

# Recommendations: Mystery novels that are also funny

By **Moira Macdonald**

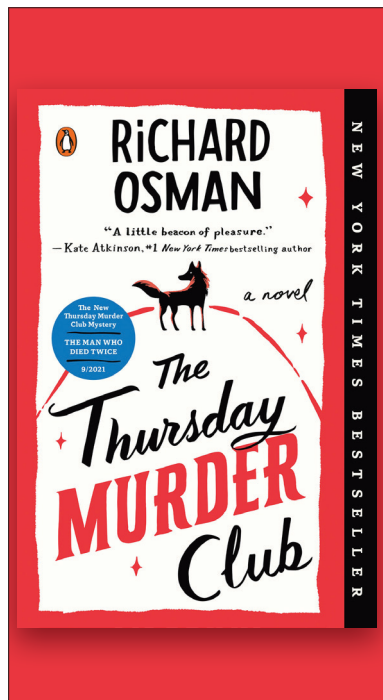
*The Seattle Times*

It's a tall order to ask for a mystery novel that's also funny, like wanting a dog who can both fetch and mix a cocktail. But such things do exist (the novels, not the dog, though surely you'll tell me if I'm mistaken), and a number of you responded to my call for recommendations for a crime fiction novel that made you laugh out loud. I wasn't at all surprised by the title most often cited: "The Thursday Murder Club," by Richard Osman, came out in 2020 and brightened many a pandemic Sunday afternoon. The tale of four seniors in a pastoral and excessively llama-laden British retirement village who attempt to solve a real-life crime, it's very funny and the characters are a treat. They return for a 2021 sequel, "The Man Who Died Twice."

Other books getting multiple votes were:

## SPENCER QUINN'S CHET AND BERNIE MYSTERIES

A lot of readers chimed in for this 12-book series, about a



Penguin Random House

detective agency run by Bernie, who is a person, and Chet, who is a dog. (But can he make cocktails?) The titles all play on famous novel or movie titles; my favorite is "A Fistful of Collars."

## "SQUEEZE ME" BY CARL HIAASEN

Hiaasen's name came up fairly often, mostly next to this 2020 bestseller about a dead dowa-

ger, a First Lady/Secret Service romance, a wildlife wrangler and a lot of hungry pythons.

## COLIN COTTERILL'S DR. SIRI PAIBOUN SERIES

This 15-book series is set in 1980s Laos, with its main character a doctor who becomes National Coroner, inheriting an incompetent boss and quirky staff. Cotterill, an English Australian author, recently concluded the series with "The Delightful Life of a Suicide Pilot."

## JANET EVANOVICH'S STEPHANIE PLUM SERIES

Evanovich's series about a New Jersey bounty hunter has spawned 21 novels, several novellas and one not-very-good Katherine Heigl movie. A reader described this one as "the 'I Love Lucy' of detective series."

And here are the rest:

- "The House on Vesper Sands" by Paraic O'Donnell (I loved this one)
- Alan Bradley's Flavia de Luce series
- Vaseem Khan's Baby Ganesh

Agency series

- J.D. Robb's "In Death" series
- Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone series
- Kinky Friedman's mysteries
- Craig Johnson's Sheriff Longmire series
- Anne George's Southern Sisters series
- Lynne Truss' Constable Twitten series
- "Her Royal Spyness" by Rhys Bowen
- Christopher Fowler's Bryant and May series
- Qiu Xiaolong's Inspector Chen Cao series
- Joe Ide's IQ series
- Donald Westlake's books

I'm quite enjoying all this crime-fiction crowdsourcing! Here's one for next month, and thinking about "The House on Vesper Sands" gave me the idea: Tell me your favorite mystery book or series set in the past.

To start us off, here's a timely recommendation. Naomi Hirahara's 2021 novel "Clark and Division" takes place in 1944 Chicago, among a Japanese American family just moved to the city after

their release from incarceration. (Last month marked the 80th anniversary of Executive Order 9066, in which President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered all Japanese Americans on the West Coast evacuated from their homes and forced into incarceration camps.) Twenty-year-old Aki Ito, grieving the loss of her older sister Rose, turns amateur detective on the unfamiliar Chicago streets, where young people seemed to rule. Did beautiful, determined Rose die by suicide, or was it murder?

Hirahara, an Edgar Award-winning author of several previous mystery series, crafts a tight plot, a palpable sense of place and a touching heroine — there's an innocence to the narration underlining that Aki is indeed very young, dealing both with grief and the disorientation of being out in the world again after years of confinement. "It felt so good to be ignored," muses Aki, of the Chicago sidewalks. "Nothing you did went unnoticed in Manzanar."

It's both an engrossing crime novel and a meaningful history lesson. Fiction's one way, Hirahara reminds us, to remember.

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