



by Steve Steinbock

As we once again celebrate the great detective Sherlock Holmes, we'll look at works by several authors who have written Holmes-related stories and pastiches. We begin with two books by noted members of the Baker Street Irregulars. Although neither of these books is directly related to Sherlock Holmes, careful readers might catch a few hints of Sherlock, including mention of wisteria (a possible reference to Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge") in both King's and Cameron's books. Moreover, *Back to the Garden* and *Exit Interview* both end in ways that leave the door open to new series with female protagonist teams in the loose mold of Holmes and Watson.

***** Laurie R. King, *Back to the Garden*, Bantam, \$28.00. The historic Gardener Estate on California's central coast is a destination for tourists, historians, art lovers, and horticulturists. During the 1970s it had been the site of a commune which hosted a huge rock festival. But when human remains are discovered beneath a tilting statue, Detective Raquel Laing of the San Mateo Cold Case Unit suspects the body may be one of the victims of The Highwayman, a serial killer active in the 1970s through the '90s. As the narrative switches back and forth from the estate's hippie days to the present, a story unfolds about discord within the Gardener family and among the commune residents. The book's title is packed with multiple levels of meaning that converge as the book reaches its climax. Laing and her reclusive sister Dee form an intriguing team that I hope will reappear in future books.

**** Dana Cameron, *Exit Interview*, DCLE Publishing, \$14.95. Although her name wasn't given at the time, the character of Jayne Rogers (not necessarily her real name) first appeared in the story "One Soul at a Time" in the June 2012 issue of *EQMM*. The special-ops officer for an off-the-books government agency appeared again—this time with the first name "Jayne"—in "Dialing In" (in the September/October 2013 *EQMM*). She's appeared a few other times in other publications, but *Exit Interview* is her first book-length appearance. When a powerful arms dealer is killed at a gala dinner, Jayne is suspected of going rogue and assassinating him. But journalist Amy Lindstrom believes there's more going on beneath the surface. Along with tech expert Nicole Bradley, the three women

uncover the real conspiracy. *Exit Interview* is an exciting adventure about betrayal, survival, and friendship, told in three strong female voices.

**** Phillip Margolin, *Murder at Black Oaks*, Minotaur, \$27.99. Since his debut more than forty years ago, Margolin has become one of America's leading authors of legal thrillers. His sixth novel blends courtroom drama with traditional mystery tropes in a story about a thirty-year-old murder case and a four-hundred-year-old manor house that is allegedly under a werewolf curse. When a former D.A. learns that he put an innocent man on death row, he is unable to do anything due to attorney-client confidentiality. With the help of attorney Robin Lockwood, the man is set free. But during the celebrations that follow, the retired attorney's body is found stabbed within a locked elevator. Margolin reveals in his dedication that he wrote the book as an homage to Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, and John Dickson Carr.

***** Peter Blauner, *Picture in the Sand*, Minotaur, \$27.99. Set in 1956 and 2014, *Picture in the Sand* is a spy novel, a love story, and an epic celebration of cinema. Alex Hassan and his grandfather Ali share a love of movies. But when Alex travels to the Middle East to join an Islamist terrorist cell, his grandfather, through a series of e-mails and the pages of his own memoir, tries to persuade Alex to reconsider his actions. Ali's own story, which takes up most of the novel, involves his own brush with radicalism and espionage when he worked as a production assistant for Cecil B. DeMille during the filming of *The Ten Commandments*. Ali's story and his grandson's take similar trajectories in this hopeful, emotional, and well-researched novel.

**** Christopher Fowler, *Bryant & May: Peculiar London*, Bantam, \$28.99. Longtime readers of Fowler's Bryant and May series will know that the cantankerous crackpot Arthur Bryant, when he isn't solving crimes or consulting with occultists, spends his free time writing his dubious memoirs and leading off-the-beaten-track walking tours of London. After last year's *London Bridge Is Falling Down*, it seemed that the Peculiar Crimes Unit was closing down and the Bryant and May series was at an end. But Fowler promised more, and in an appropriately peculiar way he delivers on that promise. "Like the streets themselves," Arthur Bryant tells us, "London's history is contradictory and designed to trip you up." While not a mystery novel per se, *Peculiar London* is an unusual and mysterious travelogue and a chance to spend several hours having your ear bent by Fowler's septuagenarian sleuths Arthur Bryant and John May.

***** John Le Carré, *A Private Spy: The Letters of John le Carré*, edited by Tim Cornwell, Viking, \$32.00. Through the correspondence of the great spy novelist, curated by his son Tim Cornwell, readers get an inside look not only into the quiet life of Le Carré, but at the experiences that shaped his work, particularly the series featuring George Smiley. The editor makes a careful distinction between John le Carré the author and David Cornwell the man, giving glimpses of both. The letters include Le Carré's correspondence with family members, editors, comedian Steven Fry, actor Alec Guinness, playwright Tom Stoppard, and many others. In the commentary, Tim Cornwell tells how his father enjoyed reading to his children ("our favorites were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories . . ."). Sadly, the editor of this remarkable volume died in 2022, two years after his father's passing.

**** Jack Calverley, editor, *Death of a Bad Neighbor: Revenge Is Criminal*, Logic of Dreams, \$14.99. For those who find revenge sweet, this quirky collection

will satisfy your predilections. *Death of a Bad Neighbor* features fifteen short stories with the broadly defined themes of neighbors and revenge. Authors include many who have graced the pages of *EQMM* and *AHMM*. The volume opens with Rob Lopresti's story about a former mobster living under witness protection who discovers the true meaning of "Lambs and Wolves." In Dave Zeltserman's "Whoops!", Mitch and Wendy Erlach get more than they expected when a suspected bank robber moves in across the way. Stories by Marilyn Todd and Hilary Davidson each explore the travails of home ownership. Among the most unusual is a creative but weirdly faithful retelling of the story of Cain and Abel by Steve Hockensmith (whose debut novel was the 2007 Sherlockian pastiche, *Holmes on the Range*).

**** Gary Lovisi, *A Sherlock Holmes Notebook*, Stark House, \$15.95. Over the years, collector, historian, and publisher Gary Lovisi has written numerous Sherlockian pastiches as well as nonfiction articles about Holmes, Conan Doyle, and Sherlockiana. The book includes a history of Holmes pastiches, two articles about *The Valley of Fear*, surveys of several collectors' editions of Doyle's works, and Sherlock Holmes collectors' cards. The most interesting piece is Lovisi's review of the correspondence between Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert Louis Stevenson. Although this collection is new, many of the articles are not, and some are several decades out of date.

Also published this past year was Lovisi's novel *Sherlock Holmes in Oz* (Wildside Press, \$12.99), in which the great detective's mission to stem the tide of a poppy menace takes him to Kansas, and eventually to the land of Oz.

The Baker Street Irregulars regularly publish volumes of Sherlockian research, appreciations, and facsimile reprints of Conan Doyle's work. Their latest books include *My Scientific Methods* (edited by Dana Richards, BSI Press, \$39.95), a collection of essays relating to the use of science in the Sherlockian canon; *A Masterpiece of Villainy* (edited by Ross E. Davies, BSI Press, \$39.95), which reprints the manuscript of Doyle's "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder," including notations as well as a series of related articles; and *Referring to My Notes* (edited by Alexander Katz and Karen Wilson, BSI Press, \$39.95), which collects essays about music in the Sherlockian canon.

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