



THE JURY BOX

by Steve Steinbock

No fictional character's birthday has generated as much debate as that of Sherlock Holmes. In 1933, American journalist and man-of-letters Christopher Morley—the man who a year later helped found the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI)—wrote an article in which he nominated January 6th as the detective's birthday. Morley's explanation is somewhat flimsy: in the Conan Doyle canon, Sherlock Holmes often quoted Shakespeare, but *Twelfth Night* is the only play he cited twice. Since "twelfth night" refers to the twelfth night of Christmas or Epiphany Day (January 6 in most traditions), Morley set that date as Holmes' birthday.

Whenever Sherlock Holmes was born, whether in January or July or the Ides of March, it is our custom to dedicate the January/February issue of *EQMM* to the Great Detective. In this installment of the Jury Box we'll look at several Sherlockian pastiches and other works inspired, to some extent or another, by that Great Detective of Baker Street.

Nicholas Meyer, *Sherlock Holmes and the Real Thing*, Mysterious Press, \$26.95. Holmes and Watson are visited by Lady Glendenning, a London real-estate owner concerned that one of her lessees, an artist named Rupert Milestone, has gone missing. In addition to helping Holmes uncover a complicated conspiracy involving a unique form of art restoration, Dr. Watson finds true love. As with all of Meyer's Sherlock Holmes pastiches—starting with *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974)—*Sherlock Holmes and the Real Thing* is cleverly presented as an authentic manuscript from the personal memoirs of Dr. John H. Watson which Meyer acquired, edited, and supplied footnotes.

Laurie R. King, *Knave of Diamonds*, Bantam, \$30.00. Since 1994, Laurie King has written over twenty volumes about the young British-American consulting detective Mary Russell and her mentor-cum-husband Sherlock Holmes. King introduced readers to Mary's endearing but untrustworthy uncle Jake in the short story "Mary's Christmas," set in 1911 while Mary was still a child (included in the collection *Mary Russell's War*, 2016). As *Knave of Diamonds* opens, shortly after Russell and Holmes returned from a wedding in France, Uncle Jake makes a surprise visit. After a fourteen-year absence, Jake asks for Mary's help. What ensues is a caper to retrieve the Irish Crown Jewels which were stolen in 1907. Deftly interweaving historical figures and events, the narrative alternates between Mary, Jake, and Sherlock Holmes. **(Continued page 157)**

THE JURY BOX (Cont. from p. 141) Jonas Kreppel, *Adventures of Max Spitzkopf: The Yiddish Sherlock Holmes*, translated by Mikhl Yashinsky, White Goat Press, \$24.95. Originally written in Poland in the early 1900s and published in Yiddish, this series of fifteen pulp novellas all feature the fearless and heroic private detective Max Spitzkopf. Appearing for the first time in English, these stories are collected into a single beautifully designed 575-page volume. Kreppel, who died in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1940, wrote these stories for a Jewish audience living in the tenuous world of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Each adventure is an expression of the precariousness of life for Jews in Europe at that time, and in each, the hero uses his ingenuity and fearlessness to save the day.

Charles Todd, *A Christmas Witness*, Mysterious Press, \$23.99. It's Christmas, 1921, and Chief Inspector Ian Rutledge has been sent to the Kentish home of Lord Braxton where the demanding and ill-mannered Colonel Braxton is recovering after being run down by a man on horseback. Since Braxton ordered many young soldiers to their deaths during the Great War, the list of those who would want to harm him is long. But certain details don't add up. Charles Todd was the collaboration of the mother and son writing team of Carolyn and Charles Todd. *A Christmas Witness* is the first new book that Charles has written solo since the death of Carolyn in 2021. With a nod to Charles Dickens, this moving Christmas novella explores the emotional and physical scars of war, and is a testament that Charles Todd, even writing solo, still has the chops to tell a fantastic story.

Charles Finch, *The Hidden City*, Minotaur, \$29.00. Charles Lenox, gentleman detective and former Member of Parliament, is contacted by his former housekeeper, concerned about a stranger seen late at night at her building near the spot where a murder occurred seven years earlier. Lenox's discovery of a symbol carved in the doorway leads him to secrets hidden in the very architecture of London. Set in the years just before Sherlock Holmes moved to Baker Street, this Victorian thriller, the fifteenth in Finch's Charles Lenox series, is well researched and told in a clear and earnest style.

