



by Steve Steinbock

As we do at the beginning of every year, we celebrate in this January/ February issue not only the new year but the birthday of Sherlock Holmes. At the end of this column, I'll share a few recent titles of Sherlockian interest. But first, we'll look at two new novels from Iceland. For a nation with only half the population of Alaska, Iceland has a disproportionately high number of good crime writers. Iceland also hosts one of Europe's most popular annual crime festivals: Iceland Noir, an annual event founded in 2013 by authors Ragnar Jónasson and Yrsa Sigurðardóttir.

***** Ragnar Jónasson and Katrín Jakobsdóttir, *Reykjavík*, translated by Victoria Cribb, Minotaur, \$28.00. Cowritten by one of the leading crime novelists of Iceland and Iceland's prime minister, *Reykjavík* is a story that spans three decades, involving a missing person's case that never goes cold. In 1956, on a small island off the coast of Iceland's capital, a teenage girl working as a maid goes missing. For the next thirty years, her disappearance haunted the police officer assigned to the case. The narrative jumps forward, first to 1966, then 1976, and finally to 1986, during the "Reykjavik Summit" between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, when a young journalist takes it on himself to discover the truth about what happened to Lára. The storytelling is captivating, the characters rich, and the translation seamless.

***** Arnaldur Indridason, *The Girl by the Bridge*, translated by Philip Roughton, Minotaur, \$29.00. A two-time winner of the Nordic Crime Novel Prize, Indridason is best known for his crime novels featuring Inspector Erlendur. First published in Icelandic in 2018, *The Girl by the Bridge* is his second novel featuring Konrad, a former policeman lost in the past, struggling to solve the murder of his father. An elderly couple hire Konrad to track down their missing granddaughter, a troubled twenty-year-old recently involved in drug smuggling. When Konrad tracks down the young woman, it's too late. She's dead with a syringe needle still in her arm. At that precise moment, Konrad gets a call from an old acquaintance who has just had a haunting vision of a girl whose body was found in a pond sixty years earlier. With a plot

colored by depravity, dark secrets, and specters, *The Girl by the Bridge* is a disturbing and well-told story.

**** Naomi Hirahara, *Evergreen*, Soho Crime, \$27.95. In a follow-up to her 2021 novel *Clark and Division*, Hirahara continues the story of Aki, a young first-generation Japanese American forced to leave her home in Los Angeles during WWII as part of Roosevelt's executive order that forced more than 100,000 Japanese Americans out of their homes and into relocation camps. *Evergreen* picks up after the war with Aki Ito, now married and working as a nurse's assistant, back in Los Angeles. When an elderly man is admitted to the hospital with suspicious wounds, she suspects he's a victim of elder abuse. When she learns that the man's son is her husband's best friend, she's placed in a moral quandary. The truth, though, is much worse. *Evergreen* is an emotionally moving and exquisitely researched novel.

Following up on the tail of Hirahara's *Evergreen* is a new graphic novel based on the true story of a man who, like many others (but not enough), broke or bent the law in order to help their Japanese neighbors and colleagues during the mass relocations. Josh Tuininga's *We Are Not Strangers* (Abram's Comic Art, \$24.99) is the story of Marco Calvo, a Sephardic Jewish immigrant from Turkey, and his friendship with Japanese American Sam Akiyama. When the Japanese were ordered out of their homes, Calvo bought Akiyama's home and took over his business, holding both until the Akiyama family returned at the end of the war.

**** Alan Orloff, *Sanctuary Motel*, Level Best Books, \$16.95. Just outside of Washington, D.C., Benjamin "Mess" Hopkins owns and operates the Fairfax Manor Inn, a small run-down motel, along with the mini-golf course next door. He doesn't make much of a profit since he largely operates it as an unofficial homeless shelter, halfway-house, and sanctuary for victims of domestic abuse. When a woman and her sullen teenage son take refuge at the hotel, their sanctuary becomes the target of her abusive husband and a trail of thugs. Orloff, whose stories have appeared in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* along with other magazines and anthologies, is a master of dry humor. His wit and warmth come through in this crime story that is both fun and suspenseful.

**** V.M. Burns, *Murder On Tour*, Kensington, \$16.95. I was drawn to this book not by the two poodles on the cover, but by the "Book Signing Today" sign they are looking at and the interior of a bookshop in the background. It wasn't until I was about twenty pages in that I realized "V.M. Burns" is Valerie Burns, whose *Murder Is a Piece of Cake* (Kensington Books, \$16.95) I told you about in the September/October 2023 issue of *EQMM*. *Murder On Tour* is Burns's ninth title in a series about Samantha "Sam" Washington, a woman who writes historical cozies and runs a bookshop with her grandmother, Nana Jo. As the small Michigan town gears up for a writers' convention, Sam learns of rivalries, accusations, and betrayals among the visiting authors. Then, during a cocktail reception, a member of the group is poisoned: not one of the bickering writers, but a soft-spoken, mild-mannered publicist. Throughout the novel, the fictional Sam inserts chapters from a manuscript for a novel she's working on, a historical cozy that reads like a Brontë-sisters novel in 1939. The plot of this novel-within-a-novel gives hints and insights about the events at the literary convention. *Murder On Tour* is a madcap mystery of mistaken motives and twisted intentions.

**** Gary Lovisi, *A Mystery, Crime & Noir Notebook*, Stark House, \$17.95. In last year's Jan/Feb issue, I reviewed Lovisi's *A Sherlock Holmes Notebook*, which collected a number of his essays and articles about Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the vast literature surrounding them. Lovisi's new collection contains nearly fifty articles that Lovisi originally wrote for *Mystery Scene*, *Paperback Parade*, *The Armchair Detective*, and other magazines, about the darker, frequently salacious side of crime fiction. The first fourteen pieces deal with general topics about hardboiled crime fiction, its themes and history, erotic cover art, and in-depth looks at Avon Paperbacks and the Dell Mapback editions. The remainder of the book deals with specific authors and their works.

This has been a quiet year for Sherlockiana. BSI Books (the publishing division of the Baker Street Irregulars) is known for their beautiful annotated facsimile editions of Arthur Conan Doyle short stories and their excellent collections of scholarly essays on Holmes-related topics. As far as I know, they had no new titles in 2023. But in December of 2022 they published *Stimulating Medicine, More Nerve and Knowledge: Doctors, Medicine and the Sherlockian Canon* (BSI Press, \$39.95), a collection of essays edited by Robert S. Katz, MD and Andrew L. Solberg, MHS. Also last year, BSI Press published *The Haven Horror: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman"* by Arthur Conan Doyle, edited by Phillip G. Bergem (BSI Press, \$39.95), containing a reproduction of the original manuscript of the 1926 story along with annotations, illustrations, and informative essays related to the story and its text.

Bonnie MacBird's *What Child Is This?* (Collins Crime Club, \$18.99) weaves together two cases of kidnapped children in a Christmastime Sherlock Holmes adventure, and Leonard Goldberg's *The Wayward Prince* (Minotaur, \$28.00) features Joanna Watson—daughter of Holmes and daughter-in-law of Watson—and the kidnapping of Prince Harry (the wayward son of King George V).

Lastly, longtime readers may recall my earlier reviews of the Lady Sherlock series by Sherry Thomas and her brilliant twist on the story of Sherlock Holmes. *A Tempest at Sea* (Berkley, \$17.00) is her seventh in the series and has Charlotte Holmes taking refuge from Moriarty while on a mission aboard a ship where she solves a locked-room mystery of sorts while on a secret mission for His Majesty's government.

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