

BOOKNEWS from

ISSN 1056-5655, © The Poisoned Pen, Ltd.
Volume 37, Number 15
December Booknews 2025
sales@poisonedpen.com tel (888)560-9919
http://poisonedpen.com

4014 N. Goldwater Blvd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85251
480-947-2974



THANK YOU FOR 2025

Holiday Store Hours

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

Closed at 5:00 PM December 24 and 31

Closed all day December 25 and January 1

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.

TUESDAY DECEMBER 2 5:00 PM Virtual Event

Peggy Townsend with Meg Waite Clayton

Townsend discusses [The Botanist's Assistant](#) (Berkley \$19)

Which was our November Cozy Crimes Pick

TUESDAY DECEMBER 2 6:00 PM Virtual Event

Kathy Reichs discusses [Evil Bones](#) (Scribner \$27.99)

Temperance Brennan. Signed books available

THURSDAY DECEMBER 4 1:00 PM Virtual Event

Sally Smith discusses [A Case of Life and Limb](#) (Bloomsbury \$28.99)

A 1901 Christmas murder set in London's Temple Law Courts
The sequel to the delightful clever [A Case of Mice and Murder](#) (\$28.99) Murder and a 1901 children's book copyright case

THURSDAY DECEMBER 4 7:00 PM Live Event

Andrews and Wilson discuss [Tom Clancy Executive Power](#) (Putnam \$32)

The youngest Ryan, Kyle, caught up in a coup in Angola
and their own [The Adversary](#) (Blackstone \$28.99)
9th in the Tier One Thrillers series

Brett Battles discusses [Stuart Woods' Blown Away](#) (Putnam \$30)

Teddy Fay, ex-CIA, master of disguise, gets his man

Jack Stewart discusses [W E B Griffin Direct Action](#) (Putnam \$30)

The Presidential Agent returns...in Virginia Beach, and then....

FRIDAY DECEMBER 5 7:00 PM Live Event

Ace Atkins discusses [Everybody Wants to Rule the World](#) (Harper \$30)

A 1985 spy romp making our December Historical Fiction Pick
A must for Elmore Leonard fans

SUNDAY DECEMBER 7 Holiday Party Live Event

Cara Black discusses [Huguette](#) (Soho \$29.95)

A WWII survivor meets Paris cop Claude Le Duc

Matt Goldman discusses [Dark Humor](#) (Severn House \$29.99)

Minneapolis PI Nils Shapiro heads to Amsterdam after a dark nemesis

Paula Munier discusses [The Snow Lies Deep](#) (St Martins \$29)

There is no more Christmasy book than this taking place in wintry Vermont and making our December Cozy Crimes Pick

FRIDAY DECEMBER 12 7:00 PM Live & Virtual Event

SciFi Friday Club discusses Ray Nayler's [The Tusks of Extinction](#) (\$17.99)

SATURDAY DECEMBER 13 10 AM Live Event

Local Author Fair

Support independently published authors

SUNDAY DECEMBER 14 10:30 AM Live Event

Croak & Dagger Club's Holiday Party

The club discusses Alex Pine's [The Christmas Killer](#) (\$14.99 UK import, may be out of stock)

THURSDAY DECEMBER 11 7:00 PM Live Event

A Double Thriller Treat

Ryan Pote discusses his thriller debut [Blood and Treasure](#) (Penguin \$30)

Our December First Mystery Club Pick

Canada's Steve Urszenyi discusses [Blood Oath](#) (St Martins \$29)
Agent Alex Martel #3

THURSDAY DECEMBER 18 7:00 PM Live Event

The Hardboiled Crime Club discusses Ed McBain's [Sadie When She Died](#) (\$14.95)

DECEMBER 25

Merry Christmas. We are closed to celebrate

SATURDAY DECEMBER 27 11:00 AM Live Event

The Cookbook Club Potluck Party

Bring a new cookbook you discovered this year to share, a culinary memoir you love, or a novel with lots of culinary content
And treats you may bring are always welcome

JANUARY 1

Happy New Year

We are closed to celebrate

SUNDAY JANUARY 4 4:00 PM Virtual Book Launch

Brad Meltzer discusses Meltzer, Brad. [The Viper](#) (Harper \$32)

Escape Artist Series #3

Signed books available

MONDAY JANUARY 5 6:00 PM Virtual Book Launch

Allison Montclair discusses [Fire Must Burn](#) (Severn House \$29.99). A jaw-dropping twist and sophisticated character development mark Montclair's exciting seventh mystery featuring Iris Sparks and Gwen Bainbridge, proprietors of London's Right Sort Marriage Bureau
Signed books available

TUESDAY JANUARY 6 1:00 PM Virtual Book Launch

Laura Dave with Riley Sager

Dave discusses [The First Time I Saw Him](#) (Scribner \$29)

Dave's heart-pounding sequel to [The Last Thing He Told Me](#) (\$17.95)

Signed books available

TUESDAY JANUARY 6 6:00 PM Virtual Preview

Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child discuss [Pendergast: The Beginning](#) (Grand Central \$30)

Signed by both authors. Can be personalized on January 11 by Doug

Books go on sale January 27 with an exclusive souvenir from the book: a party invitation. The recto will be the formal invitation itself, and the verso stamped with "From the archives of AXL Pendergast" and with Constance Greene's psychotic scrawled signature below

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 7 6:00 PM Virtual Event

Robert Dugoni discusses [Her Cold Justice](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$28.99)

Seattle attorney Keera Duggan

Signed books available

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 7 7:15 PM Virtual Event

Candace Robb discusses [A Lion's Ransom](#) (Severn House \$29.99)

The 16th for 14th Century York's Owen Archer, a king's man

Signed books available

THURSDAY JANUARY 8 6:00 PM Virtual Event

Amy Pease discusses [Wildwood](#) (Atria \$28)

The sequel to her 2024 First Mystery Pick [Northwoods](#) (\$17.99)

Signed books available

SATURDAY JANUARY 10 4:00 PM Live Event

Come for the Gothic

Rachel Hawkins discusses [The Storm](#) (St Martins \$29)

Hawkins also writes as Erin Sterling, [The Ex Hex](#) (Harper \$18.99)

Jayne Ann Krentz discusses [The Shop on Hidden Lane](#) (Berkley \$30)

SUNDAY JANUARY 11 4:00 PM Live Event

A Monster of Florence Party

Douglas Preston discusses his novel [The Monster of Florence](#)

(\$19.99) with a slide show illustrating the research he did in Italy with Mario Spezi, and his other books

He also previews and personalizes copies of *Pendergast*, *The Beginning*

MONDAY JANUARY 12 7:00 PM Live Book Launch

John McMahon discusses [Inside Man](#) (St Martins \$29)

The sequel to 2024's [Head Cases](#) (\$19)

TUESDAY JANUARY 13 7:00 PM Live Double Book Launch

May Cobb discusses [All the Little Houses](#) (Sourcebooks \$27.99)

Texas mean moms and mean girls

Ashley Winstead discusses [The Future Saints](#) (Atria \$29)

This is a love story, but not the one you're expecting.

If you wish, on a purely voluntary basis, to give our booksellers a little 2025 Bonus to brighten their holidays, we have created a [Staff Tip](#) entry set at \$3 that can be added to any order.

You can order 2 or more for a bit extra.

Thank you for supporting our independent bookstore and our booksellers.

And warm wishes to you for the holiday season.

Barbara

OUR SUBSCRIPTION CLUB PICKS FOR DECEMBER

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.

To join, gift, or request information please email sales@poisonedpen.com

British Crime Club One Unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Edwards, Martin. [Miss Winter in the Library with a Knife](#)

Cozy Crimes Club One Unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Munier, Paula. [The Snow Lies Deep](#) (St Martins \$29)

Crime Collectors Club One Signed First Printing per month
Atkins, Ace. [Everybody Wants to Rule the World](#)

First Mystery Club One Signed First Printing per month
Pote, Ryan. [Blood and Treasure](#)

Hardboiled/Noir Club One Signed or unsigned First Printing per month

Goldberg, Tod. [Only Way Out](#)

It will ship with the November Pick, Con Lehane, [The Red Scare Murders](#), which was delayed in production until December

Historical Fiction Club One First Printing per month
Qiu, Xiaolong. [The Secret Sharers](#)

Historical Fiction Paperback Club One Unsigned paperback per month

Ross, LJ. [Holy Island](#)

Notable New Fiction Club One Signed First Printing per month
Newman, Catherine. [Wreck](#) with recipes

Romance and Relationships Club One unsigned hardcover or paperback per month

Matthews, Mimi. [The Marriage Method](#)

SIGNED BOOKS FOR DECEMBER

Andrews, Brian/Jeffrey Wilson. [Tom Clancy Executive Power](#) (Putnam \$32). The Navy veterans are a splendid writing team and raise the level of engagement with the bad actors here to a high level. The Ryan at the center of a plot by pissed off Angolan wanna-be President/Dictator to stage a coup and take over his country while the heavily invested Chinese government stays hands off is younger son Kyle Ryan. He's in Luanda as part of a Defense Intelligence Agency team gathering information about Chinese activity and ambitions in Africa when a team of Angolans massacres his colleagues and takes him prisoner. Kyle, not so much an action guy as, well, a geek, strives to stay alive and help any colleagues while the action ramps up towards a takeover of the American Embassy and said coup.

Quickly sucked into action are his sister, Lieutenant Katie of the Office of Naval Intelligence, a strategic thinker, and Kyle and Katie's dad, President Jack Ryan, Sir, stuck in the sidelines in the White House Situation Room. And on the other side we get the serving President of Angola, various other players, and the real antagonist in this thriller, the coup-plotting Victor Baptista who feels the American withdrawal some years back cheated him out of the presidency.

This story is a mix of high action and strategic thinking involving multiple people and agencies/departments of governments. Thanks to actual veterans like Andrews and Wilson it all feels, despite the high drama, real. I can imagine a movie coming in the Clancy-verse.

The authors also present [The Adversary](#) (Blackstone \$28.99). The 9th in the Tier One Thriller series will be Signed here by both authors on December 4 when they will also unveil their ambitious new military fiction imprint for themselves and other authors.

For John Dempsey, it's a time of uncertainty. As a new administration tries to piece together who was behind the assassination of an American president, Task Force Ember is a team without a target. Newly minted POTUS Kelso Jarvis is haunted by strange dreams of a house on fire, and Dempsey's son,

Jake—who has begun his own journey as a SEAL—can't escape the ghost of the father he believes to be dead. But when a routine intelligence-gathering mission in Taiwan goes horribly wrong and one of Ember's own is captured, the team must race to the rescue. The big question: does tomorrow's adversary lie across the Taiwan Straits, or within themselves.

Paperback: [The Adversary](#) (\$19.99).

Atkins, Ace. [Everybody Wants to Rule the World](#) (Harper \$30). Here's a Cold War Caper ignited by a 14-year-old boy's suspicion that his mom's boyfriend might be a Russian spy. In 1985 Atlanta, Peter Bennett worries that his scientist mom's new flame, Gary—who has a funny accent, is not in the phone book, and keeps a gun in his car—is less interested in romance than in gaining access to her work for a government contractor. Peter knows that nobody in authority will take a high school freshman seriously, so he gets in touch with his favorite author, crime novelist Dennis "Hotch" Hotchner, whose writing career flamed out a decade ago. Hotch agrees to help, but trouble soon follows: a Russian hit man appears on the scene, a coworker of Peter's mom is found murdered, and the FBI gets involved. When Peter's kidnapped, Hotch and his sidekick, a brawny drag queen named Jackie Demure, shift into high gear. Atkins peppers the exuberant action with colorful references to '80s pop culture and makes our **December Crime Club Pick**.

Breaking News: Tomorrow Studios has acquired the novel [Don't Let the Devil Ride](#) (\$18.99) by Ace Atkins, which will be adapted for TV by award-winning showrunner Cheo Hodari Coker. The story: "Addison McKellar thought she knew the man she married—charming, successful Dean McKellar—until he vanished. Fearing the worst, she hires private investigator Porter Hayes, an old friend of her father and a legend in Memphis. As Hayes starts pulling at loose threads Addison's entire life unravels. Her husband's prosperous construction firm? It doesn't exist. Instead, her easy, affluent lifestyle is funded by blood money from Dean's shadowy international mercenary firm—and she doesn't even know his real name."

Baldree, Travis. [Brigands & Breadknives](#) (Tor \$28.99). Return to the fantasy world of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling Legends & Lattes series with a new adventure featuring fan-favorite, foul-mouthed bookseller Fern. Fern has weathered the stillness and storms of a bookseller's life for decades, but now, in the face of crippling ennui, transplants herself to the city of Thune to hang out her shingle beside a long-absent friend's coffee shop. What could be a better pairing? Surely a charming renovation montage will cure what ails her! It turns out that fixing your life isn't a one-time prospect, nor as easy as a change of scenery and a lick of paint. A drunken and desperate night sees the rattkin waking far from home in the company of a legendary warrior, an imprisoned chaos-goblin with a fondness for silverware, and an absolutely thumping hangover.... We have a limited supply thanks to Baldree dropping in to sign his book.

Battles, Brett. [Stuart Woods' Blown Away](#) (Penguin \$30). Teddy Fay, aka Billy Barnett in this book so good it could actually surpass one written by Stuart in both voice and plot, is a veteran of spy craft, i.e. the CIA. The latest adventure for master of disguise Teddy, currently second-in-command at Centurion movie studios, is playing a round of golf in Palm Springs with fellow Woods hero Stone Barrington. On the green, the pair start squabbling over petty rule-breaking with Belarusian oligarch Victor Popov, who's in town to stage a takeover of Richards Renewable Energy, a wind turbine business, and rake in billions in contracts for the Belarusian government. After finagling an invite to the lavish birthday party of his favorite actor, Victor again runs into and tangles with Teddy and Stone. At the end of the night, an actress turns up dead in the party's swimming pool, prompting Teddy to investigate. Meanwhile, RRE's chief engineer toils away on a breakthrough wind technology that's in danger of being stolen by a scheming coworker. It's a lot of plot, but readers can rest assured that Battles maintains full control, pulling everything together without skimping on suspense or amusing banter. Devoted series fans will be happy to hear that Battles remains a fantastic steward of Teddy Fay's adventures.

