

**DETAILED INFORMATION ON EACH OF THE GROUP A BOOKS**

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**A1 Type: Legal/Courtroom/Attorney**

**Cimarron Rose** by [James Lee Burke](#), 1997/ MVLC: 12

Basics

- **Briefly:** Billy Bob Holland, an attorney and former Texas Ranger, is hired to defend a teenager accused of rape and murder. But in fact, the accused is Holland's own son.
- **Setting:** Contemporary (1997) Deaf Smith County, Texas (real county).
- **Context:** Burke is the author of nearly 40 books, consisting of 4 series, and a number of standalones. He is best known for his 23 Dave Robicheaux books, that features a deputy sheriff in New Iberia, Louisiana. *Cimarron Rose* starts the Billy Bob Holland series.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 53%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 85%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 1,232

Long Form

**When Texas attorney Billy Bob Holland is hired following the murder of a teenage girl, he isn't just defending a client—he's defending his son.**

Lucas Smothers, nineteen and from the wrong end of town, has been arrested for the rape and murder of a local girl. His lawyer, former Texas Ranger Billy Bob Holland, is convinced of Lucas's innocence—but proving it won't be easy amid the deceit and corruption that spreads like wildfire in a gossipy small town where everybody knows everybody else's business. That includes the poorly kept secret that Billy Bob isn't just Lucas's lawyer but, as the result of an extramarital affair, the boy's father. As Billy Bob seeks to clear his son's name, he attracts enemies far more dangerous than any he ever faced as a Ranger.

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Sometimes you find an author whose work is so fine s/he makes you ashamed of your own pitiful scribbling. James Lee Burke does that for me. His book *Cimarron Rose* is a good example of his stellar performance.

*Cimarron Rose*, one of Burke's Billy Bob Holland novels, is the story of Billy Bob's search for the killer of a killer and his adolescent associates when a teen age girl is killed in a popular teenager hangout. In that, maestro Billy Bob Holland takes the lead defending an adolescent whose lower class family background preselect him as victim. In the episode that follows, Billy Bob kicks open a giant hole in town corruption, wealthy power and seemingly immoral leaders of the social upper crust.

Billy Bob, raw fisted and quick tempered, seems to embody the fighting truth seeker a la Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer of 50 years ago. This novel is replete with uncountable fist, knife, and gunfights, mano a mano among the bad guys of *Cimarron Rose*. –An Amazon reader review.

**I hunted for good lawyer-protagonist books. I have read some of this author's Dave Robicheaux series (a Sheriff's Detective) and trust his high quality writing. So I thought trying out his attorney series might be a good read. –Dick**

Awards for this Book

- 1998 Edgar Award for Best Mystery Novel
- Finalist 1998 Barry Award for Best Novel
- Finalist 1997 Hammett Prize

**A2 Type: Legal/Courtroom/Attorney**

**Thirteen** by [Steve Cavanagh](#), 2019 / MVLC: 25

Basics

- **Protagonist:** Eddie Flynn, a lawyer who used to be a con man. What happens when a murder trial defendant is not the real killer – someone on the jury is the killer who has framed the defendant?
- **Setting:** Contemporary New York City
- **Context:** This the 4th of 7 Eddie Flynn books
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 57%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 87%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 17,232
- **How Nominated:** Dick- it's author was a Barry Award finalist a few times

Long Form

It's the murder trial of the century. And Joshua Kane has killed to get the best seat in the house – and to be sure the wrong man goes down for the crime. Because this time, the killer isn't on trial. He's on the jury.

But there's someone on his tail. **Former-conman-turned-criminal-defense-attorney Eddie Flynn** doesn't believe that his movie-star client killed two people. He suspects that the real killer is closer than they think – but who would guess just how close?

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" 'The Serial Killer Isn't on Trial. He's on the Jury.'

"This awesome hook kept coming up in my book recommendations. I had resisted starting this book seeing as it was the 4th in the series, until last week when stuck trying to find something to keep my attention decided to try this. **There is no problem reading this if you haven't read the previous books.**

"Former con-artist turned lawyer Eddie Flynn finds himself defending a celebrity accused of murdering his wife and security agent; in putting together a defense he comes across some clues that suggest his client has been framed and by someone who's a pro... now pair this with what we know from the blurb - that there is a serial killer "Kane" on the jury - who is going to make sure that a guilty verdict will be returned.

"The story primarily unfolds alternating between the viewpoints of Eddie and Kane. With twists and red herrings galore and a last minute OMG I didn't see that reveal. This was a breath taking, page turning, coffee went cold and I stayed up too late read that gets my 5 star recommendation." —Amazon reader review 1

"TH1RT3EN was entertaining and I liked it, but not very realistic. I thought the character development was interesting and I particularly enjoyed Eddie Flynn. If you are willing to suspend disbelief for almost 500 pages I think it's worth reading." —Amazon reader review 2:

"Outstanding - an intriguing premise, a tense, gripping build-up, and a spectacular climax. This guy is the real deal. Trust me." —Lee Child

**I tried the first book in the series, and was not a fan. I accepted the con-man skills this protagonist brings with him, but not the Spiderman skills (he climbed along a building ledge to access and break into a third story window). But the author is explosively popular, and has been a Barry Award finalist a few times, so while I have not read this particular book, I'm willing to give it a go. Are you? –Dick**

No Awards for this Book from the 15 awarding groups as reported by [SYKM](#).

