



Sunriver Books & Music

January Newsletter

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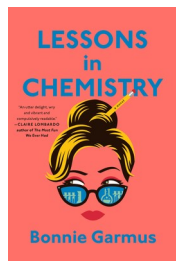


It's history, you don't erase it, you learn from it!
By Mark Skeen.

Happy New Year!
May 2024 be a year of kindness, tolerance, inclusion, respect, joy, good health, and, of course, lots of great books!

Book Clubs are a huge part of Sunriver Books & Music! Our Book Clubs are vibrant, with friendly passionate readers. We are very fond of our Book Clubs. Normally I would have the New Year's list of Book Club selections up on our website by now, but the page is having issues locating on the drop down menu for Book Clubs. The American Bookseller's Association hosts our website, hopefully the issue will soon be resolved. Every December our Book Clubs vote on their favorites of the books discussed. Following are the winners of 2023 votes.

Fiction

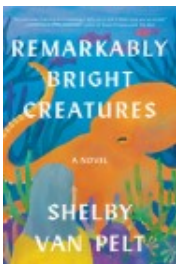


Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus mixes comedy and chemistry and the sparks fly for a spirited romp of a novel, pure fun to read. In the 1960's it was rare for a woman to be a successful chemist, the men firmly held the reins of power and didn't plan on relinquishing anytime soon. Elizabeth Zott's attempt at a successful career is stymied early, before she even achieves the doctorate degree necessary to be taken seriously in the field.

She never planned on children, but in 1961 that is where she finds herself, a single mother putting notes in her little girl's lunch. Although these are not necessarily the regular sort of mommy notes. Such as "Play sports at recess but do not automatically let the boys win." Then again, she hadn't planned on falling in love either. Calvin Evans is every bit as eccentric as Elizabeth, a brilliant scientist with an international reputation. Until he meets Elizabeth, his twin passions were science and rowing. He didn't think he would ever meet a woman with the same passion for chemistry, Elizabeth was a shock to his system. They both worked at Hastings Research Institute. Calvin the star of the establishment, Elizabeth the woman given zippo respect.

Life can be topsy turvy, taking unexpected turns both good and bad. Thus, she finds herself alone with her child and an extremely intelligent dog she has taught quite an extensive vocabulary (the dog is major cool!). Trying to make ends meet is difficult, she is not paid well or even nearly equal to the men at Hastings and is given no recognition for her work. Her whole life has been focused on being a scientist. However, needs must. So, when the opportunity arises, she takes the job of a TV personality, a celebrity chef. Elizabeth justifies her new job by the rational that cooking is chemistry. She eschews any of the usual TV frippery, giving serious presentations on preparing healthy meals while causing the TV execs, who believe all that frippery essential, heartburn. The show, to the surprise of the aforementioned execs, is a success.

Can a woman whose heart and soul are involved with serious science find happiness as a TV celebrity? I don't know, but the book sure takes the reader on a wild ride discovering how things will sort out for Elizabeth Zott! What a great character and entertaining novel!



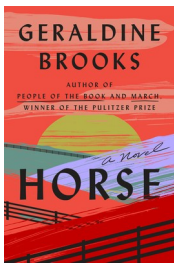
Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt, is an absolutely charming story. Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus, is on day 1,299 of his incarceration in the Sowell Bay Aquarium. While the daily crowds of humans watch him, he is watching them. Octopi are highly intelligent creatures, Marcellus particularly so. To pass the time, he observes closely those charged with running the aquarium and knows far more about them than they do about him.

Tova Sullivan, a 70ish widow, keeps busy with a job cleaning the aquarium at night after the crowds have left. She greets each creature in it's exhibit as she sets about her task of cleaning the fingerprints off their glass. Marcellus takes note that Tova regards the creatures as individuals, rather than just exhibits. This comes in handy when one-night circumstances will force their contact to be closer than either anticipated.

Tova is alone now in the house her father built. She has her group of women friends who meet weekly and her job at the aquarium. Staying busy helps keep her from obsessing about the tragedy of her son Erik's disappearance thirty years ago. He was a bright kid, working the summer on Puget Sound ferries, waiting to start college in the fall. One day he went off to work and never returned. While Tova is bereft without knowing what happened to her only child, Marcellus is an excellent detective and has solved the puzzle. However, the challenge is how to convey that information to a human??? It becomes even more important as time passes.