We have a few Signed copies of Stuart Woods' [Finders Keepers](#) (\$30), Stone Barrington, as well.

Black, Cara. [Huguette](#) (Soho \$29.95) takes us back to August, 1945, a dark time still in France where a 16 year-old called Huguette Faure is pregnant thanks to rape by a German officer and on the lam. Returning to her childhood home in Paris is not a choice as her father's enemies also want her dead. Narrowing escaping jail time thanks to kindly cop Claude Leduc, she scores a job with a legendary film director. Her ability with numbers lets her cook the books and begin to envision a life free from the ghosts of her past. But still.... You Black fans will recognize here the grandfather of Aimée Leduc who is inspired by Claude to take up detection, but as a private eye.

Clavin, Tom. [Running Deep](#) (St Martins \$30). There was one submarine that outfought all other boats in the Silent Service in World War II: the USS Tang. Captain Richard Hetherington O'Kane commanded the attack submarine that sunk more tonnage, rescued more downed aviators, and successfully completed more surface attacks than any other American submarine. These undersea predators were the first to lead the offensive rebound against the Japanese, but at great cost: Submariners would have six times the mortality rate as the sailors who manned surface ships. The Tang achieved its greatest success on October 24,

1944, when it took on an entire Japanese convoy and destroyed it. But its 24th and last torpedo boomeranged, returning to strike the Tang. Mortally wounded, the boat sunk, coming to rest on the bottom, 180 feet down. After hours of struggle, nine of the 87 crewmen, including O'Kane, made it to the surface. Captured by the Japanese, the Tang sailors joined other submariners and flyers – including Louis Zamperini and “Pappy” Boyington – at a “torture camp” whose purpose was to gain vital information from inmates and otherwise let them die from malnutrition, disease, and abuse. A special target was Captain O'Kane after the Japanese learned of the headlines about the Tang. Against all odds, when the camp was liberated in August 1945, O'Kane, at only 90 pounds, still lived. The following January, Richard O'Kane limped into the White House where President Truman bestowed him with the Medal of Honor.

* Cornwell, Bernard. [Sharpe's Storm](#) (Harper \$32). The year is 1813. France is a battlefield, and winter shows no mercy. Amid brutal conditions, Major Richard Sharpe finds himself saddled with an unexpected burden: Rear-Admiral Sir Joel Chase, dispatched by the Admiralty with sealed orders, unshakable confidence, and a frankly terrifying enthusiasm for combat. Sharpe's mission from Wellington is clear, yet anything but simple: Keep Sir Joel alive. Sir Joel could hold the key to defeating Napoleon once and for all—if a warrior like Sharpe can keep him alive.

This Starred Review adds: “The crackling latest historical adventure in Cornwell's Richard Sharpe series finds the British soldier in Southern France in 1813, where he's fighting against the armies of Napoleon at the tail end of the Peninsular War between England, Spain, and Portugal. After capturing a village he'd been ordered to avoid, Sharpe is tasked with escorting his old friend, rear admiral Sir Joel Chase, on a mission to storm the fortress of General Soult, marshal of the French Empire. Sir Joel's bravado and thirst for combat keep the pair in constant danger, as does the resentment of Lt. Col. Nathaniel Peacock, a coward who thinks command is a measure of social status unfitting for the lowborn Sharpe.... As usual, Cornwell nimbly melds Sharpe's action-hero theatrics with a vivid historical setting, offering a smart study of the past that's punctuated by thrilling bayonet thrusts and exploding cannon shot. It's a heart-pounding treat for history buffs and military thriller fans alike.”

Goldman, Matt. [Dark Humor](#) (Severn House \$29.99). Nils Shapiro, the ace PI who has cracked many a challenging case, gives himself one: tracking down the drug kingpin whose actions resulted in Nils' wife's murder two years ago. Despite the urgings of everyone in his life, Nils can't let it go. Then a visit to Sammy's daughter, a disgraced cop serving time for abetting her father, gives Nils a tenuous clue to follow in the person of the prison guard who is clearly informing Sammy who visits his girl. So summoning up his PI skills, Nils goes deep undercover and heads to Amsterdam on Sammy's trail. There by chance he meets up with another person on a quest....

Mukherjee, Abir. [The Burning Grounds](#) (Random House UK \$41). We snagged only 4 of this latest by this acclaimed author.

In the Burning Ghats of Calcutta where the dead are laid to rest, a man is found murdered, his throat cut from ear to ear. The body is that of a popular patron of the arts, a man who was, by all accounts, beloved by all: so what was the motive for his murder? Despite being out of favor with the Imperial Police Force, Detective Sam Wyndham is assigned to the case and

finds himself thrust into the glamorous world of Indian cinema. Meanwhile Surendranath Banerjee, recently returned from Europe after three years spent running from the fallout of his last case, is searching for a missing photographer; a trailblazing woman at the forefront of the profession. When Suren discovers that the vanished woman is linked to Sam's murder investigation, the two men find themselves working together once again—but will Wyndham and Banerjee be able to put their differences aside to solve the case?

Munier, Paula. [The Snow Lies Deep](#) (St Martins \$29). Our **December Cozy Crimes Pick** is the captivating seventh case for former Army corporal Mercy Carr and her retired bomb-sniffing Belgian shepherd, Elvis. Mercy tackles a string of murders that hit uncomfortably close to home. At the outset, the sleepy town of Northshire, Vermont, is gearing up for its annual Winter Solstice Soirée. On the night of the party, the event's Santa Claus—Lazlo “Uncle Laz” Ford, who also reluctantly serves as Northshire's mayor—fails to show up. Concerned, Mercy and Elvis go sniffing around town, only to discover Uncle Laz's dead body, hollowed out and stuffed with a flaming yule log. That turns out to be merely the first in a string of murders that plague picturesque Northshire before the holidays, which a determined Mercy discovers might be linked to.... The picture Munier paints of a small town in full wintry holiday swing is charming. While a murder or two is gruesome, all take place off-page.

Newman, Catherine. [Wreck](#) (Harper \$26.99). This Exclusive Edition comes with a bonus essay and recipes for our **December Notable New Fiction Pick**. “In this utterly joyful standalone novel, Newman brings back the beloved star of her summer smash hit *Sandwich*. But instead of braving Cape Cod's overpriced clam shacks, she's cozied up for fall in her Massachusetts home, desperate to get to the bottom of her freaky new rash, a mysterious local train accident, and—just maybe—how to live a life of meaningful love in a world of brutal impermanence.” —*Oprah Daily*, “25 Best Books of Fall 2025”. “*Wreck* is an emotionally packed reminder that much of our lives is spent with spouse, kids and parents. And that if you can pick between worrying about what's coming and living authentically in the moment, you should let your heart settle where it grows the most—and that might just be your living room.” —*The Washington Post*

I missed [Sandwich](#) (\$18.99 but *Wreck*, which the author signed for us and which has vaulted up the bestseller lists, seems the **perfect Notable New Fiction Pick** on which to end 2025.

Pearl, Matthew. [The Award](#) (Harper \$30) begins as a wryly funny satire of thwarted literary ambition, but it quickly evolves into something darker and more disturbing. David Trent is an aspiring novelist in Cambridge, Massachusetts, trying to navigate his ambitions in a place that has writers around every corner. His wife is supportive and employed, while David spends his time working on his Great American Novel. They are so broke, and real estate is so ridiculously expensive in Cambridge, Massachusetts thanks to Harvard that they take a ridiculous apartment housed in the ceiling above a Very Famous Author named Silas Hale who, beneath his celebrated image, is a bombastic, vindictive monster who tortures his tenants by refusing to turn on the heat in freezing winter. In fact Silas refuses to allow his new neighbor even to make eye contact with him—until young David wins a prestigious award for his new book. Suddenly Silas is interested—if intensely spiteful. Color him envious. But soon, the

administrator of the award comes to David with alarming news, and David, still consumed and with his moral compass skewed, makes some desperate choices which all manner of luck, good and bad, compound. Despite its comic elements this is a dark story about the cutthroat literary scene and how it warps people.

Pote, Ryan. [Blood and Treasure](#) (Penguin \$30) is a debut thriller by a former Navy pilot making our **December First Mystery Club Pick**: “Evoking equal parts Clive Cussler and Tom Clancy, this novel is high-speed, high-stakes, and relentlessly entertaining.” —Mark Greaney. Both Dirk Cussler and Mike Maden praise it, Mike calling it a “gut-punching, white-knuckled techno-thriller ride in a big adventure that catapults from the cold void of space to the deserts of the ancient prophets. Piloted by several fresh and original characters, Ryan Pote's debut novel pushes the story's airframe to its max in a series of rivet-busting plot twists more harrowing than an Immelmann turn in a helicopter. Strap in, hold on, and grit your teeth as you careen toward the sudden impact of the climactic ending.”

The International Space Station suddenly loses contact with Earth. When a NASA tech devises a way to restore the feed, the images that come through are unfathomable: a scene of terrible violence, the crew unresponsive, droplets of blood hovering in zero gravity. But which of the astronauts on board would have done such a thing? And why? Off the coast of Mozambique, former special ops pilot and current treasure hunter Ethan Cain sees something he can't believe: an object shot out of the heavens plunging deep into the Indian Ocean. When he goes to investigate, it becomes even less intelligible. A space capsule has crashed into the sea, and inside is a woman—alone, unconscious, and injured. Ethan knows he must save her. What he doesn't know is who she is, how she got there . . . or why she's the only survivor of a killing spree conducted 254 miles up in the sky.

Qiu, Xiaolong. [The Secret Sharers](#) (Severn House \$29.99). This is an unorthodox choice for our **December Historical Fiction Club Pick** but it has so much to say about this history of China under Mao moving up to today and the crime is so apposite to what's going on today in our country that I am moving Signed copies up from January.

Inspector Chen first appeared in Anthony Award-winning *Death of a Red Heroine* in 2000, also a First Mystery Club Pick. I have brought Signed copies of all his subsequent investigations to you ever since, books that have sold millions around the word and inspired BBC radio plays. And now he's back no longer a highly placed member of the Shanghai police but sidelined with a kind of political job after he spoke out against corruption and more in the Party in his last case. And he's doing some private eye work. So when he's approached to discover how a fortune teller in an old neighborhood has been disappeared, and his real estate mogul client is willing to pay a huge sum to find the man, Chen takes it on.

The extra you get is poetry. Qiu is a distinguished poet himself. And he structures this narrative with poems by major poets of earlier eras followed by a poem by our detective Chen, actually of course Qiu. You may not be into Chinese poetry but take the time to enjoy and contemplate both the old and new work presented here.

Reich, Christopher. [The Tourists](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$28.99). I've been a rabid fan of Reich's superb international thrillers for forever. 2024's [Matterhorn](#) (\$16.99) introduced Mac Decker,

formerly of the CIA living contentedly under the alias of Robbie Steinhardt in a small Swiss alpine village, Zinal. Then it all blows up when his son Will, himself an agent, is killed high in the Alps. What mission was Will on, and what plot was he trying to stop?

The Tourists finds Mac still grieving but making a new life. He's in Paris where he hopes to propose to Ava Attal, once Mossad's deadliest operative. Ring in his pocket, dinner ordered, he's risking the big ask when her phone rings, she gets up—and disappears. So here is Mac searching all of Paris to find her which is a nifty tour of the City of Lights for you the reader as Reich knows it well. As he does we gradually learn of a deadly plan in play where a meeting in Versailles will be the stage for a horrendous coup. What makes this book so good is more than the rapid pacing and assured plotting, it's the marvelous characters that a pro like Reich can sketch in or elaborate, either way bringing his cast to vivid life. Highly recommended.

Reichs, Kathy. [Evil Bones](#) (Scribner \$27.99). Small creatures—a rat, a rabbit, a squirrel—have been turning up throughout Charlotte, North Carolina, mutilated and displayed in a bizarre manner. But one day, as Tempe is relaxing at home alongside her aimless, moody great-niece Ruthie, she's diverted by a disturbing call. The perp is upping the ante. This find could be human. Tempe visits the scene and discovers that the victim is a dog. Someone's pet. As one who has always found animal cruelty abhorrent, Tempe agrees to help apprehend the person responsible, and she acquires an equally outraged ally in semi-retired homicide detective Erskine "Skinny" Slidell. Needing a better understanding of possible motives, Tempe seeks input from a forensic psychologist. The doctor has no definitive answer but offers several possibilities, warning that the escalating pattern of aggression suggests even more macabre discoveries—and a shift in the perp's focus to humans. And then it happens—a woman is found disfigured and posed in a manner that mimics the animal killings.

Rinker, Sherri Duskey. [Steam Train, Dream Train, Next Stop Christmas](#) (Chronicle Books \$18.99). For Ages 3-5. On the dream train, the workers know their tasks by heart, for when each new December starts, the Christmas Train takes to the air, transporting magic everywhere. Setting off on an epic journey of holiday cheer, the crew goes full steam ahead celebrating Christmas, inviting little readers to say goodnight to their favorite animals before tucking in for sweet holiday dreams.

Stead, Philip C. [A Snow Day for Amos McGee](#) (Roaring Brook Press \$19.99). A cozy winter tale of hope and joy featuring Amos McGee, the friendly zookeeper and his squad of loveable animals, for ages 3-6.

Stewart, Jack. [W E B Griffin Direct Action](#) (Putnam \$32). Charley Castillo, the original Presidential Agent, is in Virginia Beach to visit his son when two gunmen appear. Charley is able to thwart a deadly mass shooting, but he is hit and badly injured. Meanwhile Pick McCoy is at the Naval Academy catching up with some old friends. When the news of the attack reaches him, he senses that this is no random event. While Charley clings to life, Pick searches for the men responsible and in the process uncovers a deadly plot—and swears revenge. Navy fight pilot and Top Gun veteran Jack has written some top-notch Top Gun thrillers in the four-book [Battle Born Series](#) and will be crafting stirring adventures for Jack Ryan, Jr. In short, he's a writer to watch—and he's still flying, albeit commercially.