**A3 Type: Legal/Courtroom/Attorney****By Way of Sorrow** by [Robin Gigl](#), 2022 / MVLC+: 34

## Basics

- **Protagonist:** Erin McCabe, a criminal defense attorney, takes a client, a young, Black, transgender prostitute accused of murdering a wealthy politician's son. As she considers all avenues of a defense, she and her client find that their lives are in danger.
- **Setting:** Contemporary Atlantic City area of New Jersey
- **Context:** This is the 1st of a series of 3 with defense attorney Erin McCabe
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 46%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 82%%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 409

## Long Form

Erin McCabe is a criminal defense lawyer doing her best to live a quiet life in the wake of profound personal change. But when a young, Black, transgender prostitute is accused of murdering a wealthy politician's son, Erin feels duty-bound to defend her – even if it puts her career and life in jeopardy...

Four months ago, William E. Townsend, Jr., son of a New Jersey State Senator, was found fatally stabbed in a rundown motel near Atlantic City. Sharise Barnes, a nineteen-year-old transgender prostitute, is in custody, and given the evidence against her, there seems little doubt of a guilty verdict.

Erin knows that defending Sharise will blow her own private life wide open, and doubtless deepen her estrangement from her family. Yet as a trans woman, she feels uniquely qualified to help Sharise, and duty-bound to protect her from the possibility of a death sentence.

Sharise claims she killed the senator's son in self-defense. As Erin assembles the case with her partner, former FBI agent Duane Swisher, the circumstances hint at a more complex and chilling story with ties to other brutal murders. Senator Townsend is using the full force of his prestige and connections to publicly discredit everyone involved in defending Sharise. Behind the scenes, his tactics are even more dangerous. His son had secrets that could destroy the senator's political aspirations—secrets worth killing for. And as leads begin mysteriously disappearing, it's not just the life of Erin's client at stake, but her own...

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**For me, *By Way of Sorrow* was a fantastic blend of interesting characters, page-turning suspense, and most importantly - authentic courtroom action and behind the scenes legal maneuvering and negotiating. I couldn't ask for more in a "legal thriller," but I got "more" anyway. I got authentic insights into what it means to be a transgender woman. The author is a very successful NJ attorney and also a transgender woman, so I found the book holding my interest on so many levels. As soon as possible, I will be reading her second book. –Dick**

“Readers will find that *By Way of Sorrow* is a compulsively riveting page-turner with a complex heroine, a captivating plot, and no easy answers. It's one of the best thrillers of the year.” –*Mystery Scene*

“Gigl, a transgender lawyer herself, provides provocative insights into the legal system and the challenges of gender identity.” —Booklist

“Robyn Gigl has delivered a compelling, provocative legal thriller like no other. It's addictive as hell, one of those ‘just one more chapter’ books that keep you reading late into the night.

Topical and fast-paced, *By Way of Sorrow* grabs you on the very first page with a brutal murder, and then sends you on a twist-filled thrill-ride that doesn't let up until the startling finale. Gigl introduces a new kind of heroine with attorney Erin McCabe—she's brilliant, resourceful, a little vulnerable and completely unique. Bravo! Is it too soon to ask when we can expect the next Erin McCabe thriller?" —Kevin O'Brien, New York Times bestselling author of *The Bad Sister*.

No Awards for this Book from the 15 awarding groups as reported by [SYKM](#).

**A4 Type: Legal/Courtroom/Attorney**

**The Local** by [Joey Hartstone](#), 2022

Basics

- **Protagonist:** James Euchre is a small town lawyer with persuasive jury skills. He is forced into defending a wealthy Pakistani-American entrepreneur who stands accused of killing a beloved judge – who is also Euchre's good friend and mentor.
- **Setting:** Contemporary rural Texas.
- **Context:** This a debut standalone by a successful screenwriter.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 53%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 86%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 1,380

Long Form

In the town of Marshall sits the federal courthouse for the Eastern District of Texas, the epicenter of patent law in the US because of its reputation for speedy trials and massive punitive payouts. Every big-city legal team needs a friendly voice, a local attorney, to sway the hometown juries. James Euchre is the best there is.

Euchre's new client is Amir Zavar, a firebrand CEO forced to defend his life's work against a software patent infringement claim. Late one night, after a heated confrontation in a preliminary hearing, a beloved judge is found murdered in the courthouse parking lot. All signs point to Zavar—he has motive, he has opportunity, and he has no alibi. Moreover, he is an outsider, a wealthy Pakistani-American entrepreneur who stands accused of killing a local hero.

