigate the wildfires that raged on the islands of the Aegean Sea last summer. The team discovers that it's not just a matter of arsonists burning down forests. Someone is buying up property on the islands, and police interviews reveal that there may be several nations working together to profit off the land development. Also, there is gossip about hungry technology giants hoping to use wind power and marine cables to build a world presence on Syros. As no one on his team has the technological know-how to fill him in, Kaldis turns to his niece's fiancé, a teacher and software engineer whose knowledge might be just what Kaldis needs, or it could put everyone on the team—and Andreas's family—in danger." We have 3 copies left of [At Any Cost](#) (Severn House \$29.99 SIGNED).

NEW IN LARGE PAPERBACKS

Burnet, Graeme Macrae. [A Case of Matricide](#) (Biblioasis \$18.85). One morning Chief Inspector Georges Gorski of the Saint-Louis Police is summoned by a hotelier who thinks there's something "fishy" about his only guest. That afternoon, Gorski visits the home of an elderly woman who's convinced that her son intends to murder her. Then there's the death of a wealthy industrialist, who appears to have had a heart attack but who, Gorski observes at the scene, has fallen backward in an "unnatural posture," as if he was pushed. Readers will conclude that these three bits of suspicious business are the building blocks of a crime novel; readers will be right and wrong. Set in the early 1980s, the story features "a satisfyingly fiendish incidence of comeuppance, but the punctilious Gorski's detective work plays a subordinate role in the narrative: he's consumed by, among other things, his floundering marriage and a childhood misdeed. The series' conceit is that it's 'translated and introduced by' Burnet but authored by Raymond Brunet, a Saint-Louis writer who killed himself in 1992. Readers will likely be split on whether this meta framework is gratuitous or earned, but all should agree that the book, the final in a trilogy, is a filigreed character study with the feel of a slow-boil noir."

Cantor, Jillian. [The Greatest Lie of All](#) (Park Row \$18.99). "Prepare to be pulled into an addictively twisty maze of secrets and lies, heartbreak and love as up-and-coming actress Amelia Grant comes face-to-face with bestselling novelist Gloria Diamond in preparation for her role in a biopic about Gloria's long ago, once-in-a-lifetime romance. But nothing is quite what it seems, and explosive truth after explosive truth is expertly revealed by Cantor as Amelia tries to separate fact from fiction

in Gloria's life. Cantor will sign copies of this and the hardcover edition in January.

* Clare, Alys. [The Stranger in the Asylum](#) (\$18.99). London, April 1882. When cool-headed Phyllida visits the World's End Investigation Bureau to offer a curious case concerning her fiancé, proprietor Lily Raynor is intrigued—and excited. For accepting the case means taking an unexpected trip to France. Phyllida's fiancé, Wilberforce, is currently in an asylum in Brittany, after a tragic incident which resulted in the death of his father. Did he kill him on purpose—or was it an accident? Lily and her assistant, Felix Wilbraham, head to rural France to uncover the truth, but the case takes an unexpected turn when they discover that the accused man has escaped the asylum and is nowhere to be found. Soon the intrepid investigators are in over their heads. Clare has written several series; this is the latest called World's End Bureau Victorian Mystery.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. [The Best Horror of the Year](#) (Night Shade, \$19.99). Volume Sixteen includes stories by Ramsay Campbell, Tananarive Due, Christopher Golden and Stephen Graham Jones.

Ellsworth, Loretta. [The French Winemaker's Daughter](#) (Harper \$18.99). In 1942 a young woman hides in an armoire from the Nazis who take her father, cradling a bottle of wine he's given her. When she arrives in Paris her aunt is missing and Martine eventually ends up at the Hotel Drouot where Sister Ada rescues her. Move to 1990. Charlotte, a commercial airline pilot, attends an auction with her boyfriend Henri at Hotel Drouot, now the oldest auction house in Paris. Successfully bidding on a box of wine saved from the German occupation during the Second World War, Henri gives Charlotte a seemingly inferior bottle he finds inside the box. Cleaning the label, Charlotte makes a shocking discovery that sends her on a quest to find the origins of this unusual—and very valuable—bottle of wine, a quest that will take her back fifty years into the past....

Gerhardsen, Carin. [The Saint](#) (Norton \$17.95). The book, translated from the Swedish by Paul Norlen, has a multigenerational ensemble cast of Hammarby cops who act like a superhero squad. Their superpower? Collaboration. Published in Sweden in 2011, *The Saint* begins when a 13-year-old jogging in the Herräng forest discovers the body of her soccer coach, banker Sven-Gunnar Erlandsson; he was fatally shot in the neck, apparently while on his way home from a get-together with his four-man poker club. There's a rain-smear note in his pocket, along with four playing cards with no fingerprints on them, indicating that someone besides Erlandsson put them there. Was he a card cheat who drove a fellow player to murder, or is something else afoot? Gerhardsen lets her half dozen detectives take turns with the point-of-view reins, allowing readers to savor the cops' idiosyncrasies (one is a former rock star who appeared on *Idol 2008*) and appreciate their personal dramas.