* Stokes Chapman, Susan. [The Twelve Days of Christmas](#) (Harvill UK \$39). The air glitters with hope as the snowy village of Merrywake celebrates the Christmas season after the tumult of the Napoleonic Wars. As the Viscount's famous Twelfth Night Ball draws closer, many of the villagers have a story to tell – we meet a lovelorn vicar and kindly maid reunited after a misunderstanding, three sisters vying for the hand of a dastardly duke, two servants hiding a dangerous secret and a soldier making his way home, unsure of the welcome he might receive. As their tales braid together, we see life and love in the village from below stairs to high society. Reimagining each of the traditional carol's gifts, and written in tribute to Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer, here is a collection of festive tales filled with seasonal cheer and heart-warming characters. Will the challenges and mysteries that the Viscount's guests encounter be resolved by the night of the ball?

Urszenyi, Steve. [Blood Oath: An Alex Martel Thriller](#) (St Martins \$29). In the heart of Africa, CIA Special Agent Alexandra Martel's safari with her father spirals into a deadly game of betrayal when he is kidnapped by rebels. Suddenly, her peaceful Serengeti vacation transforms into a desperate race against time. As the general is held by local rebels, Russian mercenaries and Chinese MSS operatives descend on East Africa, all hunting the military secrets locked in her father's mind. Alex assembles an elite team to navigate the treacherous terrain, but complications arise when her CIA boss, Caleb, shows up unexpectedly, stirring feelings she's tried to bury since her husband's death. As competing forces close in, Alex uncovers betrayals stretching from the Serengeti to the highest levels of global intelligence.

"*Blood Oath* is as unforgiving as the African savanna—raw, relentless, and charged with danger at every turn. Steve Urszenyi delivers a high-stakes, high-speed thriller packed with pulse-pounding action and puts us back in the field with one of the genre's most unforgettable heroes—Special Agent Alex Martel. This is smart, razor-sharp storytelling."—Brad Thor

Washington, Bryan. [Palaver](#) (Farrar Strauss \$28). A queer Black man who's swapped Houston for Tokyo reconnects with his estranged mother and rebuilds his mental health, thanks to his chosen family. He's found a niche in Japan as a private English tutor and is sleeping with a married man; she came from Jamaica via Canada to raise a family in Texas. They have been out of touch for years when he phones her. Concerned about the son's safety, given his previous suicide attempt, she takes a break from her dental tech job and flies over unannounced. They circle each other uneasily, irritable and quick to take offense. Much remains latent between them, particularly the physical abuse and homophobia that led to their estrangement. The low-key plot builds through memories and interactions. The close third-person narration expands the view by slipping from present to past and back, drifting to Jamaica and Houston. As in Washington's first novel, *Memorial*, the characters' cool affect conceals deep emotions.

Washington's latest is the story of a remarkably unhappy family reunion. At the center is "the son," a gay man from Houston who fled to Tokyo after his family rejected him for his queerness. Now, over a decade later, his mother has shown up on his doorstep, responding to a distressed call from him. She wants to reconnect, but after so many years of distance, is a relationship even possible?

HOLIDAY SHOPPING

Free Gift Wrap. Worldwide Shipping (Schedule to come).

Gift Cards

[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.

Book Club Subscriptions

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. Pat the curator keeps a form of preferences to consult. 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.

POISONED PEN LOGO MERCHANDISE

[Book Bags](#) (\$15)

[Cap \(Black\)](#) (\$17.95)

[Cap \(Red\)](#) (\$17.95)

[Drink Koozie](#) (\$3)

[Enamel Pin](#) (\$9.99)

[Mugs](#) (choose Black, Red, White) (\$12)

[Poisoned Pen Pen](#) (black with red) (\$12.95)

[Poisoned Pen Tee Shirts](#) (large range of sizes, red, black, or white)

AND POISONED PEN MERCHANDISE ON BONFIRE

[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.

GIFT IDEAS

Bo-Reum, Hwang. [Every Day I Read](#) (Bloomsbury \$27.99). This invitation to 53 Ways to Get Closer to Books is just the right gift. It's an invitation to reflect on one's relationship with reading and celebrate the joys of books, providing many quiet moments for introspection and reflection, encouraging book-lovers to explore what reading means to each of us. While this is a book about books, at its heart is an attitude to life, one outside capitalism and climbing the corporate ladder. Lifelong and new readers will take away something from it, including a treasure trove of book recommendations blended seamlessly within. We suggested to read, journal, and annotate this and his other books. And here's [a suggested playlist](#) to go along with however you choose to enjoy this book.

Drout, Michael DC. [The Tower and the Ruin](#) (Norton \$35). "J.R.R. Tolkien's Creation" combines scholarship and memoir to reflect on 50 years of reading and studying Tolkien. Glimpse the making of not only *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Silmarillion* but also lesser-known books such as *The Fall of Gondolin* as well as Tolkien's poetry and innovative scholarship. All inspired by his home in Great Britain and probably some of the Continent, but never New Zealand.

Dylan, Bob. [Point Blank](#) (Quick Studies \$45) is the first major publication of Bob Dylan's artwork in over a decade, featuring nearly 100 never-before-seen drawings. Bob Dylan is a master at telling stories, creating moods and provoking feelings—not only in music and the written word but also in visual art, which he has been creating since the 1960s. This publication of his art features nearly 100 black-and-white drawings that were completed between 2021 and 2022 and served as the basis for his latest exhibition—also titled *Point Blank*—at London's Halcyon Gallery in early 2025. The works vary between portraits, still lifes, and landscapes: roller-skating lovers, a suit of armor, a suspension bridge, a karaoke singer, a roll of Scotch tape, a Parisian canal, a man with a crooked smile.

Giesecke, Annette. [Classical Mythology of the Constellations](#) (Black Dog & Leventhal \$30) Many stargazers can identify the bear-shaped constellation known as Ursa Major or spot Orion's famous belt in the night sky, but who exactly was Ursa Major, and why is Orion's belt so recognizable? Giesecke answers these questions and so many more here, teaming up again with illustrator Jim Tierney to feature the 48 constellations first identified nearly 2,000 years ago by the ancient Greek astronomer Ptolemy, as well as 40 constellations added centuries later to his original list. The myths behind each constellation are credited to a "synthesis of the best-known versions... a range of voices from classical antiquity," a recognition of the time-honored oral traditions that passed stories from the Bronze Age forward to modern times.

Gillingham, Paul. [Mexico: A 500 Year History](#) (Grove Atlantic \$35). Don't let the current immigration and drug wars deter you from reading about our neighbor and its remarkable history over the past 500 years. The story begins in 1511 with a shipwreck of Spanish sailors in the far south, moves to Cortes and his army of adventurers and on through the centuries. You will be surprised at how progressive Mexico is—it abolished slavery in 1829. Will it be able to overcome the violence of the cartels as is yet unanswered.

Gorey, Edward Charitable Trust. [E Is for Edward, A Centennial Celebration](#) (Workman Press \$60). This is a very large fabulously illustrated volume (350 of them, color and black & white), a well produced genuine coffee table book, and a wonderful gift idea for people who watch, say, *Masterpiece Theater*, or just fans of this special artist.

Gulli, Andrew. [Best of "The Strand Magazine": 25 Years of Twists, Turns, and Tales](#) (Blackstone \$29.99). This is a collection of top notch stories—it really is a gem! And perfect to dip in and out of during the busy holidays. Foreword by Alexander McCall Smith who has a story herein. The roster runs from openers by contemporaries writing outside their wheelhouses: Connelly, Deaver, James Lee Burke, Joyce Carol Oates, Jonathan Rabb, Jo Nesbø, Lorenzo Carcaterra, Ruth Ware, RL Stine, Charles Todd, Walter Mosley.... Burke and Mosley really have an edge to theirs! But also by older authors like Ray Bradbury, Tennessee Williams, Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells, PG Wodehouse. Watch our [lively discussion](#) with the Gullis, Deaver, and Mosley—it has some revealing insights into writing stories and the history of *The Strand* which the Gullis revived after a long hiatus, and which never escapes the legacy of Sherlock Holmes.

* Herron, Mick. [Slow Horses](#) (Soho \$39.95) This illustrated hardcover Collector's Edition of the first of the hit *Slow Horses* spy stories features a fold-out poster depicting Slough House in all its ragged glory, a die-cut paper-over-board cover that peeks through to full color endpapers, stenciled edges, a full color poster of the Slough House Building and key characters bound into the back of the book plus Slough House-inspired illustrations, and a new preface from Mick Herron. "Mick Herron never tells a suspense story in the expected way.... In Herron's book, there is no hiding under the desk."—*The New York Times Book Review*

We also have some Signed copies left of the 9th in series: [Clown Town](#) (\$29.95). Both together would make a nifty gift.

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.

Nintendo. [Rosalina's Storybook](#) (\$24.99). A very, very long time ago a young girl spotted a rusted spaceship holding a small star child, Luma. This is the tale of that young girl and that star child going on a great journey together, searching for one thing and finding something else altogether. This is the tale of Rosalina and the Lumas and the secret of their special bond. Featuring the actual art and story from Super Mario Galaxy, "It's a bravura piece of design that pulls off stunts no one else has even thought of."—*Edge Magazine* on a book to appeal to players in the Super Mario Galaxy.

Mustich, James. [1000 Books to Read Before You Die](#) (Workman \$40) is not morbid but a Discovery List—entertaining, enlightening, and generating a checklist for you.

Longhurst, Erin Niimi. [Omoiyari](#) (Harper \$13.99). Recommended to me by one of our longtime sales rep after she read my comments in the November 10 Enews about Japan. *Omoiyari* is a form of selfless compassion – "putting yourself in the shoes of others, and from their perspective anticipating their needs, acting in a way that might make them at ease, happy or comfortable." This book will help you embrace *omoiyari* and bring joy and happiness into your own life and the lives of others. From *Omotenashi* (Japanese hospitality), *Kirei* (cleanliness and organization) and *Mottainai* (reducing waste) to *Zakka* (finding beauty in the mundane) and *Senbazuru* (the origami art of folding one thousand paper cranes), there are so many different ways that the Japanese emphasize the importance of community and helping others.

More Comfort Reading 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.

Kondo, Marie. [Letter from Japan](#) (Crown Publishing \$30). This handsome little hardcover is ace at explaining values and customs, traditions and sensibilities of Japan, many of which I encountered on our month there in October. *Ikigai*, for example, that thing that gets you out of bed every day, the feeling that you matter and you have purpose. "Language carries our values. Our words shape our relationships and ultimately our shared reality. In a time when so much feels uncertain," Kondo writes in perfect agreement with me, "I believe it's more important than ever to speak with intention, to write with kindness."

Also you can learn about anime and why Hello Kitty is a Thing, also about gardens and, of course, tidying up.

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.

[Sherlock Holmes Playing Cards](#) (\$14.99). 54 card deck comes with a booklet containing notes on what's in the deck.

PUZZLES (and we have some Jigsaw Puzzles too)

Johnson, Maureen/Jay Cooper. [You Are the Detective: The Creeping Hand Murder](#) (Ten Speed Press, \$19.99). This baffling case offers would-be detectives lavishly illustrated with two-color drawings of the crime scene and dossiers of wily suspects. Only the most clever minds will be able to piece together the clues on each peculiar page in order to solve this suspicious death.

Karber, GT. [Bordergrams](#) (St Martins \$17). Officially, you are a diplomat, working to carve up unstable regions into peaceful territories. Unofficially, you're a secret agent working for the Division, and their ultimate mission is classified. In each of these word puzzles, you're given a map filled with words, alongside a series of cryptic clues. To solve the 80 puzzles herein, use the clues to divide the map into equally-sized territories with a common theme. It's easy at first, but like any spy mission, it always gets more complicated.

And don't overlook [Merry Murdle](#) (\$16). Santa Claus is missing! And Deductive Logico is on the case, solving 25 murders most foul this holiday season. Can you help him sleigh the culprits?

Other Karber Murdles:

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?

Lewis, Henry. [The Bookshop Murder](#) (Hachette \$28). The Mystery Agency returns with a brand new escape-room style puzzle solving mystery for all ages! Perfect for fans of *Murdle* and an Agatha Christie story. London, April 1929. As the sun rises one crisp spring morning, it reveals a body lying in the centre of Bookseller's Row, a narrow alleyway in the West End famed for its bookshops. D.I. Waterstone soon arrives on the scene and discovers the body belonged to James R. MacMillan, a property developer who planned to level Bookseller's Row to build luxury apartments. It appears every shop keeper on the street had motive to murder MacMillan, but who committed the crime? Put yourself to the test, and follow the story, working your way through a whole host of challenges—from deciphering clues at crime scenes and searching for hidden pieces of evidence in the pages—to satisfy your inner detective. Can you step into the Detective Inspector's shoes and solve the case?

Moore, Dr. Gareth. [The Murder Mystery Club Puzzle Book](#) (Andrews McNeel \$17.99). A clever mix of crosswords, riddles, and brain teasers that let readers play detective. Cozy, challenging, and satisfying to solve. Perfect for anyone who binges crime shows and knows they could outsmart the detective.

New York Times. [Puzzlemania](#) (\$38) is a collection that transforms your favorite digital games into a beautifully designed book that's perfect for solo play, family game night, or gifting to puzzle-obsessed friends. Wordle, Spelling Bee, Connection, Minis, and more.

Point, Rosie A. [Murder Among the Stacks: Sleuth & Search](#) (Adams Media \$15) is a book that pairs a classic small-town sleuthing with 50 themed word search puzzles (created by Charles Timmerman) helping readers solve the case! As the story unfolds, signs point to bookstore owner Abby Jones as the person who poisoned bestselling author Brooke Pines. She knows it is up to her and her mischievous cat, Reggie, to solve the murder and clear her name. With several promising suspects including Brooke's personal assistant and even her pushy mother, Abby looks for clues to crack the case. With each chapter, there is a corresponding puzzle helping readers work towards solving the crime. With time running out, readers join Abby in becoming amateur sleuths to help to solve one of Cranberry Creek's biggest murder mysteries!

And to help with all the word puzzles,

Merriam-Webster. [The Collegiate Dictionary 12th Edition](#) (\$24.95). It's first update in many years, so expect over 5,000 new words. I expect many of them to be a complete surprise. Right now its word of this year is "parasocial."

Plus

Last, Natan. [Across the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of the Crossword Puzzle](#) (Pantheon \$29) fills in the history and continuing importance of the crossword puzzle. I have done them most of my life and think it's a brain food activity. If you haven't yet succumbed to word game mania this may convince you to try your hand at one.