Zavar maintains his innocence and demands that Euchre defend him. It's the last thing Euchre wants. The victim was his good friend and mentor, but the only way he can get definitive answers is to take the case. With the help of former federal prosecutor Layla Stills and local PI Lisa Morgan, Euchre must navigate the byzantine world of criminal defense law in a town where everyone knows everyone, and bad blood has a long history. The deeper he digs, the more he fears that either an innocent man will be sent to death row or a murderer will be set free.

*The Local* is a small-town legal thriller as big in scope as Texas. It crackles with courtroom tension and high-stakes gambits on every page to the final, shocking verdict.

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"The plot is gripping, and Hartstone, a veteran screenwriter, sketches his characters with real verve and affection." -- The New York Times, Editors' Choice

**This author was recommended by Ed, and everything looks great to me. –Dick**

No Awards for this Book from the 15 awarding groups as reported by [SYKM](#).

**A5 Type: Legal/Courtroom/Attorney*****A Plague of Secrets*** by [John Lescroart](#), 2009 / MVLC: 21

## Basics

- **Protagonists:** Dismas Hardy, ex-cop, bartender, and ex-Assistant District Attorney turned defense attorney, and Abe Glitsky, a black, Jewish cop and homicide detective. Hardy's wealthy socialite client own's a business that is not at all what it seems to be, as more people associated with it are murdered. Plagued by lies and deception, there is one terrible secret that defense attorney Dismas Hardy is duty-bound to protect. Even if the price is his client's life.
- **Setting:** Contemporary San Francisco
- **Context:** This is #15 out 22 books in the Hardy-Glitsky series.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 62%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 89%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 1,585

## Long Form

When Dylan Vogler, the charming manager of the popular Bay Beans West coffee shop in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, is gunned down near the store, inspectors are shocked to discover that his knapsack is overflowing with high-grade marijuana. It soon becomes clear that San Francisco's A-list flocked to Bay Beans West for more than a pricy caffeine fix.

Maya Townshend is the absentee owner of the shop—and the beautiful and extremely wealthy socialite niece of the city's mayor. When she becomes Dismas Hardy's client, he thinks it will be a simple hand-holding exercise until the police identify a suspect. But then another of Maya's past acquaintances turns up murdered, and the newspapers begin to reveal the names of the coffee shop's celebrity, political, and even law-enforcement clientele. Hardy begins to question how much his client knew about what was actually going on inside her business—and whether she was also Vogler's lover.

All the while, Hardy's best friend, homicide lieutenant Abe Glitsky, sick with worry over his severely-injured youngest child, barely functions in his job. Without his supervision, his inspectors are prey to the machinations of the many power brokers with interests in the case. And ambitious prosecutors, both state and federal, close in on Maya.

As her trial gets underway, Hardy discovers that Maya harbors an explosive secret that is at the heart of the case. Regardless, Dismas Hardy is hostage to that secret, and privilege-bound to protect it.

Perceptive, fast-paced and masterful, *A Plague Of Secrets* is sure to have fans and new readers of John Lescroart alike hungrily turning the pages.

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"... you would think that given the author's ability to bring fascinating bits of knowledge about police work, legal and judicial practice, human nature and criminal behavior together in exciting storylines that after 12 books there couldn't really be much more that could surprise. You would be wrong. This story about a "simple" murder case turns out to involve illegal marijuana trade, old murders and robberies, political manipulations, money laundering and the basic deficiencies in human nature that allows all those issues to become one of Dismas Hardy's most interesting defense cases yet.

... if you want to learn a little about the legal system, human nature, the minds of murderers, and a world of secrets that always eventually come to light - buy this book. Just

make sure you set aside a lot of reading time because you will not want to put this down until you reach the end." 5 stars. –An Amazon reader review

About 15 years ago, I read quite a few of Lescroart's books and really liked them. But I haven't kept up. I remember reading one book with a scene with Abe and his young son that brought out my tears- it was so real and precious. I wrote the author and thanked him for his perceptive description. So, I am a fan and personally nominate the whole series. –Dick

No Awards for this Book from the 15 awarding groups as reported by [SYKM](#).

### A6 Type: Police Procedural (Cop-FBI-Sheriff-GameWarden)

*Better the Blood* by [Michael Bennett](#), 2023 / [MVLC](#): 29

#### Basics

- **Protagonist:** Hana Westerman (F), a Māori detective with the Auckland CIB, in contemporary New Zealand
- **Setting:** Contemporary Auckland, New Zealand
- **Context:** This the 1st in an anticipated series. This is Bennett's debut novel.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 51%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 86%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 104

#### Long Form

A tenacious [Māori](#) detective, Hana Westerman juggles single motherhood, endemic prejudice, and the pressures of her career in Auckland CIB. Led to a crime scene by a mysterious video, she discovers a man ritualistically hanging in a secret room and a puzzling inward-curving inscription. Delving into the investigation after a second, apparently unrelated, death, she uncovers a chilling connection to an historic crime: 160 years before, during the brutal and bloody British colonization of New Zealand, a troop of colonial soldiers unjustly executed a Māori Chief.

Hana realizes that the murders are utu—the Māori tradition of rebalancing for the crime committed eight generations ago. There were six soldiers in the British troop, and since descendants of two of the soldiers have been killed, four more potential murders remain. Hana is thus hunting New Zealand's first serial killer.

