

# BOOKNEWS from

ISSN 1056-5655, © The Poisoned Pen, Ltd.

Volume 33, Number 1

January Booknews 2021

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## HAPPY NEW YEAR

Note: All the event times are Mountain Standard Time

Watch these virtual events on [Facebook Live](#) or on our [YouTube](#) channel and any time thereafter at a time that suits you. You don't have to belong to Facebook to click in.

You also can listen to our [Podcasts](#) on [Google Music](#), [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), and other popular podcast sites.

### TUESDAY JANUARY 5 6:00 PM Virtual Book Launch

**Brad Taylor in conversation with Antonio Mora**

**Brad Taylor** discusses [American Traitor](#) (Morrow \$28.99)

Signed copies. And each book comes with a thumb drive loaded with Pike's passport, a scrapbook of Brad's research trip, and other documents

The purchase of a copy is required to attend a group virtual event hosted by the publisher on Crowdcast. We will send an invitation to each book buyer

If you can't attend, no worries. We will host a book discussion for Taylor's work including this book sometime in February

### THURSDAY JANUARY 7 6:00 PM

**Chris Hauty and Nick Petrie in conversation**

**Hauty** signs [Savage Road](#) (Atria \$27)

Hayley Chill

**Petrie** signs [The Breaker](#) (Putnam \$27)

Peter Ash—and June Cassidy!

Signed copies for both books

### FRIDAY JANUARY 8 12:00 PM

**Victoria Gosling in conversation with Flynn Berry**

**Gosling** discusses her debut [Before the Ruins](#) (Holt \$26.99)

Our January British Crime Book of the Month

Gosling joins us from the UK

**Berry** previews her March novel [Northern Spy](#) (Viking \$26)

Signed copies for Berry in March

### MONDAY JANUARY 11 5:00 PM

**Jeff Lindsay** discusses [Fool Me Twice](#) (Dutton \$27)

Riley Wolfe, thief

Signed books in stock

### TUESDAY JANUARY 12 7:00 PM Virtual Book Launch

**Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child**

The authors discuss [The Scorpion's Tail](#) (Grand Central \$29)

Both authors join us for this book launch on FB Live

Signed by both authors and our copies come with an exclusive photo of Doug on horseback

### WEDNESDAY JANUARY 13 6:00 PM

**Lee Goldberg** discusses [Bone Canyon](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$24.95)

LAPD's Eve Ronin #2

**Jason Pinter** discusses [A Stranger at the Door](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$15.95)

Rachel Marin #2

Signed copies for both titles

### THURSDAY JANUARY 14 6:00 PM

**Ace Atkins** discusses [Someone to Watch Over Me](#) (Putnam \$27)

Robert B. Parker's Spenser

Signed books available

### FRIDAY JANUARY 15 7:00 PM

**SciFi Friday** discusses Sue Burke's [Semiosis](#) (\$18.99)

### SATURDAY JANUARY 16 10:30 AM

**Croak & Dagger** discuss Tori Eldridge's [The Ninja Daughter](#)

(\$16.95).

### SATURDAY JANUARY 16 4:00 PM

**Jayne Ann Krentz and Christina Dodd in conversation with John**

**Dodd** discusses [Wrong Alibi](#) (Harlequin \$28.99/\$17.99)

**Krentz** discusses [All the Colors of Night](#) (Berkley \$27)

Signed books available for both titles

### MONDAY JANUARY 18 6:00 PM

**Joanna Schaffhausen and PJ Tracy**

Schaffhausen discusses [Every Waking Hour](#) (St Martins \$27.99)

Ellery Hathaway

Tracy discusses [Deep into the Dark](#) (St Martins \$26.99)

Our January Crime Club Book of the Month

Signed books available for both titles

### TUESDAY JANUARY 19 6:00 PM Virtual Book Launch

**Lisa Gardner in conversation with Riley Sager**

**Gardner** discusses [Before She Disappears](#) (Dutton \$27)

A standalone thriller

Signed books available

### WEDNESDAY JANUARY 20 11:00 AM MT/1:00 PM

ET/6:00 PM BT

**A Kate Mosse/JoJo Moyes Book Launch Party**

For those who wish to join in [click on the link](#) and you will get an invitation from the UK host. Cost is \$35 and includes an unsigned copy of *City of Tears*

Note that we are hosting a conversation with Mosse January 23 as well

### THURSDAY JANUARY 21 11:00 AM

**Jeffrey Siger and David Wagner in conversation about International Crime**

**Siger** discusses [Murder in Mykonos](#) (\$12.99)

**Wagner** discusses [Cold Tuscan Stone](#) (\$12.99)

Both books are reissues of first in series

**FRIDAY JANUARY 22 4:00 PM**

**Laura Joh Rowland** discusses [Portrait of Peril](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99)

A Victorian Mystery  
Signed books available

**SATURDAY JANUARY 23 1:00 PM**

**Kate Mosse**

**Mosse** discusses [The City of Tears](#) (St Martins \$27.99)

**MONDAY JANUARY 25 7:00 PM**

**Kwei Quartey in conversation with Michael Connelly**

**Quartey** discusses [Sleep Well, My Lady](#) (Soho \$27.95)

The sequel to [The Missing American](#) (\$27.95 Signed/\$16.95)

Signed books available

**THURSDAY JANUARY 28 6:00 PM**

**Gregg Hurwitz in conversation with Isabella Maldonado**

**Hurwitz** discusses [Prodigal Son](#) (St Martins \$27.99)

Orphan X

Maldonado's series start [The Cipher](#) is heading to film starring

Jennifer Lopez

Signed books for both available

**THURSDAY JANUARY 28 7:15 PM**

**Hardboiled Crime** discusses Erle Stanley Gardner's

[Shills Can't Cash Chips](#) (\$12.95)

**SATURDAY JANUARY 30 4:00 PM Virtual Book Launch**

**Donis Casey** discusses [Valentino Will Die](#) (Poisoned Pen \$16.99)

Bianca Dangereuse

Signed books available

**MONDAY FEBRUARY 1 7:00 PM Virtual Book Launch**

**Faye and Jonathan Kellerman in conversation**

**Faye** discusses [The Lost Boys](#) (Harper \$29.99)

**Jonathan** discusses [Serpentine](#) (Bantam \$28.99)

Alex Delaware

Signed books for both titles

**SIGNED BOOKS**

Askaripour, Mateo. [Black Buck](#) (Houghton \$26). Our **Fantastic New Fiction Book of the Month for January is a debut**—and with a strong voice. A different voice. The point I think is we should broaden our range of voices. As indicated in this Indie Next Pick for January: “Perhaps I have a different perspective on this book because I have a younger brother who is a Black, 20-something man in sales, but this book presents an evocative, honest, complex portrait of being a BIPOC person in a white-dominant workplace (albeit one that is high-powered, sales-driven, and New York City-based). This is a book that allows a reader to be seen if this is their experience, but also for a reader to learn about a different reality if this is not their own. *Black Buck* is a tightly woven, contemporary debut from an author to watch.” I add that in concept it's not that different than John Grisham's mega-bestseller *The Firm*. I think this is a brilliant way to kick off a new year of exciting books.

Atkins, Ace. [Robert B Parker's Someone to Watch Over Me](#) (Putnam \$27). 22-year-old Mattie Sullivan, Spenser's “occasional secretary, part-time assistant, and sleuthing apprentice,” needs

his help. The younger sister of a friend of Mattie's, 15-year-old Chloe Turner from the South Boston projects, agreed to give a massage to a man at a swanky Boston club, but when the man began... Chloe fled, leaving her backpack and laptop behind. When Mattie tried to retrieve the backpack and laptop, she was turned away at the club door. Chloe's disappearance gets Spenser involved. He learns that the pervert's name is Peter Steiner, a Jeffrey Epstein clone, complete with a female accomplice and a private island in the Bahamas beyond the reach of law enforcement. Spenser devotes himself to taking Steiner down in his usual style: stir things up and see how they fall out.

Casey, Donis. [Valentino Will Die](#) (Poisoned Pen \$16.99). 21-year-old silent movie star Bianca LaBelle, who shot to fame in “a series of wildly popular adventure pictures about the indomitable world traveler, journalist, and sometime spy, Bianca Dangereuse,” is set to embark on a new film, costarring with her good friend Rudy Valentino. The two are having a heart-to-heart one night by her L.A. swimming pool when Rudy tells her he's received several threatening letters, each with the same message: “Valentino will die.” On a trip to New York, Rudy does indeed become ill, and is hospitalized. Bianca travels to New York to be at his bedside. Still weak, Rudy asks Bianca to find out who might have poisoned him. Bianca calls on PI Ted Oliver to help, unaware that Ted's also investigating Rudy on behalf of a gangster known as the Irish godmother. Casey smoothly incorporates real events and people into a plot that's more thriller than mystery. Lovers of old movies and Hollywood gossip will have fun. More fun if you start with Bianca's first adventure in [The Wrong Girl](#) (\$16.99).