T'IS THE SEASON TO BE READING

* Benedict, Alexandra. [Christmas Cracker Killer](#) (Simon Schuster UK \$34 Signed). Only 4 remain of the new holiday mystery by Britain's Benedict. Puzzle compiler and former Christmas skeptic Edie O'Sullivan returns with a win for a two-day Christmas break in a hotel on a remote Scottish island, she's looking forward to a picture-perfect Christmas full of winter walks, roaring fires, good books and even better whisky. But when a guest dies under mysterious circumstances, Edie realizes that there is a killer amongst them. As more guests begin to die, it's up to her to solve the strange riddles found in the victims' Christmas crackers and stop the killing spree. But as she gets closer to the truth, she puts herself in the way of a devious and clever murderer. Can Edie solve these Christmas killings before she becomes the next victim?

We have the [Unsigned UK edition](#) (\$26) as well.

Benedict's earlier seasonal mysteries that always sell like hotcakes are [The Christmas Murder Game](#); [Murder on the Christmas Express](#); [The Christmas Jigsaw Murders](#); [The Merry Christmas Murders](#) (\$16.99 each).

* Bowen, Rhys. [The Twelve Clues of Christmas](#) (\$8.99). Scotland, 1933. While her true love, Darcy O'Mara, is spending his *feliz navidad* tramping around South America and her mother is holed up in a tiny village called Tiddleton-under-Lovey with droll playwright Noel Coward, Georgie is quite literally stuck at Castle Rannoch thanks to a snowstorm. It seems like a Christmas miracle when she manages to land a position as hostess to a posh holiday party in Tiddleton. The village should be like something out of *A Christmas Carol*, but as soon as she arrives things take a deadly turn when a neighborhood nuisance falls out of a tree. On her second day, another so-called accident results in a death—and there's yet another on her third, making Georgie wonder if there's something wicked happening in this winter wonderland... Includes an English Christmas companion, full of holiday recipes, games, and more!

Byron, Ellen. [Crescent City Christmas Chaos](#) (Severn \$29.99). "A parental visit, a catfight among holiday parade royalty, a string of thefts, and of course a murder add spice to Miracle "Ricki" Fleur de Lis James-Diaz's New Orleans Christmas.

Cahoon, Lynn. [Merry Murder Season](#) (Kensington \$18.99). Jill King is working to provide gifts for needy kids this Christmas. Jill's store, Coffee, Books, and More, is co-sponsoring a charity dart tournament on Thanksgiving weekend with Chip's Bar, where toys and cash will be collected. She and her new husband, Greg, will be competing as well—that is, if Greg's brother and

his girlfriend don't ruin the evening. But the event leads to something much worse than a family squabble when the bar owner is found dead the next morning after being used as a human dartboard

* Edwards, Martin. [Miss Winter in the Library with a Knife](#) (\$18.99). What more fun than a group invited to play a game this Christmas at an isolated country estate by host the mysterious Midwinter Trust? Even the title of this book is a puzzle to work out. When a snowstorm buries the village, the meticulously selected contestants may find nobody is playing fair.... [The hard-cover](#) is our **British Crime Club Pick for December**.

* Edwards, Martin, ed. [Who Killed Father Christmas?](#) (Poisoned Pen \$15.95). The murder of Father Christmas at one of London's great toy shops is just one of many yuletide disasters in this new collection of stories by the British Library Crime Classics from the Golden Age of crime writing and beyond. Masters of the genre such as Patricia Moyes and John Dickson Carr present perfectly packaged short pieces, and Martin Edwards delivers a sack full of rarities from authors such as Ellis Peters, Gwyn Evans and Michael Innes.

Another British Library Crime Classic edited by Edwards is [Silent Nights](#) (\$14.99), a selection of excellent Golden Age Christmas Mysteries.

Hale, Shannon. [Holly Jolly Kitty Corn—A Picture Book for Young Readers](#) (Abrams \$19.99).

Hannah, Sophie. [Hercule Poirot's Silent Night](#) (\$18.99). It's December 19, 1931. Hercule Poirot and Inspector Edward Catchpool are looking forward to a much-needed, restful Christmas holiday, when they are called upon to investigate the murder of a man in a Norfolk hospital ward. Cynthia Catchpool, Edward's mother, insists that Poirot stay with her in a crumbling mansion by the coast, so that they can all be together for the festive period while he solves the case—in less than a week!

Karber, GT. [Merry Murdle: 25 Fiendishly Festive Logic Puzzles](#) (\$16). Worldwide phenomenon Deductive Logico is on the case when Santa Claus is missing! And Deductive Logico is solving dozens of murders most foul this holiday season. Can you help him sleigh the culprits and deck the halls with justice? A great family activity too. See More by Karber in Puzzles below.

McKinlay, Jenn. [A Merry Little Murder Plot](#) (\$19). During the most wonderful time of the year, famous author Helen Monroe arrives in Briar Creek to be the writer in residence, but her "bah humbug" attitude excludes her from the many local holiday celebrations. To try to spread some Christmas cheer, library director Lindsey Norris invites the new writer in town to join her crafternoon club. Helen politely refuses and when an altercation happens between Helen and another patron, Lindsey suspects the author has been keeping to herself for a reason. Another newcomer, Jackie Lewis, reveals she's visiting Briar Creek as a super fan. Having dealt with a stalker in the past, Lindsey tells Helen about Jackie. When Jackie's body is later discovered in the town park beneath the holiday-light display with a copy of Helen's latest manuscript in her hand, the reclusive novelist becomes the prime suspect in the murder. Librarian Lindsey and her crafternoons aren't so sure....

Palmer, Iva-Marie. [Christmas People](#) (\$18). Some people are Christmas people, but Jill Jacobs is most certainly not. She

hasn't been ever since her hometown love broke her heart on Christmas Eve three years ago. After that, Jill moved to L.A. to pursue her dream of becoming a screenwriter. She hasn't been home in years to avoid her ex, but this winter she finds herself back in drab, suburban Illinois for the holidays. After one very hazy night, Jill wakes up to a hometown that's filled with jolly neighbors, covered in pristine white snow, and seasoned with the smell of peppermint. She realizes that this is more than just a bad hangover... she's stuck in a Heartfelt movie. Enjoy a rom-com with a speculative edge.

Penzler, Otto. [Golden Age Christmas Mysteries](#) (\$17.95). Christmas has served as a fertile background for mystery fiction for a very long time, perhaps because it has the appearance of a time of peace and love while being so at odds with violence, crime, and even murder. This delightful seasonal anthology includes holiday tales from some of the greatest Golden Age mystery authors. It offers such giants of the genre as Ellery Queen, Mary Roberts Rinehart, John D. MacDonald, and John Dickson Carr while introducing lesser-known writers such as Norvell Page, Meredith Nicholson, and Pat Frank.

Rinker, Sherri Duskey. [Steam Train, Dream Train: Next Stop, Christmas](#) (Chronicle Books \$18.99). For ages 3-5 and so cute!

Schertle, Alice. [Little Blue Truck's Christmas](#) (\$18.99). A gem for ages 3-5.

* Smith, Sally. [A Case of Life and Limb](#) (Bloomsbury \$28.99). Former barrister Smith injects her entertaining sequel to [A Case of Mice and Murder](#) (\$28.99), an absolute gem, with a jolt of wit and sweetness. On Christmas Eve 1901, the Inner Temple—a cloistered area of London in which many of the city's lawyers maintain their offices and living quarters—is winding down for the holidays. Sir Gabriel Ward drops into the office of Sir William Waring, head of the Inner Temple, to find the man flustered by a package left on his doorstep that contains a human hand, severed at the wrist, and a note reading: "Can I give you a hand?" An incensed Waring demands that Gabriel find the person responsible so he can spare the Temple the public humiliation of a police presence. The barrister reluctantly agrees. As Gabriel investigates, he also handles accomplished actor and singer Topsy Tillotson's defamation lawsuit against the *Nation's Voice*, a shameless tabloid that's published innuendo about her romantic life. Eventually, the two cases intersect, but Smith keeps things delightfully unpredictable until they do. Elegant prose, expert pacing, and a well-drawn protagonist whose kindness and acuity never feel heavy-handed result in a thoroughly appealing yuletide mystery.

* Todd, Charles. [A Christmas Witness](#) (Penzler \$24). It's 1921. The Yard's Inspector Rutledge is single and newly promoted to Chief so he draws the short straw at Christmas when murder strikes. Chief Superintendent Markum directs him to the Kentish home of a lord recovering from an attempt on his life. In bed with a concussion, the man is convinced someone is trying to kill him after he claims he was struck by the hoof of a running horse whose rider never stopped to check on him. Struggling with his own demons from the war and misgivings about helping a man who, as a colonel, oversaw the suffering of those on the frontlines from afar, Rutledge undertakes an uneasy investigation....with an unexpected outcome.

* Upson, Nicola. [The Christmas Clue](#) (Faber UK \$24). Christmas Eve, 1943. Anthony and Elva Pratt arrive in a snowy English village to run a murder mystery game—and instead discover a real murder. The Pratts had planned for festive cheer, despite the wartime shortages: with Elva's map of the hotel and Anthony's prop weapons to use as clues, the guests in their parlor game would move through the rooms to figure out whodunnit. But when Anthony discovers the cook's sister Miss Silver beaten to death, they instead find themselves investigating a shockingly real crime. The hotel manager Mr. Browning is trying to keep the peace but the guests are agitated, Colonel Colman is about to take over the hotel for the war effort—and the mysterious Mrs. Threadgold hasn't been seen at all. In games, there's only one victim, but this is real life. Can the Pratts puzzle out this Christmas mystery?

FOR HANUKKAH

Goldberg, Tod, ed. [Eight Very Bad Nights: A Collection of Hanukkah Noir](#) (Soho Press). An engaging Hanukkah anthology by various authors including Gabino Iglesias and Ivy Pochoda that scrambles the holiday's traditions into eight so-bad-they're-good nights."—Paula Woods, *Los Angeles Times*

Meltzer, Jean. [The Eight Heartbreaks of Hanukkah](#) (Mira \$18.99). Evelyn Schwartz has the perfect Hanukkah planned: eight jam-packed days producing the live-action televised musical of A Christmas Carol. Who needs family when you've got long hours, impossible deadlines, and your dream job? That is, until an accident on set lands her in the medical bay with one of her chronic migraines, and she's shocked to find her ex-husband, David Adler, filling in for the usual studio doctor. It's been two years since David walked away from Evelyn and their life in Manhattan...As Evelyn revisits her ghosts of Hanukkah past, she and David both begin to wonder if they can have a Hanukkah future.

CLASSICS

Bolano, Roberto. [The Skating Rink](#) (\$17). In the quiet Spanish seaside town of Z, a horrific crime has been committed: a coldblooded murder on a secret ice rink in the abandoned Palacio Benvingut. Who has been killed, by whom, and why? A tense, taut, utterly gripping narrative emerges from the jagged memories and whispered testimonies of our suspects: Remo Morán, a once poet at the helm of Z's tourist industry; Gaspar Heredia, another once poet Remo sets up with a night watchman job at a seedy local campground; and Enric Rosquelles, a corrupt civil servant and tortured romantic. And at the center of their orbit is the beautiful, iron-willed figure skater Nuria Martí, just dropped from the Spanish national team and desperate to reclaim her place. As these characters fatefully collide, this tale of obsession, corruption, passion, and violence builds toward its inevitable, bloody conclusion. In short, serious noir from a Spanish master.

* Christie, Agatha. [After the Funeral](#); [Hickory Dickory Dock](#) (\$18.99). Two Hercule Poirot Mystery reissues.

* Edwards, Martin, ed. [Metropolitan Mysteries](#) (Poisoned Pen Press \$15.95). The streets of London have been home to many great detectives since the days of Sherlock Holmes and Watson, with some of the best authors in the genre taking to the short story form to pit their sleuths against crimes ranging from murders on the Tube to heists from the capital's finest jewelers. With

contributions by Margery Allingham, John Dickson Carr and Dorothy L. Sayers along with rare finds by Raymond Postgate, J. Jefferson Farjeon and many more, this British Library Crime Classic invites you to join some of the greatest detectives ever written on their perilous trail through London's darker underside. I mean, who doesn't want to spend time with Lord Peter Wimsey? Featuring a roster of Scotland Yard's meticulous best, a cohort of daring doctors and a cadre of characterful private investigators, this new selection by Martin Edwards includes eighteen vintage mystery stories from a period between 1908 and 1963 to showcase the city's most compelling classic cases.

Ellroy, James. [LA Confidential](#) (\$19). A reissue of a book now considered a classic. Christmas 1951, Los Angeles: a city where the police are as corrupt as the criminals. Six prisoners are beaten senseless in their cells by cops crazed on alcohol. Three LAPD detectives get involved: Ed Exley wants to eclipse his policeman father's success. Bud White watched his own mother's murder—and is now a time bomb with a badge. Jack Vincennes shakes down movie stars for a scandal magazine. These events will expose the guilty secrets on which they have built their corrupt and violent careers. You can read and rent the movie, also a classic.

Rinehart, Mary Roberts. [The Yellow Room](#) (American Mystery Classics \$15.95). As far as New Yorker Carol Spencer is concerned, the war has spoiled everything. She and Don had been engaged for years and were on the verge of marriage when he was shot down in the South Pacific, leaving Carol on the verge of spinsterhood at twenty-four. So her invalid mother demands that Carol accompany her to the family's summer home in Maine. But when they arrive at the faded mansion, they find it completely locked up. The servants are gone, the lights are dark—and there is a body in the closet. There is a killer on the grounds of the abandoned Spencer estate, and the police believe it is Carol. As war rages across the seas, Carol Spencer fights a private battle of her own—to prove her own innocence and to save her mother's life. The suspense mounts as surprises continue.... Hardcover edition: [The Yellow Room](#) (\$25.95)

COZIES

Fletcher, Jessica/Terrie Moran. [Murder, She Wrote: The Body in the Trees](#) (Penguin \$29). A quartet of friends from Florida have come to Maine to experience a New England autumn, complete with hiking in the woods and fishing. When one of them goes missing, the town rallies to find the presumably lost but otherwise safe tourist. But when newspaper editor Dan Andrews is biking on the trail along a ridge, he looks down and sees a leg caught in the branches of a tree. Count on Jessica Fletcher to uncover the secret reason the victim came to town... and how it led to her murder.