The pursuit soon becomes frighteningly personal, recalling the painful event, two decades before, when Hana, then a new cop, was part of a police team sent to end by force a land rights occupation by indigenous peoples on the same ancestral mountain where the Chief was killed, calling once more into question her loyalty to her roots. Worse still, a genealogical link to the British soldiers brings the case terrifyingly close to Hana's own family. Twisty and thought-provoking, *Better the Blood* is the debut of a remarkable new talent in crime fiction.

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"A stellar series launch set in contemporary New Zealand . . . The narrative moves at a quick pace. Immersed in modern-day technologies and with a keen sensitivity to cultural issues, this is a finely crafted page-turner. Bennett is a writer to watch."—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"Bennett establishes himself as an excellent storyteller . . . The book's immersion in tribal culture and history makes the greatest impact, lending complexity and sweep to the narrative .

.. One can only hope this is the beginning of a series. A striking debut and a significant addition to Indigenous literature.”—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

“Riveting . . . Bennett deftly illuminates the plight of the Māori people and its continuing effects in New Zealand. His action-packed narrative, blended with various cultural references, recalls the novels of Tony and Anne Hillerman, Craig Johnson, and William Kent Krueger.”—Library Journal

“Bennett unflinchingly weaves together layers of fallout from New Zealand’s bloody colonization, enduring Māori culture, and gripping procedural details. Hopefully this compelling debut heralds the start of a long-running series.”—Booklist

**This book was read earlier this year and recommended to our 2023-2024 booklist by Leslie. It looks like a great candidate for a mystery book. –Dick**

Awards for this Book - More likely to appear on next year's various shortlists, but so far in 2023.....

- Longlisted for the Crime Writers’ Association ILP John Creasey (New Blood) Dagger
- Named a Best Debut Mystery/Crime Novel of 2023 by Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine (Barry Awds)
- Named a Best Book of the Month by Amazon (Mystery, Thriller & Suspense)

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### A7 Type: Police Procedural (Cop-FBI-Sheriff-GameWarden)

**All the Sinners Bleed** by [S. A. Cosby](#), June 6, 2023 / MVLC: A LOT most likely

#### Basics

- **Protagonist:** Titus Crown is the first Black sheriff in the history of this Virginia county. Titus investigates a school shooting in which both a teacher is shot by a student, and the student shooter is killed by Titus’s deputies. As Titus investigates the shootings, he unearths terrible crimes and a serial killer who has been hiding in plain sight.
- **Setting:** Charon County (fictitious), in contemporary Virginia
- **Context:** This is Cosby's fourth [standalone book of crime fiction](#). It has just been released, so with no data on this book, **let's look at the previous books:**
  - **2019-Darkest Prayer: 963 ratings, no awards.**
  - **2020-Blacktop Wasteland: 9,024 ratings, 6 major awards.**
  - **2021-Razorblade Tears: 10,464 ratings, 8 major awards.**

**I read *Blacktop Wasteland*. It was a page-turner. It was well written; no, masterfully written which is why I wanted so much to enjoy it. Unfortunately, I was put off by the theme of revenge in that book; I cannot explain why I can read about some of the most bizarre human motivations with no problems, yet revenge sours me in a protagonist. In any case, the themes in this 2023 book seem clearly different, especially with a law enforcement officer as protagonist. So keeping in mind the extraordinarily high attention, ratings and awards on his writing in previous books, I am looking forward to this year's book with a sheriff as the focus. –Dick**

#### Long Form

Titus Crown is the first Black sheriff in the history of Charon County, Virginia. In recent decades, quiet Charon has had only two murders. But after years of working as an FBI agent, Titus knows better than anyone that while his hometown might seem like a land of moonshine, cornbread, and honeysuckle, secrets always fester under the surface.

Then a year to the day after Titus's election, a school teacher is killed by a former student and the student is fatally shot by Titus's deputies. As Titus investigates the shootings, he unearths terrible crimes and a serial killer who has been hiding in plain sight, haunting the dirt lanes and woodland clearings of Charon.

With the killer's possible connections to a local church and the town's harrowing history weighing on him, Titus projects confidence about closing the case while concealing a painful secret from his own past. At the same time, he also has to contend with a far-right group that wants to hold a parade in celebration of the town's Confederate history.

Charon is Titus's home and his heart. But where faith and violence meet, there will be a reckoning.

Powerful and unforgettable, *All the Sinners Bleed* confirms S. A. Cosby as "one of the most muscular, distinctive, grab-you-by-both-ears voices in American crime fiction" (The Washington Post).

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".... Novels of crime and pursuit ... usually end with a pitched battle between the good guy and the bad guy, what I believe Elmore Leonard called "a shootout in the swamp," and Cosby delivers a fine climax. Then, in an epilogue, he serves up a final treat that's worth the whole trip.