⌘ Dean, Abigail. [Girl A](#) (Collins \$36). A debut sold into 27 countries and sparking a lot of conversation. A question for me and other authors is whether it should be marketed as crime. It's a survivor's tale: Lexie is Girl A, the girl who escaped, the eldest sister who freed her older brother and four younger siblings. How did they become imprisoned by their parents? What kind of lives can they lead once freed? The father died on the spot in his house of horrors; the constantly pregnant mother went to prison. And now the mother dies and saddles Lexie with a legacy: the family home left to her and her siblings. Which requires Lexie to negotiate with them rather than avoiding her past. That's what kicks the narrative off. There are many questions Dean does not address, leaving the reader to wonder why the kids attending school didn't break for it? Was there sexual abuse and if not, what was the impulse governing the jailer/father? How many of the children fully share the family mythology and will any of them, including Lex, fully break free? You can see this is not a conventional crime novel. Is it a modern Gothic? Does it track with *Girl on the Train* and that sort of book? Is it fair to liken it Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* or Emma Donoghue's *Room*? Caz Frear is joining me in February for a virtual event with Dean and the US edition (unsigned) of [Girl A](#) (Viking \$27).

Dodd, Christina. [Wrong Alibi](#) (Harlequin \$28.99/\$17.99). In a “spine-tingling thriller,” an 18-year-old named Evie Jones finds herself reunited with her mother after getting out of a juvenile detention facility. Back in Rockin, Alaska, with her mom and sister, Evie soon finds herself at the center of a homicide tied to her new

boss, Donald White, who has hired her as a bookkeeper but really sets her up. After being wrongfully pinned for the crime, Evie goes on the lam—getting reconstructive surgery and taking on a new identity—and tries to find White to clear her name. John gives this a rave review: “No one does high-stakes, high-voltage suspense quite like Dodd.”

Gardner, Lisa. [Before She Disappeared](#) (Dutton \$27). Gardner delivers a knockout standalone having interested herself in long-time missing persons and what it takes to work such a case. The heroine if you can call her that is Frankie Elkin, a middle-aged alcoholic whose every day is a challenge to stay dry. Being drunk cost her the one relationship she valued which echoes throughout the story. So she has cut herself loose from all bonds, travels with a backpack, picks up work in a bar where she faces down the demon drink...she’s kind of a Jack Reacher but with a specific mission and this one has brought her to a scruffy neighborhood in Boston. The MissPers is Angelique Badeau, a Haitian teenager who vanished from her high school months ago. Frankie has no credentials other than what she’s self-taught but she is persistent and thinks outside the box. Inevitably she clashes with the Boston PD when she shoulders into the cold investigation. It goes from there. Frankie is hard to like yet you hope she’s on a good path, but can she be? Gardner has always done formidable research for her books. I look forward to diving into it with her in discussing this unusual and compelling almost-procedural.

Goldberg, Lee. [Bone Canyon](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$24.95). Our blogger Lesa Holstine reviews: “Thanks to a YouTube video that went viral, Eve Ronin was promoted to the homicide division of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, working out of Lost Hills. Eve is the youngest detective there, and resented for it. She knows she’s inexperienced, but she has an excellent mentor in her partner, Duncan Pavone, who has less than a year until retirement. Their current case takes them to the fire-blackened Santa Monica Mountains where bones are showing up after the most recent fire. Aided by a forensic anthropologist’s findings, Eve and Duncan track the identities of multiple victims. One, Sabrina Morton, disappeared six years earlier after reporting she had been raped. Eve discovers a second rape victim who identifies a tattoo shared by the rapists. Half of the male detectives at the Lost Hills sheriff’s station have that tattoo on their calves. The tension ratchets up in this fast-paced police procedural, which addresses sexism, cronyism, and corrupt officers, while also dealing with the investigative process. Goldberg follows Lost Hills with a riveting, intense story. Readers of Karin Slaughter or Michael Connelly will want to try this.” I recommend reading [Lost Hills](#) (\$24.95 Signed/\$15.95 unsigned) where you first meet Eve.

Hauty, Chris. [Savage Road](#) (Atria \$27). Hayley Chill, a great name for the protagonist of Hauty’s first thriller, [Deep State](#) (\$9.99). Hayley, raised in West Virginia, and recruited into being a covert agent for “a deeper state” (see Orphan X below), is stationed in the White House where she directs an improbable double agent for the US (if I go into this it’s a complete spoiler for anyone who has not yet read *Deep State*). And we open this chapter in her unlikely career on a confrontation with a Cuban agent. A series of cyber attacks has rocked the US. NSA fingers Moscow (this is so like real life given current news of Russian hacking), pushing the President towards a devastating war. Can Hayley determine who is the super hacker and head off an immense tragedy? *Deep State* is a fine political thriller; start there.

Hurwitz, Gregg. [Prodigal Son](#) (St Martins \$27.99). Evan Smoak, Orphan X, recruited from a foster home into an ops program darker than black and trained as a government assassin, is out of the Nowhere Man role. In exchange for an unofficial pardon from the President, he must stop his crime fighting vigilante mission anonymously aiding desperate cases. Which means Evan has to do the one thing he’s least equipped to do—fit into a normal life. But in his fortified and well equipped LA penthouse. His bargain is upended by repeated phone calls from Buenos Aires—from a woman claiming to be his birth mother. And she has a Nowhere Man mission for him. The man she asks him to help turns out to be Andre, a kid he knew from childhood when they lived in a Baltimore group home. After witnessing a murder while working at an impound lot, Andre has disappeared, and Smoak soon becomes entangled in a grand-scale conspiracy involving cutting edge military technology. “The pacing is breathtakingly brisk throughout, and the action is relentless, but the real hook is how much Smoak has matured emotionally, particularly in regard to his love interest Mia Hall, a district attorney who lives in Smoak’s building, and Joey, his 16-year-old hacker protégée. This series continues to impress.” This chapter reveals more about Evan’s adoption in to the Orphan Program and his character. And Hurwitz’s explosive ending propels Evan and the reader into.... The [Orphan X series](#) is best read in order.

Kellerman, Faye. [The Lost Boys](#) (Harper \$29.99). Former LAPD detective Peter Decker, now with the police in the “sleepy little college town” of Greenbury, N.Y., has two cases to occupy him. First, 35-year-old Bertram Lanz, who’s cognitively disabled, has gone missing from a field trip arranged by his residential facility, and after extensive searches don’t locate him, Decker fears that Lanz did not lose his way but might well have abducted by someone he knew. Why? When no trace of the man is found, the disappearance quickly becomes an official missing persons case and is assigned to Decker and his partner Tyler McAdams. While combing the woods, searchers discover the remains of one of three young men who had vanished during a camping trip. And for Decker, personal problems are adding pressure as well. After a ten-year absence, the biological mother of Decker’s and Rina’s foster son, Gabriel, has suddenly appeared in New York, children in tow, wreaking emotional havoc on the young man....

Kellerman, Jonathan. [Serpentine](#) (Bantam \$28.99). Here’s a Starred review of a series that for me has, over the last entries, raised its game. “In Edgar winner Kellerman’s top-notch 36th Alex Delaware novel, a cold case preoccupies the L.A. consulting psychologist and his friend and colleague, Lt. Milo Sturgis of the LAPD: the death of Dorothy Swoboda, whose burned body was found in a car below Mulholland Drive 36 years earlier. Dorothy’s 39-year-old daughter, Ellie Barker, who recently sold her lucrative exercise wear business for millions, remains haunted by the loss of her mother, who abandoned her when she was three. Now Ellie wants an explanation for what one report at the time called a murder and another, a one-vehicle accident. Armed with the thinnest of case files, Milo and Alex uncover a disturbing number of murders that seem related to Dorothy, and they realize that the killing spree might not yet be over. Kellerman maintains pace and suspense through the interactions of the characters—witnesses, detectives, relatives of the victims—all of whom are rendered in striking and precise detail. This entry is pure pleasure, intelligently delivered.”

Krentz, Jayne Ann. [All the Colors of Night](#) (Berkley \$27). John reviews: After her professional reputation as an antiques expert is trashed, Sierra Raines ends up working as an “acquisition and transportation specialist” for a company dedicated to supplying paranormal artifacts to wealthy collectors. North Chastain uses his own unique talents tracking down psychic criminals, but when an artifact that may be connected to a mysterious government program known as the Bluestone Project, puts North’s father in a coma, North knows he is going to need Sierra’s help in tracking down the artifact. Krentz is at the top of her literary game with this page-turner that seamlessly blends suspense and romance while at the same time also delivering a maximum dose of the author’s deliciously dry sense of wit.