Cameron Cassmore was raised by his Aunt Jeanne. An illness forced the sale of her home and Cameron gave up on college to help. Now she lives in a mobile home, has become something of a hoarder, and spends her energy creating a Shangri La garden, the envy of the mobile home park. Cameron helps when needed, but he has failed to flourish. Jobs come and go; this latest bout of unemployment is primed to leave him homeless. Bad credit, a job history of quick firings, and no savings portend few prospects. His childhood friends, Elizabeth and Brad, realize he needs a fresh start somewhere outside California. He heads north to the Puget Sound.

Gotta love Marcellus! I was delighted Shelby Van Pelt gave a shout out to Sy Montgomery's excellent non-fiction, **The Soul of an Octopus**.



Horse by Geraldine Brooks. If you love history or horses, this is just the ticket! Set in three eras, it tells the story of a black groom, a remarkable stallion, Lexington, a gifted artist, a gallery owner, a scientist, and an art historian.

Tom Scott paints beautiful portraits of race horses. Jarret's father, Harry, was renowned for his prowess in training horses to run. So successful, he was able to save the money and purchase his freedom. He taught his son the ways best to treat a horse. Jarret forges a bond with a young foal, a bond that takes the horse to glory on the race track. But the times are a changing, a Civil War will tear the nation asunder with shocking brutality putting Jarret and Lexington in grave danger.

In 1954 Martha Jackson runs a New York gallery known for promoting modern inventive artists. Nonetheless she is captivated by an old painting of a horse.

Jess has been obsessed about skeletons since she was a little girl in Australia. She came to America for college, and stayed for a job at the Smithsonian. By 2019 she is managing a department, doing the work she loves. Theo is a graduate student at Georgetown University studying American Art History. He makes ends meet by sitting in his apartment writing magazine articles, kept company by his dog, Clancy, (an adorable Kelpie). The skeleton of a stallion will bring them together and lead them to the history of Black horsemen in America.

I loved reading about young Jarret staying the night in the stable to watch over the newborn foal. And Lexington, well Lexington was truly a special stallion. At its heart this is a story about the way people are treated based not on the content of their character but the color of their skin. In this book you will meet people whose character absolutely shines. Nonetheless, it is dangerous to be breathing while black in America. Geraldine Brooks succeeds beautifully with a story that embraces art, history, grand horses, and the quiet dignity of people of color whose merits far outshine their persecutors. Lexington, Tom Scott, and Martha Jackson are all real historic characters.



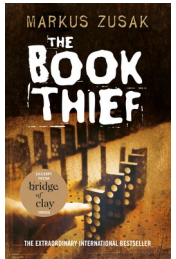
The Cider House Rules by John Irving is set in rural Maine, it is the story of Dr. Larch, an ether addicted abortionist, who runs the St. Cloud orphanage and Homer Wells, one of the orphans.

Homer develops a father son relationship with Dr. Larch, the older man caring for and training the younger. While Dr. Larch is clearly pro-choice, Homer is opposed to abortion. Homer leaves the orphanage with a young couple, finds love, breaks his heart, and ultimately faces hard choices in trying circumstances.



This is not only a wonderfully written story; it is also apt for our times. For the past 50 years women have been in charge of their own bodies. Due to a group of Black Robed people that is changing in many states. At the time this story is set, abortion was illegal. It is a view of the past relevant to current events.

While the story is about significant issues, it is also often very funny, and has characters the reader cannot help but care about. To write a novel on such an explosive topic with such a deft touch is genius. It was made into a successful movie starring Michael Caine.

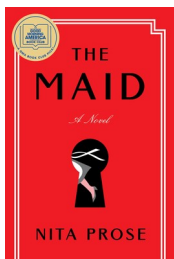


Banning Books is wrong! Our Banned Book selection, **The Book Thief** by Markus Zusak has merit for not only history, but the way it tends to repeat. There is a dangerous move afoot to move into the territory of George Orwell's **1984** and re-write history to suit political agendas. History is history, facts are facts, and neither should be rewritten because a group of people don't like the way it was. I am absolutely certain, no one suffering Hitler's genocide or slavery in the US, or any number of horrible things was in favor of the way it was either, they all would have been better served by horrific events not happening. But they did happen and it is a disservice to humanity to attempt to sugarcoat history.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak is an amazing novel of WWII with the perfect narrator for the story, Death. Liesel Meminger's brother dies in her arms on the train ride to her foster parents. This is the first time Death crosses her path. Liesel begins her career as a book thief at her brother's funeral, she picks up a book in the snow, although she does not know how to read yet, and hides it under her mattress. It is an interesting way to tell the story of a little German girl in troubled times that works perfectly on so many levels!