Ireland, Liz. [Mrs. Claus and the Very Vicious Valentine](#) (Kensington \$17.95). Who is the North Pole poisoner? He strikes at the wedding of the winter. Claire and Jake—and April and Juniper will be bridesmaids. Everyone's feeling the love. Even the reindeer. As the bridal party assembles at the Order of Elven Seamstresses for a fitting, Juniper's new boyfriend, Sterling Redwinkle, stops by with a corsage. While he's pinning it on Juniper, he's pricked by a rose thorn and collapses. Though he's rushed to the Santaland infirmary, he dies within hours. It turns out the thorns were covered in deadly poison. But who was the killer's target—sweet Sterling or the now heartbroken

bridesmaid? With Ivy the florist immediately the chief suspect, it's up to Mrs. Claus to solve the crime.

Laurie, Victoria. [A Murder in the Making](#) (Kensington \$27). Dovey Van Dalen, once the belle of 1840s Copenhagen, is now a spellbound, magic-wielding mystic in present-day Washington, D.C., charged with recovering magical property from the unbound—by any means necessary. Dovey didn't expect to fall in love after the age of 200, yet she can't stop thinking about Grant "Gib" Barlow, the gorgeous FBI agent who helped her crack her last case. But she would put him in danger. But then her best friend, fellow mystic, and unapologetic romantic, Ursula Göransdotter, tricks them into a lunch date—during which Gib is alerted that a fellow agent has been murdered in his own home. The state of the crime scene, and of the body, seem to defy logic—but Dovey immediately recognizes the Crushing Curse, which could only be cast by a supremely powerful mystic—like her boss. When another agent is killed in the same manner, Dovey races to find Elric for answers. Meanwhile, the FBI body count rises, and it becomes clear that a rogue mystic is targeting the unbound agents. But why?

Munier, Paula. [The Snow Lies Deep](#) (St Martins \$29). Our **December Cozy Crimes Pick** is the captivating seventh case for former Army corporal Mercy Carr and her retired bomb-sniffing Belgian shepherd, Elvis, as their village in Vermont is gearing up for the annual Christmas Solstice...where Santa is murdered! See Signed Books for more

Point, Rosie A. [Murder By Muffin: Solve the Puzzles](#) (Adams Media \$15). See her latest above under Puzzles and consider adding this December 30 release. Beloved bookstore owner Abby Jones finds herself in another sticky situation when her friend Rose, owner of the local bakery, is accused of poisoning the town's restaurant critic, Carson Pennington, with her famous blueberry muffins. Determined to clear Rose's name, Abby and her mischievous cat, Reggie, follow a trail of crumbs—and clues—that lead them straight into the heart of Cranberry Creek's secrets. From Carson's soon-to-be ex-wife Geraldine, whose own restaurant is failing, to his once-loyal friend Li Hua Liu and his quirky hiking buddy Wesley, everyone seems to have a motive. Solve 50 word themed puzzles while Abby solves the crime.

NEW IN HARDCOVER

Barry, Quan. [The Unveiling](#) (Grove Atlantic \$29). Barry's psychological horror novel opens with a straightforward premise: Striker is a Black film-location scout on an Antarctic cruise that is mostly populated by wealthy white people. She's there for work but also to get away from Christmas and its reminders of her dead sister. The bickering passengers are on a kayak excursion when disaster strikes, leaving them stranded on an icy volcano unsure of what really happened in the accident and to the rest of their group. They discover the remnants of past expeditions and, as the days pass and the group splinters, Striker begins to relive the memories of those who died on the island.

* Berry, Connie. [A Grave Deception](#) (Crooked Lane \$30.99). Kate Hamilton and her husband, Detective Inspector Tom Mallory, have settled into married life in Long Barston. When archaeologists excavating the ruins of a nearby plague village discover the miraculously preserved body of a fourteenth-century woman, Kate and her colleague, Ivor Tweedy, are asked to appraise the grave goods, including a valuable pearl. When

tests reveal the woman was pregnant and murdered, the owner of the estate on which the body was found, an amateur historian, asks Kate to identify her and, if possible, her killer. Meanwhile, tensions within the archaeological team erupt when the body of the lead archaeologist turns up at the dig site with fake pearls in his mouth and stomach. Then a third body is found in the excavations. And DI Tom is tracking the movements of a killer of his own. With the help of 700-year-old documents and the unpublished research of a deceased historian, Kate digs in....

Clare, Cassandra. [Better in Black](#) (Random House \$24.95). For Teen Readers, ten original love stories by the realm of Roman-tasy, featuring fan-favorite couples from Clare's bestselling *Shadowhunter Chronicles*.

Cook, Robin. [Spasm](#) (Penguin \$32). Medical thriller ace Cook is my age, 85, and still going strong, as here. When Laurie Montgomery temporarily steps down from her position as Chief Medical Examiner, she and Jack can Jack's former medical school classmate, Robert Neilson, who is the sole family practitioner in Essex Falls, an idyllic town tucked away in New York State's Adirondack Mountains. Serving also as the Hamilton County coroner, Dr. Neilson is in over his head trying to explain the sudden death of a young, healthy pest control worker on top of an outbreak of rapidly progressive Alzheimer's-like cases, and he pleads with Jack and Laurie to come lend a professional hand. Unable to resist a good mystery and a vacation in one, Laurie and Jack agree to help and head upstate. Nothing seems unusual until the dead pest worker's body disappears....

Danielewski, Mark Z. [Tom's Crossing](#) (Knopf \$40). If you are looking for something Big, Challenging, and Unusual—the *NY Times* gave it a very long and somewhat puzzled review—then this is for you. "Set in small-town Utah in the 1980s, Danielewski's eclectic 1,200-page adventure story follows two boys on their quest to save a pair of horses from the slaughterhouse. Our reviewer wrote that the novel 'sifts gold from a slurry of genre conventions — Stetsons, palominos, Smith & Wesson rifles,' adding that Danielewski 'has always reveled in bridging genre and high-gloss literature; here he blends police procedural, the horror of Stephen King and the postmodern density of David Foster Wallace.'"

In fact, King adds, "This is an amazing work of fiction. I absolutely loved it. At the heart you'll find a blood-drenched story of pursuit and two brave and resourceful children. But there's so much more. I immersed myself. Have never read anything like it."

Daids, Nadia. [Cape Fever](#) (Simon & Schuster \$27). You lovers of historical fiction ought to pick up this gem by the award-winning South African writer Daids. It starts in 1920 in a small community within a colonial empire that WWI has if not ravaged, certainly shaken. Soraya Matas secures a job as personal maid to the eccentric widow Mrs. Alice Hattingh whose estate is not far from Soraya's family living in the Muslim Quarter. Mrs. Alice awaits a visit from her successful son in London while Soraya struggles with Alice's casual classism and racism. Still Mrs. Alice offers to help Soraya write to her fiancé Nour, a ritual that leads to surprising revelations and reconfigurations. "Gothic themes, suspense, folk tales, love and grief" combines to power a narrative for readers of Du Maurier, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, even Isabel Cañas.

I just noticed that it's included in *PW*'s Best of 2025 with this comment: "This claustrophobic two-hander set in an unidentified British colony follows the tense relationship between Soraya Matas, a live-in Muslim housekeeper, and Alice Hattingh, her widowed British boss. As the pair engage in escalating psychological warfare, Davids expands her scope to consider the awful legacy of colonialism—to electrifying effect."

Other books on the list include those we recommended (and got Signed): Lou Berney, [Crooks](#). Chris Pavone, [The Doorman](#). Carl Hiaasen, [Fever Beach](#). Matthew Blake, [A Murder in Paris](#). Kristen L. Berry, [We Don't Talk about Carol](#).

Edwards, Janet Rich. [Canticle](#) (Spiegel \$30). Edwards's fierce, luminous debut novel, *Canticle*, follows a young woman named Aleys in 13th-century Belgium as she seeks a deeper connection with God and runs afoul of the ambitious men who control the local church. Edwards's narrative explores dynamics of love and power, the complexities of faith, and the quiet influence of the beguines, a group of independent women who live in community, committed to serving God and one another. Growing up the daughter of a wool merchant in Bruges, Aleys loves her mother's retellings of the stories of saints and prophets depicted in their family's illuminated psalter. When her mother dies, Aleys refuses marriage to an associate of her father and joins the Franciscan friars, a group of poor but pious men whose simple life appeals to her. They find shelter for her in the beguines' compound, the *begijnhof*, where she meets the wise magistra Sophia, leader of the community; surly Katrijn, who represents the beguines at the wool market; and Marte, a maid who serves the beguines. Friar Lukas, Aleys's Franciscan spiritual adviser and mentor, is convinced she has been touched by God, but his brother, local bishop Jaan, is both unsettled by Aleys's spiritual passion and determined to use her as a pawn in his power games. Edwards draws sharp contrasts between Aleys's genuine search for faith and the calculating power plays undertaken by Jaan and other religious leaders.

"Although set in 13th century Bruges, this is a particularly timely look at gender politics, especially as they relate to religion—how far will men go to hold on to their power and standing, and to what lengths will a woman go to serve her god? A great pick for book clubs."

Evans, Virginia. [The Correspondent](#) (Crown Publishing \$28). Here's a sleeper, a debut grown into a surprise bestseller powered some by author Ann Patchett. Its epistolary structure, portraying a woman who lives her long life by writing and receiving letters (think Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, Janice Hallett via emails). I am a fan of this form, the way it delivers voices and moves the narrative along. And here, reveals how Sybil Van Antwerp finds solace in literature. Most mornings, around half past ten, Sybil sits down to write letters—to her brother, to her best friend, to the president of the university who will not allow her to audit a class she desperately wants to take, to Joan Didion and Larry McMurtry, and Patchett, to tell them what she thinks of their latest books, and to one person to whom she writes often yet never sends the letter. Sybil expects her world to go on as it always has—a mother, grandmother, wife, divorcee, distinguished lawyer, she has lived a very full life. But when letters from someone in her past force her to examine one of the most painful periods of her life—and to realize she needs to send that unsent letter.

Freitas, Donna. [Her One Regret](#) (Soho \$29.95). One afternoon, a new mother disappears, leaving her baby crying alone in a parking lot. Has she been taken, or has she faked her own kidnapping? Freitas deftly uses the narratives of three other women, including the detective on the case, to examine the reverberations of this shocking event, while also questioning the underlying expectations that all women face. It's a thriller but asks a disturbing question about a new mother: does she regret motherhood?

Goldberg, Tod. [Only Way Out](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$28.99) is our December **Hardboiled/Noir Club Pick** by an author being hailed as the successor to Elmore Leonard. With its "unapologetic gripping view into criminal schemes gone bad, bad lives gone even worse, and sad lives redeemed," this noir "takes us to the washed-out edges of the Oregon coast, where lost souls, small-time hustlers, and true believers collide in a derelict resort town. This is a story about escape—what we'll do to get free, who we'll become to stay gone—shot through with black comedy. Sharp, strange, and unexpectedly moving." —Ivy Pochoda

Green, Amy. [Haven't Killed in Years](#) (Berkley \$30) is a twisting puzzle of a thriller starring a woman whose hidden past resurfaces in bizarre, gruesome, and often funny ways. Gwen was born Marin Haggerty. When she was nine, her father was convicted on eight counts of first-degree murder (eight being just the ones they could pin on him) and both parents went to prison (her mother for aiding and abetting). Marin became Gwen and disappeared from the public eye. She has spent the past two decades building a resolutely ordinary life, hoping to avoid the fate her father intended for her: to be just like him. But now a severed arm turns up on her doorstep, with a note: "*Hi, Marin.*" Her safe, staid lifestyle is disrupted; and more than that, Gwen is offended that someone thinks they can get the better of her. She sets out to investigate, but the clues and the characters just tangle her up further. She mostly accidentally finds herself making friends—who are also suspects. Is it time for Gwen—Marin—to come into her own as her father's protégée? Or is she going to surprise herself and set out on her own path?

Hauty, Chris. [Dead Ringer](#) (Atria \$29). Skilled thriller author Hauty digs deep into the records and formulates a startling theory about what really happened on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, using a disgraced Secret Service officer and a Jesuit professor as our guides. In truth there will always be questions about JFK's assassination, so why not this answer?

Hunt, Faulkner. [The Ballad of Innes of Skara Skail](#) (Regalo Press \$30). How I love this unusual action/adventure story that truly talks truth to power and builds upon ancient legends. And it earns its ending. Hunt takes you to the North Atlantic Islands where two young brothers struggle to survive by squatting in a derelict home. But they are driven off and forced to shelter alone on the island's empty barrens. They fall in with two strangers—one, Innes Mackie, returning from exile on the mainland upon the death of his father, and the other, a stranded seasonal worker eager to start a new life. After stumbling upon answers to the island's buried past, the four are drawn into an ancient history of secrets and lies, long hidden by the lawless powers that run Skara Skail, which in the end are no match for surprising kinship and its strength. Lean and cinematic this gem "delivers a journey through storm-lashed landscapes and their overlooked powers, forgotten relics, and the bonds of found family as justice is real-

ized.” Highly recommended.

I loaned my copy to Dana Stabenow who loved it too and concludes her long review with: “The animal characters have their own important roles in the drama, though, from the sheep to the moor ponies to Eustace the escape artist mule to the big bull elk with the banshee call who knows all the secret ways of the island. A rollicking novel with more near misses with disaster for the good guys than Odysseus ever survived, where everyone gets what they deserve and, I’m happy to report, especially the bad guys.”

Indridason, Arnaldur. [The Quiet Mother](#) (Minotaur \$29). In December my thoughts turn to Iceland and its wonderful ritual *Jólabókaflóð*, or “Christmas Book Flood,” where people exchange books on Christmas Eve, and then spend the night reading them with chocolate. Christmas there, I note, begins at 6:00 PM on Christmas Eve, allowing more reading time.

And here is a new story by one of its most distinguished writers. A woman is found murdered in her Reykjavík home, her apartment ransacked. On her desk lies a note with retired detective Konrad’s phone number. Days earlier, she had begged him to find the child she gave up nearly fifty years ago. But Konrad, reluctant to reopen old wounds, turned her away. Now, haunted by guilt, he vows to uncover the truth—for her and for himself. As Konrad digs into her tragic past, he is drawn into a web of secrets, lies, and betrayal. Each revelation points to a hidden life that connects her death to a decades-old murder—and to shadows from Konrad’s own family history.

