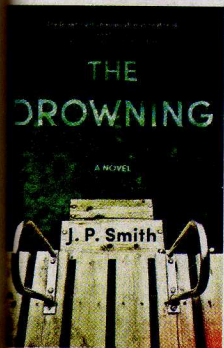


the course of his investigation, Samuel wades into the foreign terrain of online dating. His anxiety builds when another woman from a nearby town disappears and turns up dead after meeting someone through the same site. Series fans and newcomers with a taste for well-wrought regional mysteries will be rewarded. *Agent: Janet Reid, FinePrint Literary Management. (Jan.)*

★ **The Drowning**

J.P. Smith. Sourcebooks Landmark, \$15.99 trade paper (332p) ISBN 978-1-4926-6900-5

An overbearing alpha male gets his comeuppance in this smart, creepy thriller from Smith (*Airright*). One summer day, when Alex Mason was an arrogant swimming counselor at Camp Waukeelo in the



Berkshires, he left timid eight-year-old Joey Proctor behind on a raft in the middle of a lake.

Joey inexplicably vanished, but Alex lied well enough to avoid blame.

Twenty-one years later, he's a famous New York real estate developer with a lovely family and a glamorous lifestyle. Then increasingly serious intrusions from his guilty past suggest that someone—or something—remembers Joey's panic and wants Alex to share it. As it turns out, the immature, violent side of Alex's nature doesn't need much prodding to reveal itself. Smith nicely balances the borderline-supernatural events with Alex's mundane struggles as his blustering defenses crumble. Sharp, clear prose is a plus. This is a remarkably adept performance. *Agent: Claire Roberts, Trident Media Group. (Jan.)*

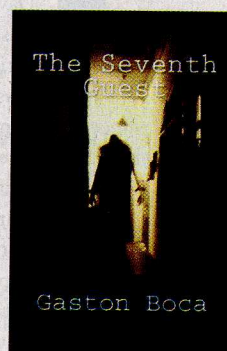
★ **Bones Behind the Wheel: A Haunted Guesthouse Mystery**

E.J. Copperman. Crooked Lane, \$26.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-68331-887-3

In Copperman's lively 10th Haunted Guesthouse mystery (after 2018's *The Hostess with the Ghostess*), Alison Kerby—who has no problem with otherworldly investigators haunting her inn at the Jersey Shore—is disturbed when a Lincoln

★ **The Seventh Guest**

Gaston Boca, trans. from the French by John Pugmire. Locked Room International, \$19.99 trade paper (168p) ISBN 978-0-692196-78-6



The opening sentence of Boca's brilliant impossible crime novel, originally published in 1935, suggests an arch, light approach: "Apart from a certain tendency, as a family, for the protagonists to kill each other, this is not your classic tragedy." But what follows takes Paris sleuths Stéphane Triel and Luc Duthiel into some very dark waters when they accept the invitation of a stranger, Jeanne d'Arlon, to join her and her husband at Nanteuil Manor. On their arrival, Triel and Duthiel find that Benoît Gérardin, the nephew of the manor's concierge, has apparently taken his own life; only Gérardin's large footprints are visible in the mud surrounding the cabin containing his hanged corpse. Certain details, including traces of red lipstick on the dead man's mouth, argue against suicide, posing a mystery that's just the prelude to more impossibilities. Boca (1903–2000) leavens the grim story line with humor while creating a palpable atmosphere of menace reminiscent of John Dickson Carr and imbuing his characters with psychological depth. Fans of golden age puzzle mysteries won't want to miss this gem. *(Jan.)*

Continental containing a skeleton is unearthed in her backyard by crews working to fix erosion after Hurricane Sandy. The 30-year-old remains turn out to be those of local car dealer Herman Fitzsimmons, who had rivalries with other car dealers and a history of extramarital affairs. The upheaval of renovations at the inn; the disappearance of the Lincoln Continental in the middle of the night; and the hostility of a police lieutenant who dislikes amateur sleuths and paranormal phenomena complicate Alison's life. With the help of husband Josh, ghost private detective Paul Harrison, and others both of this world and beyond, Alison zeroes in on the answers to the cold case. Copperman provides a ton of spirited fun for the reader. *Agent: Josh Getzler, Hannigan Salky Getzler Agency. (Jan.)*

★ **Wheel of Fire**

Hilary Bonner. Severn, \$28.99 (256p) ISBN 978-0-7278-8828-0

Bonner's so-so sequel to 2017's *Deadly Dance* offers a familiar tale of murder and greed. Imposing Blackdown Manor, for generations the home of the Fairbrother family, is aflame when the firefighters arrive. Aware that at least two people are inside, they watch in horror as the house

explodes. The charred remains found inside are later identified as belonging to Sir John Fairbrother, the family patriarch and the idiosyncratic chairman of Fairbrother International, and his nurse. The repercussions from Sir John's death set off a wave of panic at his company and bring together his estranged children: Bella, a savvy investment banker, and her wastrel brother, Freddie, who has spent years soaking up the sun in Australia. The fire is ruled to be arson, and suspicion falls on caretaker George Grey, who, right on cue, gets himself murdered. Det. Insp. David Vogel of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Major Crime Investigation Unit and his team follow a predictable path to the unsurprising twist ending. Those expecting a distinctive police lead and more than serviceable prose will be disappointed. *Agent: Toby Peake, Peake Assoc. (U.K.) (Jan.)*

★ **The Belting Inheritance**

Julian Symons. Poisoned Pen, \$12.95 trade paper (238p) ISBN 978-1-464210-87-7

An intriguing puzzle centered on identity drives this entry in the British Library Crime Classics series, first published in 1965, from MWA Grand Master Symons (1912–1994). Within five weeks in 1944, Lady Wainwright learns that two of her