Larry Millett, *Mysterious Tales of Old Minneapolis*, University of Minnesota Press, \$24.95. The author of *Sherlock Holmes and the Eisendorf Enigma* (2017) and *Rafferty's Last Case* (2022) is back with a collection of three novellas set in late 1800s Minnesota. "Murder at the Falls" follows the death of a flour-mill owner whose mutilated body is found caught in the mill's turbine. "A Wilde Night at the Nicollet House" brings author Oscar Wilde to Minnesota on a book tour where he helps solve the murder of a hotel bell captain. A labor lawyer convinced of his own imminent death offers a reward to whoever solves his murder in "The Death Committee." The stories have echoes of Mark Twain and Conan Doyle and are filled with evocative historical details.

Daniel Silva, *An Inside Job*, Harper Perennial, \$32.00. After finding the body of a dead woman floating in a Venetian lagoon, art restorer and legendary spy Gabriel Allon follows the trail to the Vatican where a lost Leonardo da Vinci painting has been stolen. The plot of *An Inside Job* is unique in that while Allon is working with the Vatican and with Italian police, he assembles a team to perform a caperlike heist in order to recover the painting. The adventure takes Allon across the globe and into the deepest corners of the Vatican, rooting out corruption and protecting the life of the Supreme Pontiff.

Tim Sandlin, *Lit*, Brash Books, \$17.99. Kasey Cobb is a diminutive middle-aged owner of a coffee kiosk in a small town in northwestern Wyoming, a town called GroVont where nothing ever happens and where he spends much of his time at the library due to his crush on a cute librarian with Rasta braids. **(Cont. p. 171)**

Road watched the horizon lighten.
“Will you be hanging around
McCarthy’s Bar?”

“You were Task Force Red. You can
find me.”

“That’s a fact, Wheeler Tillman
Road. And I will.”

The sun peered over the horizon
and sent a thin golden ray upriver.
The ray became a line, then widened
to a golden-orange spray.

“Looks almost like a road, don’t it?”

Marsh said. “Like you could step out
and walk on it.”

Road watched the edges cut the
water and hide the river’s darkness.
“I won’t be walking it today, Sarge.”

“Tomorrow?”

Road emptied his shake. He let his
eyes trace the golden road downriver
to the sunrise, while Sophie sat
frozen next to him and stared at the
Savannah River. ●

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THE JURY BOX (Cont. from p. 157) When the local fundamentalist minister and his minions descend on the library to purify it of objectionable books, Kasey finds a local celebrity novelist fighting to keep his books from the bonfire. The novelist, Judge Joubert, is a pompous, cranky, hard-drinking aging hippie who wears a tasseled leather coat (part of his “brand”). When the pastor’s son tries to push the aging author into the bonfire, Kasey steps in to help the old man. The pastor is later found dead in the hippie author’s book shed, and Kasey finds himself playing sleuth. The book is branded as “a subversive take on a ‘cozy’ mystery,” which is about as good a description as I can come up with, considering the small-town setting and the colorful cast of characters. *Lit* is a fun and entertaining bibliophile romp.

Several new short-story anthologies are worth noting. John Grisham provides the introduction to the 2025 edition of *Mysterious Bookshop Presents the Best Mystery Stories of the Year* (Mysterious Press, \$28.95 hardcover, \$17.95 trade paperback). From more than 3,000 stories that were considered, twenty tales published in 2024 were selected, including Anna Scotti’s “A New Weariness” (*EQMM*, May/June 2024), “Through Thick and Thin” by Andrew Welsh-Huggins (*EQMM*, Sept/Oct 2024), and “Home Game” by Craig Faustus Buck (*AHMM*, July/Aug 2024). Also included is the classic story of escape, “The Problem of Cell 13,” written by Jacques Futrelle, whose career was cut short when he died in 1912 during the sinking of the Titanic.

Adam Meyer and Alan Orloff coedited *Hollywood Kills: A Crime Fiction Anthology* (Level Best Books, \$18.95), which includes sixteen murderous stories, each written by an author who has worked in Hollywood. The twist is that each story is about a character working in a job that the author has held. Several stories, including Ellen Byron’s “Billy Wilder’s Ghost,” Adam Meyer’s “Killer in the Woods,” and John Shepphird’s “‘Action, Cut’ . . . And Take Blame,” all feature Hollywood screenwriters, a job held by the authors. “Stalker,” about a soap-opera star, was penned by novelist Jon Lindstrom, a longtime veteran on the cast of *General Hospital*. Eric Beetner’s “The Cutting Room Floor” features an editor, a job for which Beetner has been nominated for eight Emmy Awards. Hollywood attorney Robert Rotstein’s “Grand Theft Auto in the Heart of Screenland” is a footnote-filled and highly educational romp about the legal (and illegal) side of show business. *EQMM* Readers Award winner Stacy Woodson uses her experience in “Confessions of a Background Artist.” Novelist and editor Shawn Reilly Simmons has worked as a movie-set caterer, hence, “Craft and Consequences.” ● © 2026 by Steve Steinbock