"So: a well-told novel of crime and detection. There are plenty of them on the market. What sets this one apart, what gives it both grit and texture, is its unerring depiction of small-town rural life and the uneasy (and sometimes violent) interactions between Charon's white and Black citizens. Sheriff Crown finds himself in that gray area between, with a foot in both worlds. ..." –Stephen King, excerpted from his [full review in the NYTimes](#).

"... *All the Sinners Bleed* is rough, smart, gritty, intricate, and Southern to the core. Cosby understand that thrillers need to thrill in order to work, but he spends a lot of time making sure we feel empathy for his characters and understand the historical context of everything that happens in Charon. This is a story about a town in flux and a sheriff from a small town trying to use everything he learned while working as an FBI agent to track down a serial killer in a place that lacks the resources and technology of a big city. However, it's also a novel that deals with religious zealots railing against "gay marriage, the liberal agenda, and how all lives matter." Yes, this is a novel that acts like a mirror — and that makes it necessary reading. Charon County is a mellow place on the surface, but right underneath that there is a lot of hate, racism, and what Titus calls "putrefaction of the soul." ...

While Cosby's deconstruction of small-town America in the South and his critique of racism are great, he also manages to explore the effects of religious zealotry and how it contributes to the perpetuation of the status quo. Some people in Charon effortlessly hold on to their hatred without losing sleep because they belong to a church that supports their ideas. Much like Obama's presidency didn't usher in the "post-racial era" some folks thought it would, Titus becoming sheriff was not the end of Charon's deeply rooted racism, and racism is a disease that impacts everything, including criminal investigations. ..." – Gabino Iglesias, excerpted from his [full review on the NPR website](#). [Another great review](#).

Awards for this Book: TBD - but will likely be many.

**A8 Type: Police Procedural (Cop-FBI-Sheriff-GameWarden)*****The Dark Flood*** by [Deon Meyer](#), 2022 / MVLC: 15

## Basics

- **Protagonist:** Benny Griessel, an aging, alcoholic police inspector and his partner Vaughn Cupido perform well, in two separate cases that they face while banished to a presumably quiet small city away from Cape Town. One case is a missing university student, the other is a missing billionaire real estate manipulator. The "banishment" of Griessel and Vaughn was a result of an unauthorized investigation that threatened to reveal the corruption in South Africa's halls of power, which took place in the previous book in the series.
- **Setting:** Cape Town and the outlying small city of Stellenbosch in South Africa
- **Context:** This the 8th in a series (of 8) that began in 2008. Meyer is South African; the book is translated from Afrikaans.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 75%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 94%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 294

## Long Form

SOMETHING'S ROTTEN IN THE STATE OF SOUTH AFRICA.

A frustrated Vaughn Cupido looks at Benny Griessel. "Benna, just explain one thing to me: Where's the logic? We live in a country with a huge crime rate, the SAPS has had the biggest brain drain and loss of experience in its history these past ten years, there's a helluva problem with corruption in said Service, and they let the country's two best former Hawks detectives search for a student on a binge weekend because his mobile was stolen. Where's the logic?"

"I've been thinking about that all weekend. There's a snake in the grass, Vaughn," says Griessel.

Someone shot warrant-officer Milo April at the Cape Town Waterfront. In cold blood. In broad daylight. And maybe a senior officer of the South African Police Services ordered the execution. And maybe it's connected to the mysterious letters warrant-officers Benny Griessel and Vaughn Cupido have been receiving. With hints of State Capture shenanigans.

But to their great frustration, they have to waste their precious time searching for a missing student, probably just another kid on a crazy weekend bender.

And mega-rich Jasper Boonstra, the notorious corporate swindler, asks Sandra Steenberg to sell Donkerdrif, the very, very expensive wine estate, on the quiet. Sandra, mother of two, wife to author Josef, needs the money badly. She is drowning in debt, stuck in a web of deceit. But the transaction goes awry fast, and now Griessel and Cupido are investigating her too.

As they slowly make progress, the detectives realize that the cases are connected by the darkest passion of all: Greed.

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Finalist 2023 Barry Award for Best Novel "Excellent."—Deadly Pleasures Mystery Magazine

"A fast-moving South African police procedural . . . The plotlines are tightly knitted together, and the story ends with a nifty twist. A well-crafted blend of suspense, culture, and humor. Meyer is terrific."—Kirkus Reviews(starred review)

"Absorbing procedural details lead to an explosive confrontation with a ruthless street gang and a police-corruption scheme that links South African Police Service to the country's devastating political scandals. It's a grim period for South Africa, but Griessel and Caputo

remain loyal to justice and to each other. A gritty but surprisingly hopeful installment in Meyer’s immensely popular series.”—Booklist

“[An] outstanding series . . . In word, deed, and spirit, Mr. Meyer’s humane and engaging characters are indeed among ‘the best of the best.’”—Tom Nolan, Wall Street Journal, on *The Last Hunt*

“Deon Meyer is one of the unsung masters.”—Michael Connelly

I read this book because, as indicated below, it is one of the [five] finalists for "Best Mystery or Crime Novel" of the year (published in 2022). I have read some of the others on the list also, including Michael Connelly's offering for last year, *Desert Star*. Both are high quality books. I am voting for Meyer's book because, all things being nearly equal, I preferred the ending in *The Dark Flood* by Meyer.