Lindsay, Jeff. [Fool Me Twice](#) (Dutton \$27). Stealing a Fabergé egg. Surviving a double cross. And pulling off a robbery in the heart of the Vatican. This will be the challenge of thief extraordinaire Riley Wolfe’s life. It opens in St. Petersburg, where Riley steals the egg—no easy task. Betrayed by the pilot he hired to help him get away, he wakes chained to a rock wall on one of the Kerguelen Islands—the most remote spot on earth—prisoner of top-dog international arms dealer Patrick Boniface who is also a top-notch art collector. He wants Riley to steal Raphael’s *Liberation of St. Peter*, a unique challenge since the work is a fresco: stealing it demands stealing a wall of the Vatican. Then Riley is kidnapped from his kidnapper by Bailey Stone, a Perth-based rival of Boniface who demands that Riley pledge his allegiance to him instead. Uncertain who’ll be his patron when the dust clears, Riley goes to work, assisted by his friend Monique, a peerless forger, and Betty Dougherty (not her real name), an information professional with a serious grudge against Stone. Not to be outdone, Frank Delgado, the FBI special agent who gave Riley such a hard time in his debut last December, [Just Watch Me](#) (\$17), deals in his Task Force for International Arms Regulation and Enforcement. Worse, he gives Riley a special incentive: a surveillance photograph of Monique, the love of his life, and more important, the art forger he can’t pull off any heist without. Can Riley pull this impossible theft off and escape any consequences? Truly Lindsay must be a fan of *Mission Impossible*, no?

MacBride, Stuart. [The Coffinmaker’s Garden](#) (Collins \$45). As a massive storm batters the Scottish coast, Gordon Smith’s home is falling into the North Sea. But the crumbling headland has revealed what he’s got buried in his garden: human remains. With the storm still raging, it’s too dangerous to retrieve the bodies and waves are devouring the evidence. Which means no one knows how many people Smith’s already killed and how many more he’ll kill if he can’t be stopped. Enter an investigator with nothing to lose. The media are baying for blood, the top brass are after a scapegoat, and ex-Detective Inspector Ash Henderson is done playing nice. He’s got a killer to catch....

Mosse, Kate. [The City of Tears](#) (Pan \$46). In Mosse’s vibrant sequel to 2018’s [The Burning Chambers](#) (\$18.99), the year is 1572 and Minou Joubert (aka Marguerite Reydon-Joubert, Châtelaine of Puiver) is now married to Piet Reydon, a Huguenot soldier, and the mother of two children, Marta and Jean-Jacques. Minou and her family leave the peace and quiet of their estate and head for Paris to celebrate the royal wedding of Charles IX’s sister to Henry III of Navarre. In Paris, they get caught up in the St.

Bartholomew’s Day massacre, the slaughter of Protestant Huguenots on the orders of the French king. In the chaos of those dark, dangerous days, seven-year-old Marta goes missing. As the years pass and Marta’s fate remains unknown, Minou faces the uncertainties of life in the midst of religious conflict while dealing with the lethal machinations of her family’s archenemy, ruthless Vidal du Plessis (aka Cardinal Valentin). She eventually flees France, taking refuge in Amsterdam, “her city of tears.” The fascinating historical detail fuels the drama and keeps the plot zipping along. Wilbur Smith fans will want to check this one out. Not to mention readers of Alexandre Dumas *père et fils*, and fans, like me, of Mosse’s marvelous mega-bestseller [The Labyrinth](#) (\$17).

Petrie, Nick. [The Breaker](#) (Putnam \$27). At first blush it appears that this thriller for Peter Ash will be predictable, filled with the usual high action from the Iraq War veteran who suffers from PTSD and choking claustrophobia. He, sidekick Lewis, and Peter’s lover the freelance journalist June Cassidy are having a peaceful outdoor coffee near the Milwaukee Public Market one October afternoon when they spot a bearded man heading inside carrying an assault rifle. Looks like a shooter on a crazy mission. But it doesn’t play out that way and soon Peter and Lewis are in pursuit of the gunman who, having snatched an apparent target’s phone, escapes on an electric bike. What the?... Peter is in hiding from the law, especially the FBI, for a murder he didn’t commit, and camouflaged in shaggy hair etc, to avoid security cameras and such. He’s been sticking to tearing down buildings for pay. But now a powerful associate from his past appears with an interest in the gunman’s antics, and an irresistible offer: if Peter and June solve this mystery, Peter’s record will be scrubbed clean. And just like that Peter has a mission, but what’s wonderful is that June muscles into the investigation and the narrative, making it as much her book as Peter’s. The three end up traversing Milwaukee, not a familiar stalking ground, and what looks like a gunman on the loose plot morphs into a brisk cyber thriller. June comes into her own in a way that bodes well for future developments in this exciting series.

Pinter, Jason. [A Stranger at the Door](#) (Thomas & Mercer \$15.95). I was much taken with Rachel Marin’s debut in [Hide Away](#) (\$15.95 Signed), “a wonderful mix of a domestic family saga, a suburban thriller, and a crime novel.” —Associated Press. Think Barclay and Coben...and Rachel as a single mother version of Bruce Wayne, aka Batman. Pinter’s masterful job of ramping up suspense about the Marin’s family past informs Rachel’s vigilante role in the small city she’s made a new home. And she’s turned the role into solving crimes for the local PD as well as establishing a new relationship. Yet when her teenaged son’s teacher is murdered, gruesomely, the domino effect topples Rachel’s carefully constructed new life. And when her kid is recruited by a shadowy businessman she realizes something very personal has arrived.

Preston, Douglas/Lincoln Child. [The Scorpion’s Tail](#) (Grand Central \$29). Signed by both authors for you plus our copies come with a postcard showing Doug riding his horse on the *Jornado*, with a message from both authors as well. Note that any earlier titles by these authors cannot be signed when ordered.

Wow. I love this—a blend of Clive Cussler, Tony Hillerman, and Michael McGarrity. A treasure hunt in a ghost town in the high desert of New Mexico overlooking the dread *Jornado del Muerto* (our copies come with a postcard depicting Preston

riding his horse along this infamous highway running from Mexico City to Santa Fe under the Spanish, so dry and dangerous it was often a journey for the dead). Rookie FBI Agent Corrie Swanson, having survived the terrors depicted in series start [Old Bones](#) (\$16.99), is stationed in the Bureau's Albuquerque office. She's called to an old ghost town some hours away where the discovery of bones requires 1. A determination if they are human; 2. An ID; 3. A determination of cause of death. This seemingly routine inquiry quickly escalates when Santa Fe's Nora Kelly, the archaeologist Corrie lures off dig to answer these questions, rules: the bones are human; the man died unusually and in agony; his horse, excavated nearby had been shot, and hidden on the corpse is a 16<sup>th</sup> Century cross of gold of Spanish workmanship. It's hugely valuable, a real treasure. And there may be more treasures nearby...since a fabled hoard has long thought to have been hidden off the *Jornado* during the Pueblo Revolt. You will not see the cause of the deaths coming although you may early finger the major villain in this glorious adventure. Plus...there's a bit of Pendergast.

Some of you may have shied away from *Old Bones* and the root tragedy of the Donner Pass. I promise this story is closer to one of the authors' best, [Thunderhead](#) (\$8), and includes Native American elements Hillerman would love along with the archaeology and politics that surround Nora Kelly.

Pronzini, Bill/Marcia Muller. [The Paradise Affair](#) (Forge \$24.99). San Francisco, 1898. PIs Sabina Carpenter and John Quincannon takes the married couple to Hawaii in pursuit of Jackson "Lonesome Jack" Vereen and E.B. Nagle (aka Nevada Ned), who duped an Oakland, Calif., businessman into investing thousands in a nonexistent silver mine. Quincannon focuses on tracking down the two grifters, a task that leads him to investigating multiple murders. Meanwhile, Carpenter becomes involved in a howdunit after Gordon Pettibone, the owner of an import-export bank, is found dead behind a locked door in his study. A loaded pistol next to Pettibone's corpse makes accident or suicide the logical explanation. However, Carpenter probes deeper into both the motive and the execution of the crime.

