



THE JURY BOX

by Steve Steinbock

Last May at the Malice Domestic convention I spoke on a panel along with three experts—true scholars—of classical detective fiction. The panel, called “Agatha Christie and the Golden Age of Detection,” was moderated by Professor Douglas Greene, and included Daniel Stashower and Martin Edwards. Our discussion looked not only at the timeless staying power of Christie, but at the many other lesser-known men and women, British and American, who typify the classical in tales of crime and detection. This month I lead with Martin Edwards’s new book about the founding members of the Detection Club, and follow it with several books that demonstrate that clever plotting is not limited to the Golden Age.

***** Martin Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder*, HarperCollins, \$27.99. This important work looks at the inner lives and writing careers of Britain’s great mystery writers between WWI and WWII. Edwards’s role as Detection Club archivist gave him access to many documents not seen and stories never told before. Much of the book centers on the private lives of Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Anthony Berkeley and

the events in the world around them that inspired their writing. Edwards interweaves the stories of other Detection Club members including G.K. Chesterton, E.C. Bentley, G.D.H. and M. Cole, and John Dickson Carr. Included are photographs and facsimiles of documents (including two pages from R. Austin Freeman’s private diary, written in a code that to this day has not been cracked).

**** Yukito Ayatsuji, *The Decagon House Murders*, Locked Room International, \$19.99. Seven university students—members of a campus Mystery club—spend a week in a strange house on a deserted island where a gruesome quadruple murder took place six months earlier. One by one, the club members (who go by the names of classical mystery writers: Agatha, Orczy, Ellery, Carr, Poe, Leroux, and Van Dine) are being killed off. With obvious nods to Christie’s *And Then There Were None*, the novel is a contrast of realism and contrivance. To illustrate, midway through the book several characters discuss puzzles, codes, and magic tricks until one of them utters the name of a club member who has just died, and all are suddenly forced back to stark reality. (Continued p. 52)

ELLERY QUEEN

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Translated from the Dutch by Josh Packard

Burger pulled around behind the hospital, backed Packard into the space closest to the morgue’s entrance, and got out. The bitter February wind made him shiver. He pushed open the door, and the stink of Lysol crimped his nostrils, calling up images of dead images he’d be happier living without this early in the morning.

He wheeled a gurney out to the back of the hearse, unloaded the coffin, and headed back in with it, asking himself for umpteenth time what had happened to the bodies across the border. Yugoslavians, and Italians were lands and families behind in a province in the deep south, jobs, better pay. Some of the families wanted to bury them, but he had to take a bank loan and buy a 1939 Packard five thousand kilometers on wheels, only good for ferrying the dead. The possibility he hadn’t considered: the miners were dying, the money he made too freely. He

“You just piss the money away.” It was like the guilders burned. Burger wanted, it was to enjoy it with his friends to watch the fish line. And then stay on a

THE LAST RUN: Michael Berg

THE JURY BOX (Continued from p. 24) Originally published in Japan in 1987, *The Decagon House Murders* is credited with launching the *Shinhonkaku* (neo-orthodox) movement in Japanese crime fiction. This new translation by Ho-Ling Wong includes an introduction by Shimada Soji and an article about the real Kyoto University Mystery Club. Also new from Locked Room International is *The House That Kills* (\$19.99), by Noel Vindry, considered France's answer to John Dickson Carr. **** Ann Cleeves, *Thin Air: A Shetland Mystery*, Minotaur, \$25.99. Cleeves, a member of the Detection Club, is the author of several crime series. Her novels featuring DCI Vera Stanhope have been adapted for TV as *Vera*, now in its fifth year, and her Shetland Island series featuring detective Jimmy Perez, has been adapted as *Shetland*, now filming its third season. Against the atmospheric backdrop of seaside cliffs and legends of the ghost of a young girl who dances along the beach, a group of university friends from London are on the island of Unst to celebrate a classmate's wedding—until one of the women disappears. In a style both brooding and beautiful, Cleeves tells a surprising story, illustrating that intelligent plotting and “fair play” are not inconsistent with modern tastes and sensibilities. **** Peter Lovesey, *Down Among the Dead Men*, Soho Crime, \$27.95. Lovesey is another writer—also a member of the Detection Club—whose novels are thoroughly modern (except when he writes historical fiction) but whose plots play fair with the reader. Detective Peter Diamond has been dragged to Sussex for an internal investigation. Seven years earlier when a car thief was arrested, he seemed as surprised as the police by the corpse in the trunk. The thief was charged with murder even

though an important piece of DNA evidence was never filed. Now, as Diamond uncovers the facts behind the arrest, he finds unsettling connections to a private school's art department and several missing persons. Lovesey's plotting is smart, his style engaging and drily funny.

**** Dorothy Cannell, *Death at Dovecote Hatch*, Severn House, \$28.95. Florence Norris, the keenly observant housekeeper who debuted in *Murder at Mullings* (2014), is back. When the mild-mannered master of Bogmire tumbles to his death down a flight of stairs, he leaves behind two nutty sisters, a pretty teenaged ward, and a house full of secrets. Recalling Florence's deductive skills the local inspector asks her to quietly inquire. Cannell's writing is infused with clever turns of phrase of the sort you'd expect to find in Milne or Wodehouse, with characters as colorful as those in Dickens or *The Canterbury Tales*.

*** Paula Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, Riverhead Books, \$26.95. During her daily train ride to a nonexistent job, an alcoholic woman passes the neighborhood where her ex-husband now lives with his new wife. Each day she voyeuristically watches for a loving couple she calls “Jess and Jason” and idealizes their perfect marriage. But when “Jess” goes missing, Rachel is compelled to learn what happened. Told from the perspective of three troubled female narrators, this is a novel about obsession and regrets.

**** Joseph Trigoboff, *Rumble in Brooklyn*, Bare Knuckles Press, \$16.00. Personal memoirs are by definition self-indulgent and often they are either badly written or ghost-written. But occasionally a book will come along by someone with both an interesting life and talent. This is one such book. (Continued page 116)

SHOOTING

by Richard Helms

Even after the crime-scene guys finished wrecking it, Nigel Bowles's trailer looked nicer than my apartment.

It wasn't a trailer, actually, but a forty-two-foot motor home with a fully equipped bedroom and kitchen, and a wet bar that nearly brought me to tears.

The marble tub in the bathroom sported a waterfall spigot and gold-plated knobs that gleamed under thirty miniature LED lamps set into the ceiling. Behind the tub was a wall of one-foot-square mirrors with streaks of gold foil set into the silver behind the glass.

It was going to take more than a rag and a bottle of 409 to clean the tub after they dragged Nigel Bowles out.

A crowd around the motor home started to wheel away. A couple of the girls started to look for any face that seemed out of place. “Such luck.”

I gestured to Scotty Baggs, the one who looked like a schoolkid. “Scotty was only four or five years out of school the way a schoolkid wears a *Kick Me* sign.”

“What do we know?” I asked.

“The dead guy is Nigel Bowles. You know him?”

“No. Fill me in.”

“Jesus, Boy, don't you ever watch *Star Trek*?”

“I'm not really a TV kind of guy.”

Baggs shook his head as if he expected to crumble to dust any minute.

“Nigel Bowles is a judge on *Star Trek*.”

“Never heard of it.”

“They take kids off the street, and they show them on TV every song each week, and then one of them

HELLERY QUEEN

SHOOTING STARS: Richard Helms