There is some adjusting to unfamiliar words, like "State Capture," which you can find in Wikipedia, and a few other words unique to South Africa that the translator didn't translate. Yet still, despite that, I found the book a pleasure worth reading. —Dick

Awards for this Book

- Finalist 2023 Barry Award for Best Novel

**A9 Type: Police Procedural (Cop-FBI-Sheriff-GameWarden)**

***The Bookseller*** by Mark Pryor, 2012 / MVLC: 17

Basics

- **Protagonist:** Hugo Marston, head of security at the US embassy.
- **Setting:** Contemporary Paris, France.
- **Context:** This the 1st in a series of 9 books. The author has a few other books in addition to this series.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 45%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 81%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 2,323

Long Form

Who is killing the celebrated bouquinistes (booksellers) of Paris? Max —an elderly Paris bookstall owner— is abducted at gunpoint. His friend, Hugo Marston, head of security at the US embassy, looks on helplessly, powerless to do anything to stop the kidnapper. Marston launches a search, enlisting the help of semiretired CIA agent Tom Green. Their investigation reveals that Max was a Holocaust survivor and later became a Nazi hunter. Is his disappearance somehow tied to his grim history, or even to the mysterious old books he sold?

On the streets of Paris, tensions are rising as rival drug gangs engage in violent turf wars. Before long, other booksellers start to disappear, their bodies found floating in the Seine. Though the police are not interested in his opinion, Marston is convinced the hostilities have something to do with the murders of these bouquinistes.

Then he himself becomes a target of the unknown assassins. With Tom by his side, Marston finally puts the pieces of the puzzle together, connecting the past with the present and leading the two men, quite literally, to the enemy's lair. Just as the killer intended.

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"[A] well-crafted debut novel. Mark Pryor creates a new hero full of intelligence and charm which mixes well with the ever twisting plot of the story. Each turn of the page is a new piece of the complex puzzle that readers will enjoy fitting together. A leaf out of a classic Agatha Christie novel, mixed with the modern world of crime, is a suspenseful adventure waiting to happen." –Portland Book Review

"This is enjoyable French investigation in which Paris as seen through Hugo's eyes comes to life. Hugo is a solid hero though his inquiry may make him persona non grata and expelled from France. Although the violent abductions and homicides are somewhat muted, the storyline is fast-paced from start to Hugo and Tom confronting their adversary who expects their visit." –The Mystery Gazette

"Stylish, suspenseful, and smart, Mark Pryor's *The Bookseller* conveys the reader expertly through a puzzle of missing Nazi hunters and drug deals. Fans of Alan Furst will find much to love. As strong and welcome as a hot coffee on a chilly Paris morning. Bibliophiles, Francophiles, and mystery addicts rejoice! The debut of Hugo Marston is one you don't want to miss." –Steven Sidor, author of *Pitch Dark*

**This book was recommended by Ed, and it looks like an original plot and fun to read.**  
–Dick

No Awards for this Book from the 15 awarding groups as reported by [SYKM](#).

### **A10 Type: Police Procedural (Cop-FBI-Sheriff-GameWarden)**

***Past Reason Hated*** by Peter Robinson, 1991 / MVLC: 11

#### Basics

- **Protagonist:** Chief Inspector Alan Banks is a former member of the London Metropolitan Police, and has left the capital for a quieter life in the Dales. But even small British towns have murders, and so he investigates the stabbing death of a secretive woman in her own house just three days before Christmas.
- **Setting:** Christmas season, 1991, in the fictional English town of Eastvale in the [Yorkshire Dales](#). Robinson has stated that Eastvale is modelled on Ripon and Richmond and is somewhere north of Ripon, close to the A1 road.
- **Context:** This the 5th book in the Inspector Banks canon, stretching from 1987 to 2023, 28 books in all. Robinson died last year and his final book will be published this year post-mortem.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 45%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 84%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 5,728

#### Long Form

Chief Inspector Alan Banks knows that secrecy can sometimes prove fatal, and secrets were the driving force behind Caroline Hartley's life...and death.

She was a beautiful enigma, brutally stabbed in her own home three days prior to Christmas. Leaving her past behind for a forbidden love affair, she mystified more than a few. And now she is dead, clothed only in her unshared mysteries and her blood.

In this season of giving and forgiving, Banks is eager to absolve the innocent of their sins. But that must wait until the many facets of a perplexing puzzle are exposed and the dark circle of his investigation finally closes...and when a killer makes the next move.

Past Reason Hated is a relentlessly suspenseful novel that shows why Peter Robinson is one of the world's most acclaimed and popular mystery writers.

