

Spring mysteries bring twists and turns

The rainy month of April offers some surprises for mystery fans, four new books set in distinctly different locales: the mean streets of New York City, the tony foothills overlooking Silicon Valley, the wilds of Montana and a small cathedral town in England. Protagonists range from a ranch hand to a semi-retired con man, with a couple of detectives and social workers to fill out the roster. None of the novels is anywhere near predictable—and three have endings that are sure to shock.

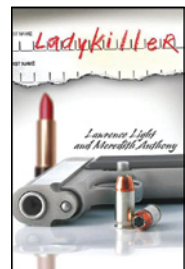


BY BRUCE TIERNEY

We'll start with Matthew Klein's clever **Con Ed** (Warner, \$23.99, 304 pages, ISBN 9780446579551), a sure bet to amuse readers of Tim Cockey and Carl Hiaasen. Retired con man Kip Largo requires fast cash in a big way. His estranged son is deeply in debt to the Russian mafia, and needs 60 grand to cover the principal and the vigilantes. Interest compounds rapidly with mob loans, though, and the 60 g's can easily escalate to a hundred if not paid promptly. Needless to say, it's not the sort of money Kip can come up with from his day gig at a dry-cleaning establishment, the only job he was able to land after serving eight long years in the slammer for mail and securities fraud. So when Lauren Napier turns up in need of Kip's once-legendary talents as a con artist, what choice does he have but to take her up on her offer? The sting seems simple enough: Lauren wants out of her marriage to an abusive, but ever so wealthy, husband. Said husband was canny when he married her, though; he made her sign a prenup that leaves her penniless if she walks out on him. All she wants is what she believes is rightfully hers: half! If Kip can engineer that, he stands to make a small fortune for himself. But wait, does the timing of all this seem a bit coincidental to you? Well, it does to Kip as well, and he can't quite figure out who's playing whom. It will be a wild chase, with high stakes: not just the money, which is substantial, but also the very lives of several of the players.



teria. Together they have crafted a disquieting novel of suspense set in and around a crisis center in New York City, **Ladykiller** (Oceanview, \$23.95, 264 pages, ISBN 9781933515052). Spousal abuse, rape, suicide—these issues and more traverse the threshold of the Westside Crisis Center on a daily basis. Another issue is about to join their ranks: murder . . . and it won't stop at just one. Detective Dave Dillon pairs up with social worker Megan Morrison in an attempt to head off the killer, but they wind up instead in a whirlwind romance that both seem incapable of putting the brakes on. And still the murders continue. There are a couple of pretty good twists in this narrative, and it's a fair bet you won't see at least one of them coming.



Among the missing

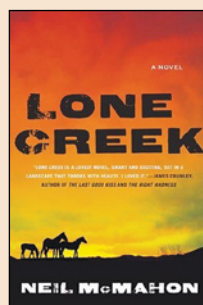
English author Susan Hill has written three Simon Serrailer novels thus far. On this side of the pond, we are a bit behind, as the first of the series, **The Various Haunts of Men** (Overlook, \$25.95, 438 pages, ISBN 9781585678761) has just been released; I predict that the others (*The Pure in Heart* and *The Risk of Darkness*) will not be far behind, as they are what my grandfather often referred to as "cracking good yarns." In a small English countryside cathedral town, Chief Inspector Simon Serrailer and policewoman Freya Graffham investigate the disappearances of a diverse group of individuals from an area of town known simply as "The Hill": a middle-aged female hospital worker; an unattractive young woman fighting acne, obesity and depression with only limited success on every front; an elderly man; and even an annoying little dog. All have gone missing without a trace. The scant available evidence seems to point to a nearby town, where faith healers, spiritualists and other new-age practitioners of various stripes ply their trades. But, as in all good mysteries, the twisty trail is littered with red herrings, and you will not easily identify the culprit (or culprits). Fans of P.D. James and Ruth Rendell can rest easy, knowing that those authors' tradition of fine storytelling will move forward at least one more generation. ♡

Double the thrill

Authors Lawrence Light and Meredith Anthony come from widely divergent backgrounds: Light is the Wall Street editor for *Forbes* magazine, and Anthony, a humorist, has been a contributor to *MAD* magazine and the women's humor quarterly, *Hys-*

Mystery of the month: The Tip of the Ice Pick goes to . . .

I've been a big fan of Neil McMahon for some time now, having read all (and reviewed most) of his books to date. Although I had been looking forward to another episode in the series featuring emergency room physician Carroll Monk, I have to say that McMahon's latest, a stand-alone thriller entitled **Lone Creek** (HarperCollins, \$24.95, 336 pages, ISBN 9780060792213), eclipses all of his work thus far.



Set in modern-day Montana, **Lone Creek** is the story of an Old-West territory inundated with developers, of working ranches fast becoming little more than hobby acreage (with serious bragging rights, mind you) for wealthy out-of-state businessmen. Construction worker Hugh Davoren labors by day at the old Pettyjohn ranch, crafting an immense new residence on the very place where he worked as a youngster some 20 summers ago. By accident, he stumbles upon the carcasses of two horses, shotgunned to death, then unceremoniously dumped in the

construction trash site. While he debates what to do with this knowledge, he gets railroaded on a trumped-up theft charge and run off the Pettyjohn property; quickly he realizes that there is something underhanded going on, and he resolves to get to the bottom of it, hopefully without landing his butt in jail for the next 10 years. Assisting him is one of the best second bananas in contemporary mysteries, the aptly named Madbird, a Native American with more than a bit of Coyote, the Indian mischief spirit, in his makeup. Together the two explore a contemporary mystery that has its roots in an earlier generation, stirring up ghosts for Hugh Davoren and his enemies alike. If you revel in the gritty western mysteries of James Crumley, the outdoorsy suspense thrillers of C.J. Box, or the quirkily delightful Alaskan whodunits of John Straley, do yourself a big favor and pick up **Lone Creek**. It may well be your favorite book purchase of the year. ♡

—BRUCE TIERNEY

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