Lafferty, Paula. [The Once and Future Queen Deluxe Limited Edition](#) (Kensington \$32). reimagines the epic saga of King Arthur, as told from the perspective of his spunky and surprising queen, Vera – complete with time travel and good running shoes!

Ledwidge, Michael. [Closing Time](#) (Hamish Hamilton \$30). In a Patterson style thriller, it’s springtime in Key West, and Michael Gannon is busy supporting his son’s dreams of making it in minor league baseball. But a late—night encounter with a seemingly harmless Australian at a dive bar turns deadly when Gannon unwittingly becomes the prime suspect in a convenience store shoot—out. Seeking the mysterious Australian to clear his name, Gannon uncovers a deadly conspiracy involving a global banker on the run from a shadow paramilitary force that will go to any lengths to stop him.

Lindsey, Erin. [Pearls and Poison](#) (Severn \$29.99). Lindsey’s sprightly fourth case for Pinkerton detective Rose Gallagher finds the intrepid investigator of paranormal activity probing a series of suspicious deaths in Gilded Age New York City. In October 1887, an obsession with the occult swirls through the upper echelons of Manhattan society. Meanwhile, in a dingy apartment building downtown, a series of people have died by poison under bizarre circumstances: none of the victims were tenants of the building, nor did they have relatives living there, and all died on the building’s unused ground floor near strange symbols on the wall. The wealthy parents of the most recent victim hire Rose to look into the matter; it’s her first solo case since her partner, Thomas, moved to San Francisco without warning. Looking for potential clues, Rose joins Mark Twain and other high-profile guests at a séance hosted by purported psychic Madame Mercury, after which the killer targets Rose’s family. “Fortifying her well-oiled whodunit plot with dashes of fantasy and romance, Lindsey

serves up another appealing adventure for the intrepid Rose. It’s an inspired romp.”

McDermid, Val. [Silent Bones](#) (Grove \$28). McDermid is at the top of her game in the masterful latest installment of her DCI Karen Pirie investigation. When torrential rain causes a landslide on a motorway in Scotland, it reveals a crime scene: someone hid a body in the tarmac eleven years before. Journalist Sam Nimmo had been the prime suspect in the murder of his fiancée when he disappeared, and now DCI Karen Pirie and her Historic Cases Unit must find out who buried him, and why. Meanwhile in Edinburgh, new evidence reopens a closed case—by Drew Jamieson, who’s gathered evidence that his brother Tom’s fatal fall on Edinburgh’s Scotsman Steps several years earlier may have been murder. But what did Tom Jamieson’s book club have to do with his demise—and what will they do to keep their secrets? Karen and her team begin to untangle a web of lies, one which connects their murder cases with Scotland’s rich and powerful. They will be tested to their limits—and possibly beyond.

McKenna, Clara. [Murder at Cottonwood Creek](#) (Kensington \$27). Far from England and their beloved Morrington Hall, Viscount “Lyndy” Lyndhurst and his American wife, heiress and equestrian Stella Kendrick—now Lady Lyndhurst—find fossils and murder in Montana when Lyndy’s father Lord Atherly, a fervent paleontologist, heads to America....

Mitchard, Jacquelyn. [The Birdwatcher](#) (Mira \$30). When she is convicted of a double murder, Felicity Wild, a brilliant grad student turned high—priced escort, declares, “I may not be innocent, but I’m innocent of this.” Reenie Bigelow never doubted it. A jury may have given Felicity a life sentence, but Reenie knows that her childhood best friend is not capable of murder. And so Reenie, a journalist, decides to use her deep connections to Felicity’s past to unravel the truth. The more she uncovers, the more Reenie is convinced that the story the prosecution told is wrong, despite the puzzling fact that Felicity said not one single word in her own defense. But there’s one thing Reenie knows for certain: Felicity would never lie. So someone has...

Moss, Tara. [The Italian Secret](#) (Penguin \$29). Pacific Ocean, 1907. A girl embarks on a journey to begin a new life far from home. Naples, 1943. A woman shelters underground from a wartime air raid, praying her husband will return home. Sydney, 1948. Billie Walker, returned from a stint as a wartime investigative journalist, uncovers a dusty box in her father’s old office whose contents—correspondence with a woman on the other side of the world—just might explain how they all are connected. Plunged into a perilous search that will take her onto the first postwar luxury passenger ship to sail across the ocean to Italy, Billie finds herself up against a dangerous adversary—someone with a mysterious grudge against her family—as she races to uncover the secrets her father left behind.

Mughal, Rana. [Dawn of the Firebird](#) (Hanover Square)) Deluxe limited edition. For fans of *The Poppy War*, *She Who Became the Sun* and *The Will of the Many*, an epic fairy tale Romantasy first adult fantasy in a projected trilogy. Khamilla Zahr-zad has wanted nothing more than to be claimed and named by her father, a distant emperor who has never visited her where she lives with her mother’s nomadic tribe, despite the portents of fortune at her birth. Instead, she becomes the apprentice to the tribe’s folk teller,

set apart from the rest of her people. But when tragedy strikes in the form of a raid and the vast majority of her kin are slaughtered, a heavenly magic awakens in her—the *nūr*, the power to wield light. Khamilla and her mother return to the emperor's court, where her status as one of the rare *Eajīz*, or magic users, to be born in her father's empire makes her useful to him. Thrown into the viper pit of court affairs, Khamilla has to learn to navigate politics and what it means to be strong as she fights for the emperor's attention and approval. But just as she feels like she might have earned her place and found her purpose, it is ripped away from her again. In the aftermath, Khamilla finds herself behind the enemy empire's lines, a spy infiltrating their training city for *Eajīz*. As she remakes herself into a different kind of weapon yet again for another force, she nurses her desire for vengeance.

Muller, Eddie. [Dark City Dames](#) (Running Press \$32). In 2001, Eddie Muller, host of Turner Classic Movies' *Noir Alley*, published *Dark City Dames*, an homage to six golden-age Hollywood actresses who left their marks on the silver screen while playing femmes fatales and other morally dicey women. By the time Muller interviewed these actresses, the film business had long "discounted their allure." Muller didn't, and neither will readers of this invaluable expanded edition, which spotlights 10 additional noir actresses and offers an afterword containing "personal remembrances that, at the time, couldn't be included in the original edition." The six featured actresses are heartbreakingly candid: Marie Windsor laments her dashed A-list dreams. Ann Savage recalls a life of trouble and tragedy. Evelyn Keyes's story would have challenged the Hollywood Production Code. The book is lavishly illustrated with promotional film posters, publicity shots, and personal photos. There's a feminist shimmer to the whole production—after all, crime dramas were, as Muller puts it, the only golden-age film genre in which women were the equals of men: "equally tempted, equally compromised, every bit as guilty." —Nell Beram

Murrin, Orlando. [May Contain Murder](#) (Kensington \$28). While his flooded house undergoes repairs, chef-turned-writer Paul Delamare has been offered an accommodation upgrade—an all-expenses-paid trip aboard a private superyacht in the company of Xéra, one of his dearest friends. Paul will help Xéra work on her memoirs as *Maldemer* glides its sumptuous way to the Caribbean. The scenery is stunning, the luxury is unparalleled, and the food...well, at least the dishes that Paul is roped into preparing are delicious. The hired chef, meanwhile, seems completely out of her depth. She's not the only one. Much as Paul adores Xéra, a Parisian socialite who he was introduced to by his late lover, Marcus, he has little in common with the other guests, a motley crew consisting of Xéra's new husband and his grasping family. When Xéra's priceless new necklace goes missing, Paul falls under suspicion. But there's far worse in store, as one of the passengers is found dead in mysterious and grisly circumstances. This locked-room mystery comes with original recipes. I didn't care for the first in this series but this may appeal.

Nelson, PJ. [All My Bones: An Old Juniper Bookshop Mystery](#) (St Martins \$28). Madeline Brimley recently inherited a bookstore in Enigma, Georgia, and survived a murder and arson in series opener [Booked for Murder](#) (\$19), a Lillian Jackson Braun Award finalist, recruits her friend Gloria Coleman, the local Episcopal priest, to help her plant azaleas in the front yard of the old Victorian that houses the bookstore. Turning the soil, however,

uncovers the body of one Beatrice Glassie, a troublesome woman who has been missing for the past six months. When her friend Gloria is arrested for the murder, Madeline is determined to prove her innocence and, as she quickly finds out, there aren't many people in town who hadn't wanted to kill Bea Glassie at one point or another. And the very expensive and rare first edition of a particular volume of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*—ordered by the victim and her sister is somehow tied to the grim death.

This new series, amateur sleuth/cozy, is by one of my favorite authors, Philip DePoy, writing as PJ Nelson.

Ojito, Mirta. [Deeper Than the Ocean](#) (Union Square \$28.99). Beautiful prose sweeps you along a dual narrative spanning the Canary Islands to Cuba (early 20th Century) to NYC, Spain, Cuba, and Key West (in the 21st). Two women struggle with loss, grief, and upended lives tied together by the discovery made by widowed Mara Denis that her great-grandmother, listed among the dead of the 1919 shipwreck of the *Valbanera*, may have had a different fate. Did you know that La Palma, a part of the Canaries, is perfect for growing mulberry trees, hence silk farming and a silk industry? Recommended by me, always on the lookout for debuts of note, and by *Kirkus Reviews*: "[A] story of complex passions, tragic destinies, and Latin American culture that recalls the novels of Isabel Allende...A strong debut graced by vivid settings, strong female characters, and classic storytelling."

Sanderson, Brandon. [Tailored Realities](#) (Tor \$29.99) includes author's notes and stunning interior illustrations for each story. Spanning the genres of fantasy and science fiction, *Tailored Realities* includes ten works of short fiction from the ingenious mind of one of the genre's most beloved bestselling authors. From futuristic detective thrillers to inventive space opera, superhero action, high-tech fantasy, and beyond, these gripping standalone reads have never before been gathered into one volume, with many available here in print for the first time.

* Summers, Georgia. [The Bookshop Below](#) (Redhook \$29) renders an enchanting world of self-sabotage, romance, deadly ink magic, and dearly beloved bookstores. London was once full of shops where books and the magic they held could be exchanged for the priceless: self-extracted teeth, a lock of hair. In contemporary times, the force that imbues books and bookshops with their power, through the particular magical workings of booksellers, is fading. Cassandra in great danger, is called to return, reluctantly, to the bookshop where she was raised, trained, and then banished by her mentor, Chiron. She was once his protégé, destined to become an owner one day. Now, she finds herself reinstated, struggling to rehabilitate Chiron's decayed shop "and all its finicky, unpredictable moods." Cassandra must manage a bookseller she feels lucky to hire, a wonderfully capable woman named Byron; a handsome, magnetic rival named Lowell Sharpe; and the duty she feels to solve the mysteries of what happened to Chiron and why the magic bookshops are disappearing. Cassandra is not sure she wants to be here at all, let alone on the hook for saving everything she knows from destruction. But she feels she owes a debt. She finds she cares about people she never expected to. And she uncovers an enormous secret about her own origins that upends the stakes entirely. "Summers excels at transporting her readers to a dreamy otherworld where anything is possible."

Another December bookish novel combining Dark Academia with second-chance Romance and a touch of witchcraft is Margot Harrison's [The Library of Fates](#) (Graydon House \$30).

Eleanor Dennet, a new librarian at Harvard University's Library of Fates, is adrift following the mysterious death of her predecessor and mentor, Odile Vernet. When Odile's son, Daniel, shows up on campus, Eleanor is surprised that he doesn't remember they were once classmates and lovers. The two met in Odile's seminar in 1995, where they learned of the *Book of Dark Nights*, written centuries ago by a French witch. In a parallel narrative, the students discover the book's magical powers, including its ability to offer predictions of the future in the reader's own handwriting, which only the reader can see. Harrison also shows how the Library of Fates could magically match readers with the perfect book. Now, Daniel and Eleanor discover the *Book of Dark Nights* is missing from the library, and they must recover it or risk losing the library's special qualities. As Daniel gradually remembers his time with Eleanor, the pair rekindle their romance and unearth clues about the missing book. "Harrison keeps the reader guessing with her taut mystery plot, which builds to wild revelations about the depth of the book's power. Readers will be riveted."

Tokarczuk, Olga. [House of Day, House of Night](#) (Penguin \$28). ... "these fragments form a history of the region... Alongside history and memory, Tokarczuk explores identity, transformation, and the meaning of home. Her meditations range from the banal to the surreal: playful riffs on mushrooms are interwoven with weighty existential questions. Lloyd-Jones's translation eloquently captures these various registers." —*The Financial Times* on a new book from this acclaimed Polish author.

Waters, Paul. [Murder in Moonlit Square](#) (No Exit Press UK \$29). When semi-retired Irish nun Sister Agatha Murphy meets Avtar Mehta round the back of his historic Delhi hotel, they form an instant bond over a sneaky smoke and good gossip. Then a street robbery outside the hotel, a dead body inside it, and the disappearance of a pilgrim guest bring the local police to the hotel, determined to close their cases quickly, and with them the Delhi Haveli Hotel. Sister Agatha and Avtar must race to stay one step ahead of the police, the Indian secret service and a hidden killer – as well as keeping their sense of humor through a terrorism scare in the run up to Christmas on the colorful streets of old Delhi.

Wegert, Tessa. [In the Bones](#) (Severn \$29.99). It's almost summer in Cape Vincent, and as the heat rises, ex—professional ice hockey superstar Mikko Helle arrives, ready to move into his extravagantly renovated waterfront home. Mikko is thirty, handsome, and wealthy. He's a stranger in town. There's no reason to suspect Mikko is anything other than he seems. Local married mother Nicole Durham works her connections hard to get hired as his cleaner. She needs this job—and not just because of the money. Nicole is desperate to expose a secret, and she's running out of time. But when Nicole disturbs an intruder while cleaning, New York State Police Investigator Tim Wellington discovers that the luxury mansion is hiding its own unthinkable truth. Deep in the basement lie the bones of a young woman, identity unknown.... Canadian Wegert highlights the many charms of NY's Thousand Islands region in her work—note that this novel starts a new series.