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"After nearly thirty years of reading thousands of mysteries and thrillers, I've come up with my three favorites...and the latest [is] from Canadian author Peter Robinson, Past Reason Hated." –The Times, St Petersburg

"Robinson's got police procedure down pat, and he always manages to come up with an intriguing cast of characters, a skillfully crafted plot, and a climax that's as surprising as it is satisfying." –Booklist

"Robinson writes the classic mystery, hewing to the time-honored format but managing also to keep the proceedings contemporary and fresh, largely through the creation of convincing and complex characters." –San Diego Union-Tribune

"The author's characterizations are unfailingly sharp and subtle....Mr. Robinson is always looking for little signs of evil that can give away a town like Eastvale." –Marilyn Stasio, The New York Times Book Review

"The latest Inspector Banks mystery, *Past Reason Hated*, is a sure sign that Peter Robinson is a mature, confident writer—and one who wastes no time in proving it." –Martin Dowding, Quill and Quire

**This author was suggested by Ed, and I am glad he mentioned him. #1- I love the DCI Banks ITV show that has 32 episodes over 5 seasons... all based on Robinson's books. For whatever reason, I've never tried one of the books, so this was a good reminder. #2 Robinson wrote 28 books, and the last one was published in June 2023; and by last I mean the very last - Robinson died last year. #3 - I was impressed with all of the praise for the man provided by 3 blockbuster authors: [Watch and listen here](#). – Dick**

#### Awards for this Book

- 1992 Arthur Ellis Award for Best Novel

**A11 Type: Private Detective (PI) Stories**

**Free Fall** by Robert Crais, 1994 / MVLC: 7 CWC: 39

Basics

- **Protagonist:** Elvis Cole and Joe Pike, a pair of Hollywood private eyes. A woman hires Elvis and Joe to look into her cop fiancé; they discover it is a LOT of trouble, and find themselves with targets on their own backs.
- **Setting:** Contemporary Los Angeles, CA
- **Context:** This is the 4th book in a 19 book series that began in 1987, and is ongoing.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 60%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 90%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 5,727

Long Form

Elvis Cole is just a detective who can't say no, especially to a girl in a terrible fix. And Jennifer Sheridan qualifies: Her fiancé, Mark Thurman, is a decorated LA cop with an elite plainclothes unit, but Jennifer's sure he's in trouble—the kind of serious trouble that only Elvis Cole can help with.

Five minutes after his new client leaves his office, Elvis and his partner, the enigmatic Joe Pike, are hip-deep in a deadly situation as they plummet into a world of South Central gangs, corrupt cops, and conspiracies of silence. And before the case is through, every cop in the LAPD will be gunning for a pair of escaped armed-and-dangerous killers—Elvis Cole and Joe Pike.

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"I've now read several of the Elvis Cole books and one review probably serves them all equally. I have been pleasantly surprised and found them to be enjoyable reads. Sure, you know what you're getting. Wise-cracking P.I. takes on bad guys, other cops, bureaucracies, government hacks, etc. He is smarter than the average investigator and funnier (though I don't personally know any investigators—they just seem like they'd be a dour lot). He, of course, has the requisite side-kick, Joe Pike. Pike is the quintessential straight man, bad-ass, sun glass-wearing, stealth protector who occasionally shows a glimpse of humanity to make him more endearing as he beats the crap out of someone. This series by Robert Crais is more believable than the Lee Child stuff, more current (and also more believable) than Robert Parker mysteries, and more fun than Connelly's Harry Bosch character. An easy read with humor and enough intelligent writing to keep me from feeling guilty as I enjoy spending the time flying through the story." –An Amazon reviewer

**I have read several Robert Crais books. He is an excellent writer. I'd like to make time to read them all in order. –Dick**

Awards for this Book

- Finalist 1994 Edgar Award for Best Mystery

**A12 Type: Private Detective (PI) Stories**

**The Last Place You Look** by [Kristen Lepionka](#), 2017 / MVLC: 25

**Basics**

- **Protagonist:** Roxane Weary is a richly drawn PI who proves that 'hardboiled' and 'feminine' aren't mutually exclusive. She has been asked to look into the murder conviction of a man on death row because the convict's sister says she has just seen the "dead victim" alive and well.
- **Setting:** Contemporary Columbus, Ohio
- **Context:** This the 1st of four (so far) in her series.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 49%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 83%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 1,224

**Long Form**

Nobody knows what happened to Sarah Cook. The beautiful blonde teenager disappeared fifteen years ago, the same night her parents were brutally murdered in their suburban Ohio home. Her boyfriend Brad Stockton—black and from the wrong side of the tracks—was convicted of the murders and is now on death row. Though he’s maintained his innocence all along, the clock is running out. His execution is only weeks away when his devoted sister insists she spied Sarah at an area gas station. Willing to try anything, she hires PI Roxane Weary to try and locate Sarah.

Brad might be in a bad way, but private investigator Roxane Weary isn’t doing so hot herself. Still reeling from the recent death of her cop father in the line of duty, her main way of dealing with her grief has been working as little and drinking as much as possible. But Roxane finds herself drawn in to the story of Sarah's vanishing act, especially when she links the disappearance to one of her father’s unsolved murder cases involving another teen girl.

The stakes get higher as Roxane discovers that the two girls may not be the only beautiful blonde teenagers who’ve turned up missing or dead. As her investigation gets darker and darker, Roxane will have to risk everything to find the truth. Lives depend on her cracking this case—hers included.