Quartey, Kwei. [Sleep Well, My Lady](#) (Soho \$27.95). We are excited that Quartey fan Michael Connelly is hosting the conversation. This Starred Review explains Mike's enthusiasm: In Quartey's terrific sequel to 2020's [The Missing American](#) PI Emma Djan takes on a nearly year-old cold case—the murder of high-profile fashion icon Lady Araba in the bedroom of her lush mansion in a gated community known as the Beverly Hills of Accra, Ghana. Lady Araba's aunt doesn't believe her niece's chauffeur, who was convicted for the killing, is guilty. Emma and her colleagues at the Yemo Sowah Agency assume various undercover identities—as housekeeper, cop, construction worker, professor, journalist, interested house buyer—in an effort to narrow the long list of possible culprits, including family members, several lovers, and an alcoholic TV talk show host. Stops at the morgue and a forensic lab, as well as an ongoing search for a unique murder weapon, contribute to the dark atmosphere. Along the way, Quartey skewers Ghanaian politics, religion, and the law. Smooth prose complements the well-wrought plot. This distinctive detective series deserves a long run." Note that we have some Signed copies of *The Missing American* too so you can buy into the whole series.

✧ Rowland, Laura Joh. [Portrait of Peril](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). "October 1890. The wedding of London crime-scene photographer Sarah Bain and DS Thomas Barrett is interrupted by the discovery of a body in the crypt of St. Peter's Church. The victim, Charles Firth, has been stabbed in the chest. Sarah's granted a leave of absence by Sir Gerald Mariner, her boss at the Daily World, to investigate. Her team includes street-wise teenager Mick O'Reilly and her closest friend Lord Hugh Staunton, whose homosexuality has estranged him from his family. Firth specialized in photographing ghosts; when Sarah visits his widow, Leonora, she's in the process of contacting the dead. One of her friends advises her to help Sarah: "We have to rule out the possibility that the killer is human." As in Sarah's first four cases, Rowland's knack for drollery and colorful characters is on full display. Strangely, the Firths are connected to a case Sarah's been trying to solve for years: the wrongful conviction of her father...Rowland's Victorian London is fascinating and her team of irregulars unmatched."—*Kirkus Reviews* on a book I haven't been able to read yet.

Schaffhausen, Joanna. [Every Waking Hour](#) (St Martins \$27.99). I was torn between this 4<sup>th</sup> investigation for Ellery Hathaway, the one victim who escaped serial kidnapper/killer Coben and is now on tryout as a detective with the Boston PD, and the first in a new series by PJ Tracy, below, for our January Crime Book of the Month. They are both excellent, but for you readers a debut is I think a better choice. In fact I recommend reading the first three Hathaways before diving into this one since there are relationship spoilers if you do not. And the relationship between Ellery and FBI Agent Reed Markham, the investigator who liberated her from death's door at Coben's hands, is key to propelling the narrative. This book centers on the disappearance of 12-year-old Chloe Lockhart. The daughter of an affluent older father and a busy surgeon mother, she has a nanny. And for a moment the nanny lets Chloe out of her sight. It soon appears there is more to this, especially when Ellery learns that Chloe's mother had a son with her first husband, and that the son was killed—and his nanny died at the scene. It's a complicated story with a complex solution. Order [the whole series](#) and binge.

Taylor, Brad. [American Traitor](#) (Harper \$28.99). Pike Logan, the head of the Taskforce counterterrorism unit, and his Taskforce member girlfriend, Jennifer Cahill, are in Australia on vacation. They intend to stay with former Taskforce colleague Dunkin Delmonty, but on arrival they find Dunkin on the run from Chinese assassins. Dunkin recently exposed the schemes of his coworker, a Chinese-American artificial-intelligence specialist, who sabotaged the software of the new F-35 fighter jet and stole the code for the early-warning system protecting Taiwan from Chinese invasion. The attack on Dunkin prompts Pike to call in his Taskforce unit and team with a former Taiwan intelligence to stop war engineered between the island and Li's China. The action is high and, as a former tactical master like Taylor can envision, the tactics are impressive."As usual in the Pike Logan series, the spy-craft and related technology are fascinating, the dialogue crackles, and all the players are operating in an international sea of moral ambiguity. Recommend Pike Logan to readers who like their spies tough, smart, and bordering on superhuman."—*Booklist*. Taylor signs our copies at his home. The purchase gets you're an invitation to the party his publisher is hosting January 5 and to a later book discussion we will host on zoom at The Pen.

Tracy, PJ. [Deep into the Dark](#) (St Martins \$26.99). We long-timers at The Pen loved the Monkeewrench series written by Tracy and her now deceased mom. So we are thrilled PJ has begun a series on her own that is our **January Crime Book of the Month**. Others agree with me it's a knockout!

One of them is our very own Lea Holstine: "Sam Easton is a veteran who lost his buddies to an IED explosion in Afghanistan. With burns and scars on half his face, he stands out, and his spirit is broken. His wife, Yuki, left him three months earlier. He's a barback at the Pearl Club, where Melody Traeger is a bartender. When Ryan, a customer that Melody's been seeing, hits her, Sam offers her a place to stay. Neither of them has reliable alibis when LAPD detective Margaret Nolan shows up with her partner after Ryan is killed. When another murder occurs, Sam and Melody seek refuge, but their safe harbor becomes a house of terror, and they must draw on their own resources to survive. The author of the award-winning "Monkeewrench" novels launches a new L.A.-based series with an intense, unforgettable novel that focuses on the predators and prey that thrive in the city. The intricately plotted story handles Easton's PTSD with compassion while revealing his disturbing torment. Three complex characters, Sam, Melody, and Detective Nolan, are introduced in a gripping story for thriller fans." —*Library Journal* (starred review), Pick of the Month

✦ Tudor, CJ. [The Other People](#) (\$46). Traversing England's M1 in a camper van (which doubles as his home) in an endless search for clues to his daughter's whereabouts is no way to live, but Gabe, who is a shadow of his former self, sees it as penance. During the attack on his family three years ago, Gabe wasn't home. He was on the M1, where he insists he caught a glimpse of Izzy in an old car. His father-in-law identified their bodies, but Gabe's sighting of Izzy that day, and a few other things, has convinced him that she's still alive. He was a suspect for a short time but was cleared and couldn't convince the police of his sighting. A tip on Izzy from a mysterious man who calls himself the Samaritan leads to a submerged car, a dead body, and an underground network that calls itself The Other People. Its website is only accessible via the dark web, and it offers a very exclusive service for victims of crime who feel robbed of the justice they feel they deserve. But the group's help comes at a terrible price. Meanwhile, a woman named Fran is on the run with a little girl named Alice, who has terrifying visions of a girl and an eerie beachscape. Who is the girl, and what is she trying to tell Alice? "The latest page-turner from Tudor contains elements of the supernatural within a thriller, but the true mystery lies in dark secrets kept and the lengths that some will go for justice and revenge. Plot twists and revelations will keep readers guessing to the last page."—*LJ*. Recommended to fans of Dean Koontz.

### UNSIGNED EVENT BOOKS

Gosling, Victoria. [Before the Ruins](#) (Holt \$26.99). Four disaffected teenagers. A deserted manor. A vast supply of drugs. A diamond necklace stolen in 1936 rumored to be buried on the grounds. A further cache of explosive secrets. What could go right this summer of 1996 when Andy's mother predicts the apocalypse? Andy and three friends decide to see out the end of the world at a deserted manor at the center of an unsolved mystery. There they meet David who is charming, unreliable—and on the run from the police. Danger is like a drug to teens, yes? He pits the friends against each other on a treasure hunt that may have begun as an innocent deception....

Come for the missing person mystery, stay for the existential ennui. Our **January British Crime Club Book of the Month** is less a mystery than a study in moral disorder, much like the debut of Abigail Dean in *Girl A*, which I review in Signed Books. Dana Stabenow calls this British nihilism and it seems to be the Next Big Thing, with undertows of menace beautifully depicted in artful prose. Valerie Martin says Gosling puts her "in mind of Edward St. Aubyn and Donna Tartt: Dark, fierce, and totally addictive." Aimee Molloy likens it to the work of Tana French. I can see early Ruth Ware.

Mosse, Kate. [The City of Tears](#) (St Martins \$27.99). See the review above under Signed Books of Mosse's second chapter in superb historical fiction set in 15<sup>th</sup> Century France and its devastating religious wars.

Siger, Jeff. [Murder in Mykonos](#) (\$12.99). A new edition with a Foreword by Thomas Perry for the first investigation by Greek cop Andreas Kaldis who has been promoted out of Athens, a useful trick for politicians, to serve as the Mykonos Chief of Police. There he is confronted in this tourist haven with the remains of a young woman, ritually bound and buried on a pile of human bones inside a remote church in the mountains. Pressure descends to find her killer before the island's fabled reputation as a tourist playground is jeopardized. The chase is full of action and ancient tropes and spends some time on nearby Delos.