Wilson Wesley, Valerie. [The Mysterious Death of Junetta Plum](#) (Kensington \$27). Harlem, in the Jazz Age. 1926: Harriet Stone, a liberated, educated Black woman, and Lovey, the orphaned, biracial 12-year-old she is bound to protect, are Harlem-bound,

embarking on a new, hopefully less traumatic chapter in their lives. They have been invited to move from Connecticut by Harriet's cousin, Junetta Plum, who runs a boardinghouse for independent-minded single women. It's a bold move. It is also one that thrusts them into a murder investigation when a body is found at the foot of the boardinghouse stairs....

OUR DECEMBER LARGE PAPERBACK PICKS

* Craven, MW. [Nobody's Hero](#) (\$18.99). When a shocking murder and abduction on the streets of London leads investigators to open a safe in Langley for the first time in ten years, they find a note directing them to a few key individuals. Three of the people on the list are dead. The fourth is Ben Koenig. Koenig has no idea why his name is on the list. Then he realizes that he knows the woman who carried out the killings. Ten years earlier, without being told why, he was tasked with helping her disappear. Far from being a deranged killer, she is the gatekeeper of a secret that could take down America, and for the safety of the country, she has been in hiding for years—until now. And if she has resurfaced, the danger may be close. Ben Koenig has to find her before it's too late. But Ben suffers from a syndrome that means he can't feel fear. He doesn't always know when he should walk away . . . or when he's leading others into danger. Darkly comic—"This high-body-count romp is told with such verve and relish that even readers who shy from mayhem might find themselves on Koenig's side as he hurtles from one impossible near-death experience to the next." —*The New York Times Book Review*

* Feeney, Alice. [Beautiful Ugly](#) (\$18.99). What a twist here. And for me the deep magic of this book lies in the remote Scottish island Feeney creates as the landscape of the story. And there is so much more.

Wives think their husbands will change but they don't. Husbands think their wives won't change but they do. British author Grady Green hits the pinnacle of his publishing career on the same night that his life goes off the rails—first his book lands on the New York Times bestseller list, and then his wife, Abby, goes missing while driving home. A year later, Grady is a mere shadow of his former self: out of money and out of ideas. So, when his agent, Abby's godmother, suggests that he spend some time on the remote Isle of Amberly, in a log cabin left to her by one of her writers, it seems as good a plan as any. With free housing for himself and his dog and a beautiful, distraction-free environment, maybe he can finally complete the next novel. But from the very beginning, Grady's experiences with Amberly seem weird, if not downright ominous... "As Grady falls deeper and deeper into insomnia and alcoholism, he begins to realize his being on the island is no accident—and that should make him very afraid....

* Godfrey, Jennie. [The List of Suspicious Things](#) (Sourcebooks \$17.99). This debut is told from the point of view of an adolescent trying to discover the identity of the Yorkshire Ripper: part thriller, part coming-of-age story, and part historical fiction. Miv recruits her best friend, Sharon, to help her in the search. "We'll make a list," Miv says to Sharon. "A list of the people and things we see that are suspicious. And then... we'll investigate them." But in a small town with a powerful gossip mill, anything and everything can seem suspicious: the immigrant who owns the local convenience store; the grieving widower too sad to sleep in his marital bed; even Miv's own father, taking secret calls and sneaking out late at night when her mother is asleep.

The stakes grow ever higher, and the truth ever murkier, as the girls encounter situations well beyond their understanding of the world. Miv and Sharon turn up depressed parents, extramarital affairs, xenophobia and racism, alcoholism, men out of work, and more. “I don’t know if any of the people we know are suspicious,” Sharon muses, “or whether they’re just trying to live their lives.” This isn’t Young Adult reading: “Godfrey succeeds in handling serious, adult themes through the eyes of a young girl without infantilizing or oversimplifying.”

Goodman, Allegra. [Isola](#) (\$18). Talk about survival. The fictionalized story of heiress to a fortune Marguerite de la Rocque de Roberval, destined for a life of prosperity and gentility, who is orphaned, and defrauded by her guardian—an enigmatic and volatile man—and forced to take voyage on an expedition to New France, is hair-raising and triumphant. The journey takes a unexpected turn when Marguerite, accused of betrayal, is brutally punished and castaway on a small island. There, Marguerite finds herself at the mercy of nature—and polar bears. As the weather turns, blanketing the island in ice, she discovers a faith she’d never before needed. “Lushly painted...a perfect read for cozing up by a roaring fire—and feeling thankful you’re not the sixteenth-century heroine the story is based on.”—*People*

Higashino, Keigo. [Invisible Helix: A Detective Galileo Novel](#) (\$18). The body of a young man is found floating in Tokyo Bay. But his death was no accident—Ryota Uetsuji was shot. He’d been reported missing the week before by his live-in girlfriend Sonoka Shimauchi, but when detectives from the Homicide Squad go to interview her, she is nowhere to be found. She’s taken time off from work, clothes and effects are missing from the apartment she shared. 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—she was hours away in Kyoto when Ryota disappeared, forcing Detectives Kusanagi and Utsumi to restart their investigation. 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,” in hopes he can find the nearly hidden threads of history and coincidence that connect the people around the bloody murder—which, surprisingly, connect to his own traumatic past. We recommend this Edgar-nominated series.

Lindqvist, John Ajvide. [The Writing in the Water](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$16.99). Wow, this series start by a Nordic master (translated into English) is a knockout—and a fun riff on Stieg Larsson’s series as carried on by David Lagercrantz, etc. Our lead is not “The Girl Who” but Julia Malmros, a former police officer now a bestseller with her renowned crime fiction series. She’s midlife, divorced, very comfortable living off her large income in Stockholm. And then she’s offered the chance to write the next book in *The Millennium Series*. At first she refuses, she’s too comfortable, and she hasn’t got the tech chops. But does she want to back down from the challenge? So she requests the publisher recommend an expert on programming and hacking. When she meets him, the much younger Kim Ribbing in January, 2019, she sees he has the chops, but he’s also unnervingly direct with hints of a dark past. And suggests sex. Seriously? Then an impossible editor and a press interview blow up her *Millennium Series* contract. Retreating to her summer cottage on the Stockholm

archipelago, she turns to writing her own work, sparks with Kim whose horrific history she and we learn, and then they witness a massacre of a party on a nearby pier, saving just one, a little girl, before the cops arrive. And off we go....

Told from the points of view of Julia, Kim, Julia’s police officer ex Jonny, they and we follow a trail of corruption, cash, murder, alongside personal histories and aspirations. I’m delighted that a sequel is under contract!!

Maizes, RL. [A Complete Fiction](#) (IG Publishing \$18.95). With little evidence, would-be author P.J. Larkin serves a “nibble” on the trendy new social-media app Crave, accusing editor George Dunn of stealing the novel she submitted to him for publication. The nibble shoots to the top of the site’s Popular Menu Items and before you can say “unpaid literary labor,” George is embroiled in a scandal, his job and book deal in jeopardy. P.J.’s novel is snapped up amid the publicity, but has she revealed her sister Mia’s secrets in the book? Some diners on Crave think so, and now it’s P.J.’s turn to feel the public’s scorn. Told in the humorous vein of *Where’d You Go Bernadette?*, *A Complete Fiction* examines the very serious questions of who has a right to tell a story, and the role of cancel culture.

Morrow, Bradford. [The Forger’s Requiem](#) (\$17). Literary forger Henry Slader, assaulted and presumed dead by his longtime nemesis, Will, awakens in a shallow grave, suffocating in dirt. Concussed and disoriented, Slader exhumes himself and sets out to exact revenge on his rival, orchestrate Will’s downfall, and make a fortune along the way—armed with a devastating secret about Will’s past. The novel takes you “inside the world of expert forgery, rivalrous fury, and generations of dark family secrets, with Mary Shelley’s voice and life woven throughout. This is a dark and somewhat confusing tale for plot but clear on the lure and gravitational pull of forgery (viewed as a creative process) and filled with literary lore.

Mulhauser, Travis. [The Trouble Up North](#) (\$18.99). This is a terrific book, if complex. The Sawbrooks have spent decades crisscrossing the waterways and vast forests between Northern Michigan and Canada to make their way as smugglers. Those hidden routes through the border’s nooks and crannies are their legacy, but they no longer pay the bills. The world has changed; the resorts, with their fancy clientele, are infringing on their space, and the Sawbrooks find themselves deeply fractured, clutching at their past and the last vestiges of a once close family. Rhoda, the tough-as-nails matriarch, is caring for her dying husband while finding herself disappointed in her three adult grandchildren. The eldest daughter, Lucy, is now a park ranger, working to federally protect the land against her mother’s will, while Buckner, the only boy, is drinking his life away. Jewell, the baby of the family, is her mother’s last hope, but when she tries to save them all in one fell swoop she becomes ensnared in a crime of escalating proportions....

Murphy, Emily Bain. [The Ivory City](#) (Union Square \$18.99). The plot is a strong one but what makes this book remarkable is its loving, colorful, detailed depiction of the St. Louis World Fair of 1904—not the Judy Garland version but a richly embellished portrait of the fair with its palaces and pavilions, the visitors and the society of the Gilded Age (love the clothes!), the penalties exacted on pretention, impoverishment, and rule breaking, all tougher on women but hard on men too. There’s more than

one kind of love story, too, and a courageous heroine in Grace Covington.

Cousins Grace and Lillie have been best friends since birth, despite Grace's vastly inferior social status ever since her mother married for love instead of wealth. When Lillie invites Grace to the biggest event of the century—the legendary World's Fair, also known as “The Ivory City”—Grace hopes her fortunes might be about to change. But when a member of their party is brutally killed at the fair, and suspicion falls on Lillie's brother Oliver, Grace must prove Oliver's innocence before her beloved cousins' family is ruined forever. Along the way, she'll discover that the city's wealthy elite—including Oliver's handsome but irritable friend Theodore—aren't who they appear to be.

Sayles, John. [To Save the Man](#) (\$19.99). We really liked the director/screenwriter/actor/novelist's last book, [Jamie MacGillivray](#) (\$24 deluxe paperback), an historical epic sweeping us from Scotland's 1746 Battle of Culloden to the New World, when we did a sparkling conversation with Diana Gabaldon for its release. Here's a blurb from the publisher from his new novel: “In the vein of *Never Let Me Go* and *Killers of the Flower Moon*, one of America's greatest storytellers sheds light on an American tragedy: The massacre at Wounded Knee.”

MORE LARGE PAPERBACKS

Adler Olsen, Jussi. [Locked In: A Department Q Novel](#) (\$19). When the head of Department Q, Detective Carl Mørck, finds himself handcuffed in a police car headed for Copenhagen's Vestre prison, he realizes that a violent case from his past has finally caught up with him. But he is being framed. Someone has a million-dollar bounty on his head to make sure he doesn't talk, putting him in grave danger among the prison's incarcerated criminals and corrupt officers. Carl's colleagues at the Copenhagen Police Department instantly turn their backs on him, leaving the ever-loyal Department Q team as his only hope. This series is the inspiration for Netflix's series *Dept. Q*.

Dara, Maxie. [A Grim Reaper's Guide to Cheating Death](#) (Penguin \$19) Dara's witty sequel to [A Grim Reaper's Guide to Catching a Killer](#) (\$19) smartly expands on that universe. Nora Bird works as an administrative coordinator at S.C.Y.T.H.E. (Secure Collection, Yielding, and Transportation of Human Essences), assigning grim reapers to collect the souls of the recently deceased. As she sorts through her case files one morning, Nora is horrified to see the name of her twin brother, Charlie. The siblings have barely spoken for months, but with both of their parents dead, the typically risk-averse Nora is galvanized to protect what little family she has left. She scoops Charlie from his apartment and they go on the run with a parrot named Jessica in hopes of evading her colleagues. Every time they manage to avoid the death listed in Charlie's file, however, the method changes, leading Nora to believe he's been marked for murder by someone at S.C.Y.T.H.E. She becomes a sleuth, sniffing out clues that point to buried family secrets. A long list of suspects, a dark sense of humor, and surprisingly weighty meditations on mortality carry the day. It's a killer good time.

Doar, Julie. [The Gallagher Place](#) (Zibby Publishing \$17.99). Library Reads recommends: “Marlowe is used to the drama that comes with spending holidays with her family, but nothing's come as close to blowing her world apart like this visit. When she and her brothers stumble upon a dead body, it leads to an

investigation that may be tied to the decades old disappearance of her childhood best friend. Soon, no one's secrets will be safe.”

Drysdale, Pip. [The Close Up](#) (\$19). When Zoe Ann Weiss moves to Los Angeles to pursue her dream of becoming a writer, her whole future is wide open. But then Zach, the bartender and aspiring actor she's falling for, ghosts her. Her debut novel, a thriller, fails. And she has writer's block worse than ever before. Now, three years later, Zach is famous and Zoe is facing a dead-end job at a flower shop and a demanding agent, terrified she'll never get her life back on track. But when she makes a flower delivery and unexpectedly finds Zach at the address, it's like no time has passed. Zoe starts writing again—the first time she's felt inspired in months. Then the inevitable happens and photos are leaked, landing Zoe in the press. Her first book goes viral, and everyone seems to know her name. Except the problem with everyone knowing your name is that *everyone* knows your name—including a mysterious stalker obsessed with Zach. A stalker who starts re-creating violent scenes from Zoe's book, step-by-step. And Zoe knows exactly how this story ends.... “Thoroughly addictive, effortlessly cool and clever as hell, TCU is both a voyeuristic peek into the world of celebrity and a dark *Gatsby*—esque critique of the modern American Dream.”

Ellroy, James. [Killer on the Road](#) (\$18 reissue). Even as a child, Martin Michael Plunkett was no ordinary boy. Extreme parental indifference marked him as an outcast. In his head, Plunkett crafted a second life, remaking himself in the guise of his favorite comic book villain. His mind fixated on dark thoughts and twisted imaginings. A heart of evil was burnished—and Plunkett grew up to become a psychotic murderer. This chilling tale is written as the reflections of an unrepentant criminal.

Frick, Kit. [Friends and Liars](#) (Atria \$18). Estranged college friends are drawn back to the palatial Italian estate where old secrets are buried and one of them died in this electric tale of friendship, deceit, and suspense. It began five years back when heiress Clare Monroe tragically died on New Year's Eve at her family's opulent Italian palazzo. Since that time, her college friends have harbored a dark secret—their lies and betrayals led to Clare's untimely death. And now her family invites them to the lakeside palazzo for a memorial.