Kistler, Bonnie. [Shell Games](#) (Harper \$18.99). There's gaslighting galore in this un-put-downable outing which revolves around the veracity of a septuagenarian's explosive allegations. Widowed Florida real estate developer Kate Sawyer, 71, has long been a staple in local business journals and society pages. Recently, she's reunited with—and gotten engaged to—her high school sweetheart, Charlie Mull. On their wedding night, Kate calls 911 in hysterics, claiming Charlie just confessed to a long-unsolved string of murders from the 1980s. Kate's quiet

daughter, Julie, gets caught in the middle when her husband, Eric, hears of the accusations and insists Kate undergo a psych eval, claiming she's been showing signs of dementia. Kate refuses, forcing Julie to weigh in on whether she trusts her mother or thinks she's losing her mind. Kistler masterfully keeps the action thrumming with a series of subtle ground-shifts that force readers to recalculate everyone's motives. The narrative never veers into implausibility as the misdeeds and double-crossings stack up, resulting in the rare page-turner that doesn't deflate in its final act. This will keep readers up all night."—*PW* Starred Review

McKinney, Chris, ed. [Honolulu Noir](#) (Akashic \$16.95). I mentioned this new volume in the Urban Noir Series in November but maybe some of you are looking now at a holiday break in our 50th State. This anthology offers a kaleidoscope perspective on Hawaii's capital city in 13 stories ranging from riffs on Agatha Christie to an investigation involving the real police officer who inspired Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan mysteries series.

Patterson, James/Brian Sitts. [Holmes, Marple & Poe](#) (\$19.99). Three private investigators open Holmes, Marple & Poe Investigations in New York City. They keep their identities secret prompting the NYPD's Helene Grey to go on a mission to unmask them—no matter who gets killed along the way. Good for Patterson fans but no classic.

Pinter, Jason. [Past Crimes](#) (\$18.99). Pinter provides "a refreshing and exciting perspective on the rise of the true crime genre by launching readers headfirst into an immersive near-future world. Everyone lives 24/7 in a virtual reality called Earth+, where true crime simulations are all the rage, while people's physical bodies are abandoned on the planet Earth. Cassandra West is an agent for V.I.C.E., the foremost licensing agency for true crimes. It's her job to convince the families of real murder victims to sell their stories as entertainment for armchair detectives to investigate. Newly pregnant and struggling with debt, she celebrates a successful signing even as she's haunted by the accusation that she may be taking advantage of victims. Then her own husband dies, setting her on an impossible quest for justice."

I like Pinter's earlier work. But caution: "An insightful examination of true-crime entertainment, Pinter's novel also stands as a condemnation of gleaning excitement through other's misery. With a narrative flavor reminiscent of Ready Player One, it nevertheless lacks a similar descriptive charm, owing to prose that tells more than it shows. Stilted character dialogue further dampens the experience, making it a haphazard race toward the conclusion rather than a carefully laid-out journey. Despite its weaknesses, this sci-fi is recommended for fans of Ernest Cline and the crime thrillers of James Patterson."—*Library Journal*

Pitoniak, Anna. [The Helsinki Affair](#) (\$18.99). For December why not head north in your reading to NATO's newest member. Spying is the family business. Amanda Cole is a brilliant young CIA officer following in the footsteps of her father, who was a spy during the Cold War. It takes grit to succeed in this male-dominated world—but one hot summer day, when a Russian defector walks into her post, Amanda is given the ultimate chance to prove herself. The defector warns of the imminent assassination of a US senator. Though Amanda takes the warning seriously, her superiors don't. Twenty-four hours later, the senator is dead. It gets worse from there....

Piper, CJ. [A Chill in the Flame](#) (Sourcebooks \$18.99) is "the first in a standalone dark Romantasy duology. Discover the origins of demons and darkness and uncover the twisted politics behind the sprawling, bloody continent in the Villains books, set in Piper's beloved *The Night and Its Moon* universe."

And for young readers, [The Graveyard Gift](#) by Fern Forgettable, as told by Piper CJ (Random House, \$14.99). "This book gave me all the Wednesday Addams vibes. Young Rosemary can see how people die. She's a student at Fern's school for other demi-fae. Then sinister forces cause one of her classmates to go missing."

* Scott, Justin. [The Sister Queens](#) (\$18.99). I'm a longtime fan of Scott's work. This is unread by me as yet so here is the full *Kirkus* review: "Anthony Bacon, spymaster to the Earl of Essex, snatches Will Shakespeare from a London street to make him an offer he can't refuse. Either Will writes *The Sister Queens*, a new play that barely fictionalizes the rivalry between Elizabeth and the kinswoman she had executed, or Bacon will call out Will's mother, Mary Arden Shakespeare, who's never renounced her Catholicism. The plot twist Bacon insists on is that Mary never plotted treason against the Queen; she was falsely accused on the basis of trumped-up evidence. The play, which Will can hardly decline to write, will surely bring the unnerving partisanship of 1600 England to a full boil. So Will makes every effort to identify the power behind Bacon who's making this foolhardy demand. Is it the spymaster's brother, Queen's Counsel Extraordinary Francis Bacon, or Essex himself, or possibly even Will's patron, the Earl of Southampton? Will is haunted at every turn by the spirit of Father Valente, an unrepentant Jesuit friend who's just been hanged at Tyburn prison. Now if only Father Val could tell him the identity of the prime mover of this dastardly plot, or even what corner of Will's world was likely to produce the next threat to his life and his peace of mind. Veteran Scott crams in enough historical detail for a miniseries before identifying a mastermind who's likely to leave readers as shocked as Will is. Highly recommended for readers disgusted with contemporary politics. Yes, things have been worse."