Wagner, David. [Cold Tuscan Stone](#) (\$12.99). Rick Montoya has moved from New Mexico to Rome, embracing the life of a translator. He's settling in to la dolce vita when a school friend who is now senior in the Italian Art Squad recruits Rick for an unofficial undercover role. Armed with a list of galleries, suspects, and an expense account, Rick would arrive in Tuscany posing as a buyer for a gallery and spend his days looking at Roman artifacts and sipping wine to flush out burial urn traffickers. But before sunset on Rick's first day in Volterra, a gallery employee dies in a brutal fall from a high cliff. The local Commissario and his team consider Rick an amateur, and worse, a foreigner. And now they suspect him in the dead man's murder.... "Wagner hits all the right notes in this debut. His likable protagonist engages, plus the Italian angle is always appealing. Perfect for readers who enjoy a complex puzzle, a bit of humor, and a fairly gentle procedural. Don't miss this one."—*Library Journal* Starred Review for the first Rick Montoya Italian Mystery, now reissued.

### CLASSICS

Bennett, Margot. [The Man Who Didn't Fly](#) (Poisoned Pen \$14.99). The *PW* Starred Review: First published in 1955, this outstanding mystery from Bennett (1912–1980) poses a genuinely original puzzle. A private plane that was scheduled to transport four men from England to Ireland crashes into the Irish Channel, presumably killing the pilot and the three men seen to board the plane. But in the absence of the passengers' corpses, which of them perished—and who is the title character, the fourth man who for an unknown reason missed the flight? Identifying him falls to an entertaining pair of policemen, Inspector Lewis and Sergeant Young, who work diligently to reconstruct what happened in the face of witnesses whose recollections of what the men on the plane looked like are frustratingly murky. Bennett maintains suspense despite not relying on a familiar whodunit structure. Superior prose (a landlord sits "on a low stool, his great, yellow, rectangular face hanging over the bar like a

disfigured moon; occasionally pouring a drink”) enhances the crackerjack plot. This superior reissue exemplifies the mission of the British Library Crime Classics series.

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

Dana Stabenow adds, “Mary Kelly’s *The Spoilt Kill* beat out John Le Carré’s *Call for the Dead* for the Gold Dagger Award in 1961, and now I know why. This book is exquisitely written, with a totally character-driven plot in a fully realized workplace setting (a commercial pottery). The detective is undercover on a case of industrial espionage and the pottery’s accountant is found murdered by, well, let’s just say by clay. But this is one of those books that is about far more than its mystery... some passages could have been written today and be just as true now as then.”

Woolrich, Cornell. [The Bride Wore Black](#) (American Mystery Classics \$15.95). Here the first suspense novel that Woolrich wrote following his career as a pulp fiction author. Upon publication, the *Kansas City Star* said it was “a delicacy for epicures” while the *Hartford Courant* stated it was “the most exciting experience in crime fiction this reviewer has had in some considerable time.” This is the noir-tinged puzzler that launched the career of one of the genre’s most influential authors. It was filmed by Francois Truffaut, who adaptation was made as an homage to Alfred Hitchcock. A woman is obsessed with a deadly personal mission. She selects her victims with care. She dispatches them with cunningness and then she vanishes as quickly as she surfaces—out of nowhere. No one knows her identity or why she appears to undertake such ghastly deeds. We only know she has terrifying beauty and each time she appears a man dies horribly! “If it doesn’t freeze your blood, then you are immune to literary chills.”—*The Baltimore Sun*

#### AND CLASSIC CHRISTIE

Christie, Agatha. [Poirot Investigates](#) (\$9.95). A collection of stories featuring eccentric Hercule Poirot. Knopf has bought the Christies away from Collins, or so it seems, so expect a spate of reissues with probable new material in introductions and such.

Also PBS will kick off the year 2021 with two TV documentaries focused on the life and publishing career of Agatha Christie, author of more than 60 murder mysteries and easily one of the most popular and successful novelists in the world. The two forthcoming specials are *Inside the Mind of Agatha Christie*, which will broadcast on January 17 at 10 p.m. EST, and *Agatha Christie’s England*, which will broadcast January 24 at 10 p.m. EST, on PBS, PBS.org, and on the PBS video app. Both programs will

stream online simultaneously with the broadcast and will be available on iOS, Android, Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, Android TV, Samsung Smart TV and Chromecast. Both programs will be narrated by Samantha Bond.

*Inside the Mind of Agatha Christie* offers Christie fans rare access to her family members, scholars and her personal archive. The film will delve into her isolated childhood, her time as a nurse during WWI (which gave her the background medical knowledge for her use of poison, blood and gore in her books), as well as the breakdown of her first marriage and her mysterious disappearance for 11 days in 1926.

*Agatha Christie’s England* will explore how Christie created a literary universe that shaped the world’s image of England. The settings of her books were taken from real places and the film will explore her surroundings, among them Ugbrook House, where she met her first husband, Abney Hall, the inspiration for Christie’s iconic country house murder settings, and the boathouse at Greenway, her country retreat. Which I visited in 1990 and had a private tour with her grandson Matthew Pritchard.

#### NEW IN HARDCOVER

**Note: There are still few advanced reading copies. I have read printed MS of the Signed books but not most of the below, hence so many quoted reviews**

Delany, Vicki. [A Curious Incident](#) (Crooked Lane \$26.99). Our blogger Lesa reviews: Gemma Doyle, owner of Sherlock Holmes Bookshop and Emporium, insists she’s not a consulting detective. Eleven-year-old Lauren is missing her cat, Snowball. Gemma’s dog, Violet, tracks the cat to a neighbor’s gardening shed, but Gemma basks in the praise. Just a couple of days later, Lauren is back, offering Gemma \$10 to prove her mother, Sheila, did not kill her rival for the annual trophy from the West London Garden Club. After Sheila’s garden was vandalized and she accused Anna, it’s natural for the police to view Sheila as a suspect when Anna is killed. Gemma can’t stand Sheila, seeing her as self-centered and egotistical, and she tells Lauren the police will find the killer. But even Gemma finds it hard to resist the girl’s pleas when she shows up at the bookstore, abandoned by both of her parents. She takes in Lauren and, in typical Gemma fashion, probes in the wrong places until the killer panics and attempts a second murder. Quirky Gemma provides the humor herself in the latest cozy installment in the series. Readers who appreciate Holmes pastiches, this one featuring a woman with Holmes’s intellect and lack of emotional intelligence, will enjoy the character-driven story. 6<sup>th</sup> in a [cozy series](#).

✦ Doherty, Paul. [Hymn to Murder](#) (Headline \$26.99). Secrets simmer in the lonely wasteland of Dartmoor. Spring, 1312. At Malmaison Manor, Lord Simon is concealing a dark secret—one he arrogantly assumes will never catch up with him. But someone knows about the crime he committed and they’ve found a way to make him pay. And he’s not alone. When he is found mysteriously slain, other deaths soon follow. Meanwhile, ships on the Devonshire coast are being deliberately wrecked, their crews slaughtered, their cargoes plundered. Sir Hugh Corbett and Lord Simon are bound by the Secret Chancery and their search for one precious ruby—the Lacrima Christi. So, when Corbett learns of Lord Simon’s death, he is once more dragged into a tangled web of lies and intrigue and it’s not long before secrets of his own start to surface. Amazing to think this is the 21st Hugh Corbett mystery.

Engberg, Katrine. [The Butterfly House](#) (Gallery \$28). A Danish hospital mystery. Copenhagen homicide detective Jeppe Kørner investigates the murders of three people connected to a now-closed teen psychiatric facility, the Butterfly House. Each victim was drained of blood and left floating, two in Copenhagen fountains and the third in a lake. Since Jeppe's partner, Detective Anette Werner, is on maternity leave, the low-energy Detective Falck, one of many well-drawn supporting characters, assists him in tracking down surviving staff members and patients. One patient's suicide and a staff member's mysterious death years earlier provide motives, and the behavior of many of the potential suspects/victims suggests they could all be guilty of something. The stakes rise as Anette, restless at home, starts investigating on her own, creating some turmoil in her personal life. By addressing the issue of society's treatment of the mentally ill, Engberg brings the complexities of life into this superior Danish police procedural. Engberg began with [The Tenant](#) (\$16.99).

Grippando, James. [Twenty](#) (Harper \$27.99). *LJ* reviews: Eighteen-year-old Xavier Khoury confesses to killing 14 people in a shooting spree at his school and the district attorney is confident of a death penalty verdict based on the anti-Muslim sentiment in the community. Xavier's mother asks Miami attorney Jack Swyteck, whose daughter is a kindergartener at the school, to represent Xavier in proceedings to reduce the sentence to 14 consecutive life sentences in prison, which is a speedier process and also less onerous for the victims' families. When Al-Qaeda claims responsibility for the mass shooting, the crime intersects with federal terrorism departments and jurisdictional arguments ensue. Jack tries to withdraw as counsel for family reasons but the request is denied by the district judge. His investigation is hampered by governmental interference as well as his uncommunicative client. Either Xavier was groomed for the shooting by extremist factions or he is being set up and is actually innocent. This 17th book in the "Jack Swyteck" series is a low-key legal thriller for the first two-thirds of the book, after which the action heats up to inferno proportions. Hold on to your seats after that. Fans of Grippando and of legal thrillers will not be disappointed.

