

CRIME



A gripping murder story that questions how we treat ex-soldiers opens Joan Smith's roundup

The UK's recent wars were always likely to have an impact on crime fiction. Trainee detective Joseph Stark, the hero of Matthew Frank's accomplished first novel *If I Should Die* (M Joseph £14.99/ebook £7.49), is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder when he returns to his former job with the police. His first case turns out to involve ex-soldier Harry Maggs — a Falklands veteran who has been sleeping rough in south London — and raises questions about the treatment of military personnel when they leave the armed forces.

Stark comes across Maggs during an inquiry involving teenagers from a crumbling estate who are beating up the homeless. When one of the victims dies, it becomes a murder investigation and the relentless hours take their toll on Stark's shattered body. Frank brilliantly maintains a balance between the demands of a complex plot and his character's difficulty in adjusting to civilian life; the book is occasionally



Richard Crompton A vivid portrait of Kenya

No place like home?

sentimental, but none the less gripping for that.

The Kill (Ebury £16.99/ebook £9.99) is the latest in Jane Casey's series of books featuring Maeve Kerrigan, a female CID officer. Kerrigan is very much a woman in a man's world, negotiating her way through male camaraderie and a boss with an infuriating line in sexist remarks. Someone is targeting police officers in London, beginning with the shooting of an officer who is found dead in his car in Richmond Park. Casey is good at pacing her plots, but on this occasion her protagonist's obsession with sexual tension in the office turns into an irritating distraction.

In the 1980s, long before organised gap years, travelling abroad before going to university could be a lonely experience. In *The Long Fall* by Julia Crouch (Headline £13.99/ebook £7.49), Emma sets off on

her own with high hopes and a student rail ticket. She has only reached Marseille when she is attacked by a stranger; fleeing to Athens, she finds herself isolated and on the brink of a breakdown. When she is befriended by two slightly older American students, a chain of violent events is put in motion that changes the course of her life. Three decades later, these events unexpectedly catch up with Kate, a prominent charity campaigner who lives

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in London with her wealthy husband. The result is a tense and dramatic novel, switching seamlessly between two time periods.

Richard Crompton is a former BBC journalist who lives in East Africa. *Hell's Gate* (Weidenfeld £12.99/ebook £6.49) is the second of his novels set in Kenya, and is every bit as good as *The Honey Guide*. His detective, Mollel, is a former Masai warrior whose wife died in the bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi in 1998. In the new novel, he is dispatched to a small town on the edge of a national park where the local police are suspected of exercising summary justice when a judge keeps releasing defendants. Crompton writes with ease about traditional customs and the impact on Kenya of globalisation, creating a vivid portrait of a country struggling to come to terms with modernity.

Locked-room mysteries used to be a staple of golden-age crime fiction. Now the Norwegian novelist Hans Olav Lahmu has revived the form in *The Human Flies* translated by Kari Dickson (Mantle £16.99/ebook £10.99). The novel is set in 1968, when a young detective inspector — Kolbjorn Kristiansen, known as K2 — is sent to an apartment block in Oslo to investigate the murder of a Resistance hero. The victim has been shot in his flat but there is no sign of the weapon and the front door appears to be locked from the inside. It is the start of a brilliant investigation in which K2 is secretly assisted by an enigmatic young woman who is confined to a wheelchair.

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AT A GLANCE FICTION

ON LEAVE
by DANIEL ANSELME
translated by DAVID BELLOS
Penguin £16.99/ebook £9.99 pp224

It's December 1956, in a rain-drenched, neon-lit Paris (very nouvelle vague in mood), and three young conscripts, fighting for the French army in Algeria, have a few days' leave. Abandoned by wives, estranged from families, cut off from all the civilians around them, they are a crafted study in alienation, a dark antithesis to the American classic film



On the Town. Anselme himself was an overweight journalist, a former member of the Communist party who fought with the resistance during the Second World War.

This novel grew out of his conversations with young soldiers on leave from the unpopular, increasingly bloody Algerian conflict. It was first published in 1957, when the war had five more years to run, and still resonates.

ALL THE WAY by MARIE DARRIEUSSECQ
translated by PENNY HUESTON
Text Publishing £8.99/ebook £8.99 pp248

The mind of a girl undergoing the unsettling sexual transformations of puberty turns out to be an obscure and rather mannered place to be in this, Darrieussecq's 14th novel. Her wilful heroine, Solange, tackles life and her sexual desire head on in a small French town in the early 1980s. Clarity is not helped



by the Australian translation ("face washer"? "rear-vision mirror"?), but the awfulness of being young and horny comes through hideously enough. Darrieussecq achieved instant notoriety with her first novel, *Pig Tales*, in 1996, in which a woman gradually turns into a sow. She has never quite repeated that success, and for all its strengths, *All the Way* does become rather wearing.

THE FRONT SEAT PASSENGER
by PASCAL GARNIER
translated by JANE AITKEN
Gallic £7.99/ebook £6.99 pp139

When Fabien Delorme returns to his Paris apartment after visiting his father, his wife is not at home. She has been killed as a passenger in a car accident outside Dijon some 200 miles away. Was she having an affair? With confused ideas of revenge, Fabien tracks down the widow of the driver. He thinks he is stalking her. He shouldn't

be so certain. This is a splendidly warped thriller that is always sliding off in unexpected directions just when you think you have got a handle on it. Garnier, who died in 2010 aged 60, wrote more than 50 books. His is a dark, richly odd and disconcerting world: this is another of his devastating and brilliant little novels.



David Mills