Shuang-Zi, Yang. [Taiwan Travelogue](#) (Graywolf Press \$18.99). This novel has won the 2024 National Book Award for Best Translated Literature. May 1938. The young novelist Aoyama Chizuko has sailed from her home in Nagasaki, Japan, and arrived in Taiwan. She's been invited there by the Japanese government ruling the island, though she has no interest in their official banquets or imperialist agenda. Instead, Chizuko longs to experience real island life and to taste as much of its authentic cuisine as her famously monstrous appetite can bear. Soon a Taiwanese woman—who is younger even than she is, and who shares the characters of her name—is hired as her interpreter and makes her dreams come true. The charming, erudite, meticulous Chizuru arranges Chizuko's travels all over the Land of the South and also proves to be an exceptional cook. But something causes Chizuru to keep her distance. It's only after a heartbreaking separation that Chizuko begins to grasp what the "something" is. Disguised as a translation of a rediscovered text by a Japanese writer, this novel was a sensation on its first publication in Mandarin Chinese in 2020 and won Taiwan's highest literary honor, the Golden Tripod Award.

Williams, Charles. [Nothing in Her Way/River Girl](#) (Stark House \$19.95). Patrick often selects the hardboiled crime

classics, usually double volumes, republished by Stark House for discussion. Here's one: When Michael Belen runs into the cherubic con man named Wolford Charles in New Orleans, he has no idea he had just opened the door to his ex-wife Cathy. She and Charles and Judd Bolton are working a con on a man named Goodwin, who had been a partner with a contractor named Lachlan down in South America. Lachlan had worked a swindle which had wiped out Cathy and Michael's parents, and now as far as Cathy is concerned, it's payback time.

In *River Girl*, All deputy sheriff Jack Marshall wants to do is escape his troubles when he heads upriver for a little fishing. What he finds instead is Doris, who lives in a shack on a small island with her sullen husband, Roger Shevlin. Back in town, Marshall can't stop thinking about Doris, and keeps coming back to her shack while Shevlin is away, always looking for an excuse to visit. But Shevlin grows wise to his visits, and Marshall is forced to make a decision—to take Doris away or fight for her.

Yokomizo, Seishi. [The Little Sparrow Murders](#) (Pushkin Vertigo \$16.95) is the latest of Yokomizo's classic Japanese crime novels to be reissued. This one, originally published in 1971, is a bloody feast of multiple murders in a terrorized mountain community. Kosuke Kindaichi, the requisite sleuth, seems to be behind at every step — but when he catches up and determines the culprit you will be, as I was, quite surprised.

OUR DECEMBER SMALL PAPERBACK PICKS

(There are only 7 small paperbacks publishing in December)

Bardugo, Leigh. [Hell Bent](#) (\$9.99). Assembling a team of dubious allies, Galaxy "Alex" Stern is determined to find a gateway to the underworld and rescue Darlington from purgatory, in the second novel of the series following *Ninth House*.

* Gramont, Nina De. [The Christie Affair](#) (\$9.99). Brilliantly reimagining the unexpected 11-day disappearance of Agatha Christie that captivated the world, this novel is told from the point of Miss Nan O'Dea, who infiltrated the Christies' wealthy, rarified world to destroy their marriage.

O'Connor, Carlene. [Irish Milkshake Murder](#) (\$8.99). Three cozy novellas that take place on St. Patrick's Day include the tale of a killer green milkshake at a New Jersey luncheonette and another murderous milkshake that takes out a wedding guest on a ferry trip to Inis Mór.

Patterson, James. [The 23rd Midnight](#) (\$10.99). Women's Murder Club #23. When an obsessed maniac turns serial killer Evan Burke's true-crime story into a playbook, adding some of his own gruesome touches, Detective Lindsay Boxer, who put Burke in jail, tracks this elusive suspect, who is determined to put an end to the Murder Club—permanently.

Pekkanen, Sarah. [Gone Tonight](#) (\$9.99). A mother senses danger closing in when her daughter, ready to spread her wings and move away from home, begins asking questions about her past.

Quirk Matthew. [Inside Threat](#) (\$9.99). Secret Service agent Erik Hill puts aside his growing disillusionment with Washington corruption to uncover a conspiracy that forced the President to flee to a doomsday bunker.

Shelton, Paige. [The Poison Pen](#) (\$9.99). Scottish Bookshop #9. Arriving at Jolie's estate in the village of Roslin to examine an antique sword, Delaney Nichols, when a dead body is discovered, digs into Jolie's own fascinating history through a journal linked to King Edward VIII, but when the journal goes missing, Delaney must read between the lines to solve this case.