Harrison, Jamie. [Center of Everything](#) (Continuum \$26). "This is a story about family, about history, and about love. The characters are like you and me; their stories are intertwined just as ours are, with a past and a hoped-for future. Author Jamie Harrison wields a mighty pen with precision and care, peopling her book with a myriad of interesting characters living believable lives. Her narrative is insightful and moving, and she has that rare gift of making a fictional story sound like the real thing."

Hawkins, Rachel. [The Wife Upstairs](#) (St Martins \$27.99)

Moss, Tara. [The War Widow](#) (Dutton \$26). Moss, author of the Makedde Vanderwall series, follows a former war correspondent in this 1946-set novel. Billie Walker decides to reopen her father's investigative firm after losing her job at the Sydney newspaper where she worked. In her first case, a German immigrant hires Billie to find her 17-year-old son. As Billie looks into the boy's disappearance, she becomes embroiled in more nefarious goings-on, including a murder. The launch of a planned series, this fun title, we noted, is full of "rich period detail" and features a fierce heroine that makes it a "stylish twist on the classic 1940s detective novel."

North, Anna. [Outlawed](#) (Berkley \$26). The Indie Next Pick: "I am a well-adjusted adult, but I still cried when I finished this book because I loved it so much. While the western is generally a conservative genre built upon racist and sexist values, Anna North has managed to stay true to the classic in style and theme while creating a powerful and progressive story. Ada is an incredibly compelling narrator with clear passions and talents, and watching her grow into herself and achieve her goals is wonderful. *Outlawed* is about the many different ways to be whole and to own your power, even in a world that tries to hold you down. It's an exciting and extraordinary novel."

O'Donnell, Paraic. [The House on Vesper Sands](#) (Tin House \$26.95). The Indie Next Pick: "Paraic O'Donnell leavens the dark foreboding of a truly sinister, otherworldly mystery with distinctively clever storytelling and a decidedly marvelous cast of characters. You are in the best of hands with Inspector Cutter and Gideon Bliss on the case, along with the intrepid and resourceful reporter Octavia Hillingdon. Beautifully done!"

Quinn, Cate. [Black Widows](#) (Sourcebooks \$26.99). This is an ambitious novel by a British author, previously "independently" published to success, who examines the murder of a Mormon husband through the prisms of each of his three sister wives. Living on a kind of homestead in Utah near enough to Salt Lake City to reach it but away from the gaze of authority (the narrative makes it clear that polygamy is not only a crime in Utah but much frowned upon by conventional Mormons), the isolated family of four is, unsurprisingly, rife with tension. Yet as the story progresses towards an unexpected resolution, so do the wives. Quinn cites some of the many troubled issues our own Betty Webb examined in *Desert Wives* including interbreeding and its effects.

Robson, Jennifer. [Our Darkest Night](#) (Harper \$17.99). "In 1942 Venice, Antonina Mazin, a young Jewish woman, aspires to be a doctor like her father, despite crackdowns by Mussolini's government on the rights of Jews. As the political winds turn more ominous, Antonina's father arranges for her to go into hiding in a remote village, masquerading as Nina, the Catholic wife of local farmer and former seminary student Niccolò Gerardi. While their relationship at first is only for show, the two fall in love while working for the Resistance. But when a Nazi officer discovers Nina's true identity, their lives are placed in jeopardy. The brutal reality and atrocities of war are on full view with devastating clarity. Expert characterizations and perfect pacing are rounded out by lyrical prose ("She lay on her side, stricken, watching the last of the sun fade to nothing, and she waited for the stars to bloom"). This sterling novel will break readers' hearts," says the *PW* review. I add that WWII books are an ever increasing subgenre of historical fiction, authors teasing out innumerable aspects of a war where there was a clearly delineated good and bad side, quoting Ken Follett in a speech I heard.

✠ Rous, Emma. [The Perfect Guests](#) (Berkley \$26). 1988, Norfolk, Raven Hall, Fourteen-year-old Beth Soames is beginning a foster placement with Markus Meyer and Leonora Averell as companion for their curiously isolated daughter, Nina, also 14, who is homeschooled and forbidden to venture into the local village. Jump forward 31 years to London, where actor Sadie Langton is hired to play a guest at a glamorous murder mystery weekend



being staged at a historic mansion. A subsequent flashback finds an unidentified young woman sneaking onto the Raven Hall grounds.... “A richly atmospheric time-slip mystery with the pulse of a thriller, *The Perfect Guests* is deliciously evocative and absolutely spellbinding. Set up like a game of Clue, the story alternates between two narratives, one in the past, the other in the present, each chapter winding the tension higher as you discover the pieces you need to solve the puzzle. With vividly drawn characters, gorgeous prose, and an electric sense of place and time, I was sucked in from the very first page. [A] fun and immensely satisfying treat!”—Christina McDonald on a new book by the author of [The Au Pair](#) (\$16).

Saunders, George. [A Swim in a Pond in the Rain: In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life](#) (Random \$28). The Indie Next Pick: “In this literal master class on literature and writing, Saunders earnestly yet playfully dissects 19th-century Russian short stories to discover how they exude life to this very day, while highlighting methods any aspiring writer can employ. The huge bonus: reading the wondrous stories themselves, and experiencing Tolstoy’s authority, Chekhov’s humanity, and the joy and glory of Gogol.”

Schwartz, Liese O’Halloran. [What Could Be Saved](#) (Atria \$27). The Indie Next Pick: “Wow. What a riveting read! Part family saga, part mystery, *What Could Be Saved* is just extraordinary. It is a moving, powerful story of loss and regret, loyalty and redemption. Schwarz’s crisp, lyrical prose lays bare the emotional journey of each member of this unforgettable family. These beautifully drawn, tragically flawed characters will remain with me long after turning the last page.”

Skelton, Douglas. [The Blood is Still](#) (Arcade \$25.99). I was attracted to this novel by the Scottish author Skelton because Ian Rankin praises it, and because the murder—that of a man in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Highland dress slain by a claymore on the site of Culloden—is referred to throughout by Police Scotland as the Outlander murder! In some ways it’s more like a Glasgow landscape with crime families at war and such, a shadowy militant group, and a tough crime reporter called Rebecca Connolly both at odds with and helping out the police. And there is a kind of love story....

Thompson, Victoria. [City of Schemes](#) (Berkley \$26). Elizabeth Miles, an endearingly charismatic con artist, is about to marry lawyer Gideon Bates, but she’s fearful that news of the wedding might reach nasty businessman Oscar Thornton, who once sought to kill her but who now thinks Elizabeth is dead after she faked her own death. Despite Elizabeth’s best efforts to keep the event quiet, word of her impending wedding does reach Oscar, who approaches Gideon and demands that Elizabeth repay the \$250,000 she cheated him out of in an earlier book. Since she doesn’t have the cash, Elizabeth must devise a new, intricate scam to get out of the bind she’s in. Thompson enhances the caper plotline by having the real-life American Protective League, an anti-immigrant group that disbanded after the armistice in 1918, spawn a fictional successor group that hunts down Americans who aren’t sufficiently loyal to their country. For fans of classic grifter stories, such as *The Sting*. This is better read after the three earlier books in the [Counterfeit Lady Novels](#).

✦ Tudor, CJ. [Burning Girls](#) (Random \$27). See the review in Signed Books above.

Williams, Eley. [The Liar’s Dictionary](#) (Doubleday \$26.95). The Indie Next Pick: “*The Liar’s Dictionary* is an enormously charming novel about putting the world into words. Its two logophilic heroes, separated by a century, are unforgettable characters; I loved spending time with these word-curious creations. You’ll be utterly transported by this playful and seriously funny book.”

#### NEW IN LARGE PAPERBACK

Allende, Isabel. [A Long Petal of the Sea](#) (\$17). Winner of the National Book Foundation’s Lifetime Achievement Award, Allende explores the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War from 1938 to 1994. It begins as pregnant young widow Roser flees Franco’s Spain with Victor Dalmau, an army doctor and the brother of her dead husband. They enter a marriage of convenience to survive, boarding the *SS Winnipeg* for Chile—“the long petal of sea and wine and snow,” as Pablo Neruda called it—as they learn what being in exile really means having built stable lives, he as a cardiologist and she as a widely respected musician. But when the Pinochet dictatorship unseats Chile’s Marxist president in 1973, they find themselves once more endangered by their political views.