Gervais, Simon/Ryan Steck. [The Second Son](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$16.99). Soldier-turned-sommelier Chase Burke may be holding bottles of wine rather than a rifle, but then his intelligence analyst brother is killed in a black op gone wrong leaving his branded as a traitor. Then an ambush at his restaurant leaves a congresswoman, his secret romantic partner, clinging to life. All this leads to Chase teaming up with NYPD Detective Alice Doyle, a single mom with her own issues, and to their discovery of a criminal syndicate with elite mercenaries to deploy...after them.

* Gold, Robert. [Eleven Liars](#) (Grand Central \$17.99). Journalist Ben Harper is on his way home when he sees flames in the churchyard. The derelict community center is on fire. And somebody is trapped inside. With Ben's help the person escapes, only to flee the scene before they can be identified. Now the small village of Haddley is abuzz with rumors. Was this an accident, or arson? Then a skeleton is found in the burnt-out foundations. When the identity of the victim is revealed, Ben is confronted with a crime that is terrifyingly close to home.

Heller, Peter. [The Orchard](#) (Vintage Contemporaries \$18). An

old Heller back in print. Hayley and her seven-year-old daughter, Frith, live in a rustic cabin with no electricity in the foothills of Vermont's Green Mountains. A renowned translator of Tang dynasty poetry, Hayley walked away from her career and her addict husband to raise Frith alone in a land populated not by ambition-fueled academics but by hawks, beavers, and other wild things—including their exuberant Bernese Mountain dog, Bear. They get by on what little they earn from their overgrown apple orchard and the syrup they make from their maple trees. Frith—precocious, homeschooled, and a voracious reader—considers herself queen of this backwoods paradise. She is too young to understand the pain and regret that have followed her mother here. Season after season, it is the three of them—mother, daughter, and dog—until the spring day when Rose Lattimore appears at their door and upends Hayley and Frith's solitary existence. When tragedy unexpectedly strikes, Frith must come to terms with heartbreak for the very first time.

Kelly, Lee. [My Fair Frauds](#) (Harper \$18.99). Here's a classic sting narrative. Forced out of her Kansas home by the ruthless city bankers who conned her father, Coraline "Cora" O'Malley is working for peanuts as a stage magician's assistant (and sometime thief), determined to save up enough money to buy back her family's farm. During a Manhattan show, Cora meets Alice Archer, who is posing as the Grand Duchess Marie Charlotte Gabriella of Württemberg, a small German kingdom rich in emerald mines and beset by political unrest. Alice is working a long con on the five wealthy families who cheated her father in a shady railroad deal, planning to swindle them out of their wealth in turn. Cora's presence gives Alice an inspiration: the young woman will pose as the duchess's cousin, newly arrived in New York, and help lure in her targets. Along with Alice's faithful maid, Béatrice, and her taciturn cook, Dagmar, the women plot a scam that will take them from the gritty streets of the Lower East Side to Manhattan's most opulent drawing rooms.

MacIntosh, Kate. [The Champagne Letters](#) (\$19). Reims, France, 1805: Barbe-Nicole Clicquot has just lost her beloved husband but is determined to pursue their dream of creating the premier champagne house in France, now named for her new identity as a widow: *Veuve Clicquot*. With the Russians poised to invade, competitors fighting for her customers, and the Napoleonic court politics complicating matters, she must set herself apart if she, and her business, are to survive. In present day Chicago, broken from her divorce, Natalie Taylor runs away to Paris. In a book stall by the Seine, Natalie finds a collection of the Widow Clicquot's published letters and uses them as inspiration to step out of her comfort zone and create a new, empowered life for herself. But when her Parisian escape takes a shocking turn, she's forced to make a difficult choice.

McGuire, Emy. [No One Aboard](#) (Graydon House \$18.99). A filthy-rich family suffers a seafaring disaster in this gnarly tale. Two weeks after the Cameron clan casts off from New Haven aboard their multimillion-dollar yacht for a voyage down the East Coast to celebrate twins Rylan and Tia's 18th birthday, the vessel is discovered 80 miles off the coast of Florida with no one on board. Authorities, alerted to the ghost ship by Jerry Baugh, a middle-aged fisherman who has never recovered from his own family's nautical tragedy years earlier, scramble to locate the four Camerons and their three-person crew. As the quest for

answers presses on, McGuire weaves in flashbacks to the ill-fated voyage, which is tempestuous from the outset courtesy of secrets, lies, and betrayals among the passengers. Despite a couple of whopping contrivances, including a link between the missing Cameron patriarch and the man who finds his yacht, McGuire's consistently riveting plot keeps the pages flying. Readers won't be able to rest until they discover what befell the Camerons

Meacham, Leila. [April Storm](#) (Harper \$17.99). Kathryn Walker enjoys an enviable life. Her husband is an accomplished doctor, her children are bright and successful, and she devotes herself to charity work that uplifts her Suburban Colorado community. Settling into a new year, her life couldn't be better....until the advent of April. For Kathryn, the month has always rained trouble—but this time may be even stormier than the fraught past she's trying to overcome as this seemingly perfect suburban housewife is being pursued by a private detective . . . and hunted by a murderer in this riveting, much-anticipated posthumous novel from the author of *Roses* and *Dragonfly*.

Mulhern, Julie. [Murder in Manhattan](#) (Forever \$17.99) launches a snappy historical series centered on 1920s nightlife columnist Winifred "Freddie" Archer. One night, Freddie witnesses a shooting outside a Manhattan club and notices an elegantly dressed young woman she swears she's seen before fleeing the scene. When other, similar murders follow, Freddie draws from her reporting to compile a suspect list and puts herself directly in harm's way as she tries to ferret out the culprit. Mulhern peppers her narrative with real-life figures to charming effect: Freddie, who's based on 1920s *New Yorker* columnist Lois Long, gossips with legendary sports columnist Ring Lardner, trades quips with Dorothy Parker during a bumpy ride uptown in a Packard, and sips gin rickeys with actor Tallulah Bankhead. "All the while, she proves to be a resourceful heroine whose professional prowess as both a journalist and a gumshoe impresses without straining credibility. Immersive, fast-paced, and entertaining, this promises good things to come."

Natt Och Dag, Niklas. [Hope and Destiny](#) (Atria \$19) is inspired by one of Sweden's most notorious murders. In the 1430s, Swedish nobles are eager to wrest power back from King Eric. Their efforts spark a peasant rebellion led by Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson, a nobleman with a reputation as a valiant warrior. The uprising attracts the interest of Sir Bengt Stensson, who believes that an alliance with Engelbrektsson could work to his advantage. That attempted alliance leads Magnus, Sir Bengt's son, to try and gain the trust of the rebel leader—an effort that ends in copious bloodshed on all sides. Those expecting a murder mystery along the lines of Natt Och Dag's previous novels should be warned: the central killing occurs late in the narrative, and there's more focus on plunging readers in the era's political conflicts and shedding light on the killer's motives than on concealing their identity.

Nelson, P.J. [Booked for Murder](#) (\$19). Madeline Brimley left small town Georgia many years ago to go to college and pursue her dreams on the stage. Her dramatic escapades are many but success has eluded her, leaving her at loose ends. But then she gets word that not only has her beloved, eccentric Aunt Rose passed, but she's left Madeline her equally eccentric bookstore housed in an old Victorian mansion in the small college town of Enigma. But when she arrives in her beat-up Fiat to claim The

Old Juniper Bookstop, and restart her life, Madeline is faced with unexpected challenges. The gazebo in the back yard is set ablaze and a late night caller threatens to burn the whole store down if she doesn't leave immediately. For the sequel see December Hardcover.

* Parris, Rachel. [Introducing Mrs. Collins](#) (Little Brown \$19). Arriving in time for Jane Austen's 250th birthday, Parris' debut is centered on Charlotte Lucas, the young woman who was Elizabeth Bennet's supportive best friend in *Pride and Prejudice*. Charlotte has never been a romantic. Practical to a fault, she accepted Mr. Collins's proposal with clear eyes and a steady heart, trading passion for security. Life at Hunsford Parsonage may be quiet and predictable, but it is hers to manage—and she's determined to make the best of it, whatever her friend Elizabeth Bennet may think, until she encounters a guest at Rosings Park: Richard, an enigmatic colonel who shatters her peace of mind. Torn between what she must do and what she truly desires, Charlotte finds herself at the center of a story she never expected to be hers, the story of a woman who had written herself out of her own life and is only now daring to want more.

Patrick, Phaedra. [The Time Hop Coffee Shop](#) (Park Row Books \$18.99). Greta Perks was once the shining star of the iconic Maple Gold coffee commercials, the quintessential TV wife and mom. Now fame has faded, her marriage is on the rocks, her teenage daughter has become distant and Greta's once-glittering career feels like a distant memory. When Greta stumbles upon a mysterious coffee shop serving a magical brew, she wishes for the perfect life in those past Maple Gold commercials. Next thing she knows, Greta wakes in the idyllic make-believe town of Mapleville, where the sun always shines and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and second chances fill the air. Given the opportunity to live the life she dreamed, Greta is determined to rewrite her own script. But can life ever be like a coffee commercial?

Patterson, James. [The #1 Lawyer](#) (Little Brown \$19.99). Biloxi's best criminal defense attorney has never lost a case—then his client's beautiful wife is murdered, and America's #1 lawyer suddenly becomes its #1 suspect in this thriller from Patterson and Nancy Allen.

Rule, Ann. [Worth More Dead: And Other True Cases](#) (Gallery Books \$20). Former Marine sergeant and judo instructor Roland Pitter Jr. claimed it was all an elaborate plan to win back his wife's love—it wasn't supposed to end with her dead body in the trunk of a car. It would be nearly twenty years before he admitted to hiring someone to kill his estranged wife, but the alleged confession was as shocking and convoluted as the crime itself. Read this and other cases by the legendary Rule whom we welcomed several times at The Pen.

Ryan, Annelise. [Beast of the North Woods](#) (Penguin \$19). OK, I looked up "cryptid." It's an animal or creature whose existence is rumored or legendary but not scientifically proven, such as Bigfoot, the Yeti, or the Chupacabra. And here when an ice fisherman in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, is discovered mauled to death, the witness claims it was the work of a hodag, a cryptid. Scoffers including the local cops arrest the witness for the murder. But the witness is the nephew of cryptozoologist Morgan Carter's bookstore employee Rita so naturally Morgan and her loyal dog Newt head to Rhinelander to investigate the hodag and the crime.... 3rd in Ryan's Monster Series. Just go with it.

Satterthwaite, Jenna. [The New Year's Party](#) (Mira \$18.99). It used to be an annual thing—the raucous New Year's party full of games and hors d'oeuvres. But for Olivia and her friends, the chaos of their thirties has hit. It's been a few years since the close friends were last...close. But this year is gonna be different. The burnout, parenting stress, credit card debt, job drama, marriage troubles, addiction—they're going to set it all aside for the night. No, really. They swear. Except for the secrets. Every last person has one... But secrets are only as good as the people you trust to keep them, and when the wrong one slips out...well, friends or not, that just might lead to murder.

* Walters, Minette. [The Players](#) (\$18.99). Walters, author of some smashing suspense thrillers, found her voice again writing historical fiction. Here is her latest, set against the backdrop of the Bloody Assizes—the trials that would determine the fate of over one thousand treasonous rebels. England, 1685. Decades after the end of the English Civil War, the country is once again divided when King Charles II's illegitimate son, the Protestant Duke of Monmouth, arrives in Dorset to incite rebellion against his Catholic uncle. Armed only with pitchforks, Monmouth's army is quickly defeated by King James II's superior forces and charged with high treason. Those found guilty will be hanged, drawn, and quartered. As Dorset braces for carnage, the formidable Lady Jayne Harrier and her enigmatic son, assisted by the reclusive daughter of a local magistrate, contrive ways to save men from the gallows (as the country moves towards 1688 and the Glorious Revolution bringing William and Mary to the throne).

DECEMBER SMALL PAPERBACKS

Chien, Vivien. [Crime Rangoon: A Noodle Shop Mystery](#) (Minotaur \$9.99). Cindy Kwan, owner of Asia Village's bookshop, The Modern Scroll, is privileged to host best-selling author, Charlene Chan for a signing in honor of the writer's latest book, *The Mystery of General Tso*. Lana Lee is equally excited for the appearance of her favorite author and even more so when Cindy asks her to be Charlene's "handler" for the event. Taking her duties very seriously, Lana stays by the side of the prominent author to assist in anything that she might need. With a line out the door and stretched through the plaza, Cindy is overjoyed at what a success this is for her shop. But, unfortunately for Cindy, her success comes with a price: the author is found dead in the mystery aisle, clutching a copy of her own book. Coincidentally the book's plot matches the details of the murder. 12th in this series.

Patterson, James/Maxine Paetro. [The 24th Hour](#) (\$10.99). Sergeant Lindsay Boxer, Medical Examiner Claire Washburn, Assistant District Attorney Yuki Castellano, and crime writer Cindy Thomas gather at one of San Francisco's finest restaurants to celebrate exciting news: Cindy is getting married. Before they can raise their glasses, there's a disturbance in the restaurant. A woman has been assaulted. Claire examines the victim. Lindsay makes an arrest. Yuki takes the case. Cindy covers it. The legal strategy is complicated by gaps in the plaintiff's memory—and the shocking reason behind her ever-changing testimony.

Stuart, Amy. [A Death at the Party](#) (Simon Schuster \$10.99). Nadine Walsh's summer garden party is in full swing. The neighbors all have cocktails, the catered food is exquisite—everything's going according to plan. But Nadine—devoted wife, loving mother,

and doting daughter—finds herself standing over a dead body in her basement while her guests clink glasses upstairs. What happened? Stuart is Canadian.

Urszenyi, Steve. [Out in the Cold: An Alex Martel Thriller](#) (\$10.99). While sailing across the Mediterranean, the megayacht *Aurora* is rocked with explosions, taken under siege by unknown assailants. On board are some of Europe's wealthiest and most powerful political players, including the secretary general of Interpol, a high-ranking Finnish diplomat, and Special Agent Alex Martel—whose lethal sniper skills kick in to bring them safely to shore. Someone is waging a ruthless campaign of attacks against Finland, one of NATO's newest members, in an attempt to throw the Alliance into turmoil. But Alex is on the case....