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"Roxane is a wonderfully complex character...This is a remarkably accomplished debut mystery, with sensitive character development and a heart-stopping denouement. Let's hope there are more Roxane Weary novels on the way."—Booklist (starred review)

"Introducing a fascinating protagonist who combats her emotional demons with the aid of sugar, booze, and sex, this suspenseful, original, and confident debut will please fans of the hardboiled PI genre."—Library Journal (starred review)

**In addition to older "PI" authors I have enjoyed a lot in the past (Crais, Paretsky, and Rozan), I wanted to identify a really good newer, emerging PI writer. So I looked at the "Shamus" awards given by the *Private Eye Writers of America* during the last 6 years. I came up with: *Kristen Lepionka*. I researched her books and liked what I saw. Thank you *Leslie* for test-reading the book; she gave it a solid thumbs-up. Will you choose it? –Dick**

**Awards for this Book**

- 2018 Shamus Award for Best First PI Novel
- Finalist 2018 Anthony Award for Best First Novel
- Finalist 2018 Macavity Award for Best First Mystery

**A13 Type: Private Detective (PI) Stories*****Bitter Medicine*** by Sara Paretsky, 1987 / MVLC: 8 CWC: 50

## Basics

- **Protagonist:** V. [Vic] I. Warshawski, an attorney turned private eye, investigates malpractice at a "for profit" hospital.
- **Setting:** Chicago, IL
- **Context:** This is the 4th book in a series of 22, between 1982 and 2022 (40 years!)
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 47%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 81%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 3,017

## Long Form

Warshawski knows from the start that Consuelo Alvarado's baby is trouble. Consuelo is sixteen. Diabetic. And the daughter of a friend. When she goes into labor too early, even V.I.'s wild drive to get her to the hospital can't save either Consuelo or her child.

Soon V.I. is investigating possible malpractice at the emergency room--and falling for a doctor who works there. Mixing business and love is always bad medicine, but V.I. finds herself listening to her heart, not her head. And when a brutal murder and the violent destruction of a women's clinic put her at the center of a very dirty conspiracy, justice may be the only remedy for a hurt that cuts deep...and chills right to the bone....

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"A dense, convincing, fast-moving plot, a dauntless but vulnerable heroine, a fine-tuned ear for real-life dialogue and a sharp eye for the Chicago scene. Superior stuff." — The Kirkus Reviews

"Paretsky, author of *Indemnity Only*, *Deadlock*, and *Killing Orders* (all featuring Warshawski), has established herself as a first-rate exponent of the hardboiled school of detective writing. She brings new meaning to the genre with her thoughtful work." — Library Journal

"Paretsky is still the best...she doesn't pull punches." — The Washington Post Book World

**I've loved this series since the mid 90s, and since many of the group have not read these books, it seemed like a great idea to add this book to the choices. –Dick**

## Awards for this Book

- Finalist 1988 Macavity Award for Best Novel

**A14 Type: Private Detective (PI) Stories**

***The Art of Violence***, by S. J. Rozan, 2020 / MVLC: 21

Basics

- **Protagonist:** Lydia Chin, a 30-something Chinese American private eye, and Bill Smith, a 40-something Army brat private eye. Is recently released convict Sam Tabor a serial killer, or just a crazy artist? That's what Sam asks Smith to prove, one way or the other.
- **Setting:** Contemporary NY City.
- **Context:** This the 13th book in a series that began in 1994 with *China Trade*.
- **% of Amazon readers giving 5-star ratings:** 57%
- **Combined % of Amazon readers giving either 4 OR 5-star ratings:** 84%
- **Total all Amazon ratings this book:** 260

Long Form

In the latest mystery from S. J. Rozan, Bill Smith and Lydia Chin must track down a serial killer stalking women in New York's contemporary art scene. [Both Lydia and Bill have their own PI businesses, but often assist or collaborate on cases.]

Former client Sam Tabor, just out of Greenhaven after a five-year homicide stint, comes to Bill Smith with a strange request. A colossally talented painter whose parole was orchestrated by art world movers and shakers, Sam's convinced that since he's been out he's killed two women. He doesn't remember the killings but he wants Smith, one of the few people he trusts, to investigate and prove him either innocent or guilty.

NYPD detective Angela Grimaldi thinks Sam's "a weirdo." Smith has no argument with that: diagnosed with a number of mental disorders over the years, Sam self-medicates with alcohol, loses focus (except when he's painting), and has few friends. But Smith doesn't think that adds up to serial killer. He enlists Lydia Chin to help prove it.

Smith and Chin delve into the world surrounding Sam Tabor, including his brother, two NYPD detectives, and various other artists, dealers, collectors, curators, and art connoisseurs. No answers appear. Evidence is found and lost again. And more bodies turn up.

Sam Tabor might be just a crazy artist. But someone is killing people in his orbit. If not Sam, who? Why? And who will be next?

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**This is a good PI series I enjoyed a few years back and thought it's tone and pace would appeal to many of you. -Dick**

No Awards for this Book from the 15 awarding groups as reported by [SYKM](#).