✦ Black, Benjamin. [The Secret Guests](#) (\$17). When World War II began in 1939, Operation Pied Piper evacuated almost a million children from cities to the British countryside for safety. The Blitz began in 1940, and, despite the dangers, the British royal family refused to leave the country. While the bombs fell, the family steadfastly remained in place. But what if the young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, were evacuated in secret? In Black’s alternate history, the princesses, accompanied by a female intelligence agent and Irish police officer, are taken into the neutral Republic of Ireland to a remote, crumbling country estate owned by a distant relative and given new identities. However, little remains secret in the Irish countryside. As the young women settle into the rural routine, speculation mounts in the area about who is in their midst and just what their potential political value might be to Irish nationalists.

Bohjalian, Chris. [The Red Lotus](#) (\$16.95). The first time Alexis saw Austin, it was a Saturday night. Not in a bar, but in the emergency room where Alexis sutured a bullet wound in his arm. Six months later, on the brink of falling in love, they travel to Vietnam on a bike tour so that Austin can show her his passion for cycling and he can pay his respects to the place where his father and uncle fought in the war. But as Alexis sips white wine and waits at the hotel for him to return from his solo ride, two men emerge from the tall grass and Austin vanishes into thin air. The only clue he leaves behind is a bright yellow energy gel dropped on the road. As Alexis grapples with this bewildering loss, navigating the FBI, Austin’s prickly family, and her colleagues at the hospital, Alexis uncovers a series of strange lies that force her to wonder: Where did Austin go? Why did he really bring her to Vietnam? And how much danger has he left her in? Bohjalian reinvents himself with each new novel, and after 2018’s *The Flight Attendant*, slated for a limited HBO series, he’s at it again.

Brown, Rita Mae. [Scarlet Fever](#) (\$17). What is it with antiques shop owner Harry Dunbar? First he finds a Louis XV desk just like the one that was stolen from Master of Foxhounds Jane “Sister” Arnold years ago. Then he tells Sister that he’s willing to sell it to her and her partner, retired D.C. accountant Gray Loril-

lard, for a mere \$20,000, since it's only an 18th-century replica. Then, before she can make up her mind, he's found dead at the bottom of the side staircase at Horse Country, Marion Maggiolo's plush equine-themed gift shop. Did he fall, or was he pushed? That's the question before the Jefferson Hunt club and a cast that includes "28 foxhounds, 20 horses, 16 foxes, 3 birds, 3 house pets, and 25 humans." Tally-ho!

Colfer, Eoin. [Highfire](#) (\$16.99). The author of the Artemis Fowl series comes a hilarious and high-octane adult novel about a vodka-drinking, Flashdance-loving dragon who lives an isolated life in the bayous of Louisiana—and the raucous adventures that ensue when he crosses paths with a fifteen-year-old troublemaker on the run from a crooked sheriff.

✦ Finch, Charles. [The Last Passenger](#) (\$17.99). Set in 1855 London, this third prequel to the Charles Lenox Victorian crime series takes the aristocratic sleuth to a crime scene at Paddington Station, where a conductor on the train from Manchester has found a man's bloody corpse. The killer insured that identifying his victim would be a tall order by not only emptying the dead man's pockets but also taking the time to cut out all the labels from the man's clothing. While the police attribute the killing to an ongoing gang war in Manchester, Lenox pursues a different tack after realizing that the conductor lied about missing a bus ticket home in his statement to the authorities. Other evidence, such as the conductor's not wearing a uniform, suggests that he was an imposter not employed by the railway. Finch effectively integrates the politics of the time, including pre-Civil War tensions in America, and his insertion of subplots regarding his lead's romantic life doesn't distract from the clever murder puzzle. If you have somehow missed him start with the three prequels: [The Woman in the Water](#); [The Vanishing Man](#) (\$17.99 each); and this new novel. Or read the very first Lenox, [A Beautiful Blue Death](#) (\$9.99). Finch will sign a return to 1878 London in [An Extravagant Death](#) (St Martins \$27.99) for you and do a virtual event with us February 25

Gentill, Sulari. [Shanghai Secrets](#) (Sourcebooks \$15.99). I may love this entry in the Rowland Sinclair Mysteries the best. Originally titled All the Tears in China (Sulari loves long titles), it takes the wealthy Australian, a kind of Lord Peter Wimsey, and the three members of his bohemian household—to 1935 Shanghai. I loved editing this 9<sup>th</sup> in the [Rowland Sinclair Mysteries](#). Read them in order, they are a marvelous binge as well as reminding us the 1930s turmoil was not all about Europe.

Here's one of the enthusiastic reviews by someone other than myself: "Set in 1935, Gentill's rousing ninth Rowland Sinclair mystery takes Rowly, on his brother Wilfred's instructions, to Shanghai for trade talks involving the family wool business. "Just listen and be pleasant. For God's sake, don't sign anything," Wilfred tells him, adding, "Take your unemployed lefty friends with you, if you must." Thus self-proclaimed poet Milton Isaacs, landscape painter Clyde Watson Jones, and nascent filmmaker Edna Higgins accompany Rowly to the "Paris of the East," where they rub shoulders with English lawyers, Chinese gangsters, Russian nobility, Japanese businessmen, and Indian taxi drivers. Rowly runs afoul of the police when Alexandra Romanovna, a beautiful Russian dancer, is found with her throat cut in his hotel suite, leaving him with no choice but to investigate. Rowly and his pals soon discover any number of people with motive to murder Alexandra. Eccentric but authentic characters bolster a

cracking good plot. Gentill captures in telling detail a political, moral, and cultural milieu." Anne Perry and Rhys Bowen are also fans.

Jen, Gish. [The Resisters](#) (\$16.95). A tale of nonconformity in a world gone mad. Though preternaturally gifted at baseball, specifically pitching, young Gwen is part of the "Surplus," a mass of disenfranchised people living on the edges of a future society in AutoAmerica—an America that has embraced authoritarian automation, creating a class of haves, the "Netted," and have-nots, the "Surplus." The Surplus, deemed unemployable, can't work but must consume, including free food. Gwen's mother, Eleanor, has been persecuted by the government as a resister to the draconian laws and is currently suing the state to expose toxic agents in the free food. In this stark context, Gwen grows up playing baseball in secret, but when her talent is discovered, she is recruited by Net U, the university for the privileged. She reluctantly agrees to attend and has her moral and personal resolve severely tested.

Maurensig, Paolo. [Game of the Gods](#) (World \$15.99). In 1930s British India, a humble servant learns the art of *chaturanga*, the ancient Eastern ancestor of chess. His natural talent soon catches the attention of the maharaja, who introduces him to the Western version of the game. Brought to England as the prince's pawn, Malik becomes a chess legend, winning the world championship and humiliating the British colonialists. His skills as a refined strategist eventually drag him into a strange game of warfare with far-reaching consequences. Inspired by the unlikely true story of chess master Malik Mir Sultan Khan, *Game of the Gods* is a fascinating tale of karma and destiny, by the author of the multimillion-copy bestseller *The Lüneburg Variation* which does not appear to be in print, a shame since chess has become so hot thanks to [The Queen's Gambit](#) (\$16.95) dramatized on Netflix so well.

Montgomery, Jess. [The Hollows](#) (\$17.99). Set in the fall of 1926 in Bronwyn County, Ohio, Montgomery's intricate, atmospheric sequel to 2019's [The Widows](#) (\$9.99), a First Mystery Book selection, finds Sheriff Lily Ross called to investigate the death of an elderly woman who fell from the top of the Moonvale Hollow tunnel into the path of an oncoming train. Was it an accident, or was she pushed onto the tracks by a ghostly figure in white, as the brakeman insists? Lily learns that the victim, Thea Kincaide, was an escaped inmate from the Hollows Asylum for the Insane and a long-lost cousin to her best friend, jail mistress Hildy Cooper, who sometimes looks after Lily's two young children. In retracing Thea's path from the asylum to the site of her death, Lily discovers disturbing evidence that an evil spirit from the past is trying to rise again. Realistic characters complement a great sense of place. Montgomery does an admirable job of portraying brave women such as Lily who must become the support of their families in the face of their own grief after their husbands' deaths. I highly recommend both of these gems.

Patchett, Ann. [The Dutch House](#) (\$17). A 1920s mansion in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, worms into the lives of the broken family that occupies it. It comes complete with Delft mantels, life-size portraits of the original owners, a ballroom, and staff, as a gift to the Brooklyn buyer's wife. She hates it. And runs away, leaving her children. Five years later enter a second wife... "Patchett remarkably traces acts of cruelty and kindness through three generations of a family over 50 years. Patchett's splendid

novel is a thoughtful, compassionate exploration of obsession and forgiveness, what people acquire, keep, lose or give away, and what they leave behind.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

Patrick, Rene. [The Sharpest Needle](#) (Severn \$28.99). Marion Davies, the mistress of press baron William Randolph Hearst, asks Lillian Frost, the social secretary to a star struck millionaire, and famed costume designer Edith Head, Lillian’s friend, to discreetly discover the source of a letter threatening to reveal a saucy incident from Marion’s past that could embarrass Hearst. Lillian and Edith’s investigation leads them to the letter writer, a surprising blackmail demand, a dead body, and a painting by Otto Haas, a German artist whose work is being destroyed by the Nazis. Along the way, Lillian attends parties at Hearst’s San Simeon estate, meets Charlie Chaplin, dances with Orson Welles, and attends the premiere of *The Wizard of Oz*. Meanwhile, the Germans invade Poland, and at least one Hollywood producer is trying to curry favor with Mussolini. Patrick elegantly weaves Hollywood gossip and history into the well-crafted plot. This is a tailor-made treat for film buffs and the whole series focusing on the Hollywood A-List of its Golden Age is one much enjoyed by our own John Charles.

✎ Pooley, Clare. [The Authenticity Project](#) (\$17). A group of strangers who live near each other in London become fast friends after writing their deepest secrets in a shared notebook. Julian Jessop, a septuagenarian artist, is bone-crushingly lonely when he starts “The Authenticity Project”—as he titles a slim green notebook—and begins its first handwritten entry questioning how well people know each other in his tiny corner of London. After 15 years on his own mourning the loss of his beloved wife, he begins the project with the aim that whoever finds the little volume when he leaves it in a cafe will share their true self with their own entry and then pass the volume on to a stranger... This is a warm and lovely read, perfect for a chilly winter night.

Robson, Jennifer. [Our Darkest Night: A Novel of Italy and the Second World War](#) (Morrow \$17.99). “In 1942 Venice, Antonina Mazin, a young Jewish woman, aspires to be a doctor like her father, despite crackdowns by Mussolini’s government on the rights of Jews. As the political winds turn more ominous, Antonina’s father arranges for her to go into hiding in a remote village, masquerading as Nina, the Catholic wife of local farmer and former seminary student Niccolò Gerardi. While their relationship at first is only for show, the two fall in love while working for the Resistance. But when a Nazi officer discovers Nina’s true identity, their lives are placed in jeopardy. The brutal reality and atrocities of war are on full view with devastating clarity. Expert characterizations and perfect pacing are rounded out by lyrical prose (‘She lay on her side, stricken, watching the last of the sun fade to nothing, and she waited for the stars to bloom’). This sterling novel will break readers’ hearts,” says the *PW* review. I add that WWII books are an ever increasing subgenre of historical fiction, authors teasing out innumerable aspects of a war where there was “a clearly delineated good and bad side,” quoting Ken Follett in a speech I heard.

Ryan, Hank Phillippi. [The First to Lie](#) (\$15.99). Ryan earned a *PW* Starred Review for this August 2020 publication: In this stellar standalone from five-time Agatha Award winner Ryan, broadcast journalist Elle Berensen relishes her first assignment for Boston’s startup Channel 11—proving that a much touted

drug made by the pharmaceutical company Pharmedex can make women barren. Elle wants to ferret out the information with facts and ethical journalism, but Meg Weest, her new, overly enthusiastic assistant, is consumed by the story. Lacking scruples, Meg will go to any lengths, including lying, cheating, and violence, to usurp Elle and humiliate the family who own Pharmedex. Elle has to wonder whether security agents for Pharmedex have uncovered her investigation after her home is broken into and she’s followed a couple of times. Meanwhile, confident Nora Quinn, the drug firm’s newest pharmaceutical sales representative, who visits doctors’ offices and chats with patients in waiting rooms, has her own agenda. The breathlessly energetic plot touches on corporate intrigue, journalism ethics, revenge, and the corrosive nature of lies.

Schaffhausen, Joanna. [All the Best Lies](#) (\$17.99). FBI agent Reed Markham is haunted by one painful unsolved mystery: who murdered his mother? Camilla was brutally stabbed to death more than forty years ago while baby Reed lay in his crib mere steps away. The trail went so cold that the Las Vegas Police Department has given up hope of solving the case. But then a shattering family secret changes everything Reed knows about his origins, his murdered mother, and his powerful adoptive father, state senator Angus Markham. Now Reed has to wonder if his mother’s killer is uncomfortably close to home. Unable to trust his family with the details of his personal investigation, Reed enlists his friend, suspended cop Ellery Hathaway, to join his quest in Vegas.... For more about Ellery and Reed refer to Signed Books above. But I’d start with the first two books in this series.

Watts, Madeleine. [The Inland Sea](#) (Catapult \$16.95). The Indie Next Pick: “This character study of a woman’s reckless year while taking time away from college and answering phones for Australia’s emergency response system cuts deep. Madeleine Watts’ extraordinary debut novel takes us from oceans to bathtubs, from rivers flowing in the wrong direction toward a mythical sea to apocalyptic firestorms. The writing is stunningly powerful and insightful. I highly recommend this.”

#### NEW IN SMALL PAPERBACK

*Nearly all the small paperbacks in the December 2020 Booknews publish on December 29 and the next batch will be end of January. The four below are available earlier in the month.*

Box, CJ. [Long Range](#) (\$9.99). It begins when a retired FBI agent warns the Wyoming Game Warden’s longtime falconer friend, Nate Romanowski, that the Mexican drug cartel whose four assassins Nate helped take down in *Wolf Pack* have marked Nate as a target for revenge. The cartel has dispatched Orlando Panfile, an expert marksman, to do the job. Meanwhile, someone takes an astonishing long-range shot at ill-tempered Judge Hewitt in his home that hits Hewitt’s wife, leaving her in critical condition. Could it be Panfile? Joe is asked to join the investigation by the new county sheriff, Brendan Kaplow, a guy who’d rather strut than sleuth and seems to be focused on political office. Kaplow find it easier to arrest Nate, a remarkable shooter, than actually investigate, especially after a long-range rifle is discovered hidden in one of Nate’s falcon pens. Of course, Joe isn’t buying it, and conducts his own unauthorized investigation to help clear Nate. But why does Panfile mount an effort to have Nate freed? Several other odd questions need answering, too. I am impressed with the way Box skillfully elicits sympathy for Panfile, a stone

cold killer if ever there was one. I love Nate trying to be a conventional family man and.... But it's a Box hallmark never to do the obvious!

Collins, Max Allan. [Skim Deep](#) (Hard Case Crime \$10.95). The onetime world-class thief Nolan—now happily gone straight with his own restaurant/nightclub—whisks his longtime lover Sherry off to Vegas for a trip to a wedding chapel and a honeymoon stay. But an eye-in-the-sky security cam at a casino spots Nolan, whose past catches up with him when he's thought to be casing the joint. An old "friend" sees Nolan as the perfect patsy for a scheme to heist the weekly skim haul, and when the former thief's young frequent accomplice, Jon—a musician in the casino's house band—finds the couple mysteriously, suspiciously missing, it's up to Nolan's Best Man to keep wedding bells from tolling a funeral march.

✎ George, Elizabeth. [A Banquet of Consequences](#) (\$9.99). As Inspector Thomas Lynley investigates the London angle of an ever more darkly disturbing case, his partner, Barbara Havers, is looking behind the peaceful façade of country life to discover a twisted world of desire and deceit. The suicide of William Goldacre is devastating to those left behind who will have to deal with its unintended consequences—could there be a link between the young man's leap from a Dorset cliff and a horrific poisoning in Cambridge? This novel published in 2015 but this is the first small paperback edition.

Howard, Linda. [After Sundown](#) (\$7.99). I thought this March 2020 release in hardcover was fabulous. Don't miss the paperback. When Ben Jernigan, a former Marine turned survivalist Tennessee mountain man, warns Sela Gordon, the owner of a gas station he frequents, of a catastrophic solar storm that will take down the global power grid in less than 24 hours, she doesn't quite believe him, but gathers supplies just in case. When the grid goes down as predicted, Sela and her neighbors are plunged into a new world order. Money has no meaning, gasoline is gold, and people must band together as food and other supplies dwindle. Despite the desperate times, attraction bubbles between shy Sela and reclusive Ben as they work to keep themselves, their families, and their friends safe. As hot romance sizzles between the pair, steadily mounting panic among those trying to survive the crisis keeps the pages turning in a frightening realistic thriller with great landscape and atmosphere.