Liesel comes to love her foster parents, especially her papa, Hans. Her best friend, Rudy Steiner, is obsessed with the Olympic runner, Jesse Owens. The reader is drawn into the lives of these characters as Hitler's drastic changes to Germany impact them. Death is an empathetic character, kind to those human souls he is charged to collect and overworked as the world plunges into war. Liesel touches something in Death. Zusak is able to convey moments of happiness and joy, along with the overarching dread, terror, and tragedy of the era. It is a gripping story that I can whole heartedly recommend.

Mystery

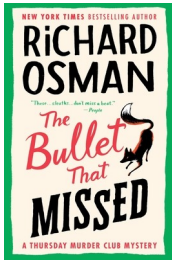


The Maid by Nita Prose is an interesting story combining unique characters with a clever plot.

Molly Gray has difficulty interpreting the nuances of social interaction, has a tendency to blurt out things obviously true but wholly inappropriate for comment. Until recently her grandmother helped her navigate the ins and outs of human behavior. The two women shared an apartment and were devoted to each other, but her grandmother recently died so Molly is on her own regarding how to comport herself.

She works as a maid in a toney hotel, the Regency Grand, a job she enjoys. Molly likes order, she likes things clean and tidy, she feels accomplishment in returning a messy room to a state of pristine comfort. She has a friend in the kitchen, Juan Manuel, and a crush on Rodney. Molly has surmised that to most of the guests, the maid is almost invisible. She is good at her job; being a maid doesn't call on her to have a lot of sparkling repartee and she enjoys restoring order.

What her job doesn't prepare her for is murder. The Regency Grand has a lot of well-heeled customers. People important in the financial pages and the society pages of leading newspapers. One of them, Mr. Black, is dead in the penthouse, a room Molly routinely cleans. Discovering him in this condition is way outside Molly's normal duties. Once the police get involved it is clear Molly is caught in troubled waters. This is a charming mystery; Molly is a delightful character intent on putting things right.

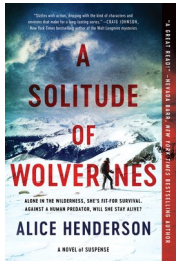


The Bullet That Missed by Richard Osman is the third in the popular **Thursday Murder Club** series. Steven Spielberg is making a movie of **The Thursday Murder Club**. Join Elizabeth, Ibrahim, Ron, and Joyce for another excellent escapade. They are delving into more cold cases, this time picking one that some powerful people would really like to keep firmly in the unsolved files.

Several years ago, a rising star in local TV news, Bethany Waites, was murdered when her car went over a cliff into the sea. By all accounts she was talented and investigating something big. Mike Waghorn is the lead talent on the local news show, South End Tonight, he and Bethany were close friends. It doesn't take the **Thursday Murder Club** long to have him on board with helping their investigation.

Of course, Joyce has a crush on Mike. There is electricity between Ron and Pauline, two strong people who fit together nicely. Good to see Ron enjoying some female companionship. Ibrahim has fallen in love with Joyce's dog, Allen. Nothing wrong with that, I am besotted with my dog too! Shows good sense to appreciate canine company, and Ibrahim is a paragon of good sense. Speaking of electricity, PC Donna De Freitas and Bogdan are definitely shooting off sparks. DCI Chris Hudson is a new, much improved, man since he started keeping company with Patrice. It is grand to see them involved in rewarding relationships.

Not all is sunshine and joy. Connie Johnson's rage against Ron and Bogdan is smoldering as she awaits her trial for crimes that should put her away for a good long while. She vowed to kill Ron and Bogdan for their role in her arrest. It is not an idle threat; she seems to be running her criminal enterprises from inside the jail. And Elizabeth is being blackmailed into killing an old acquaintance. She definitely has the skill set to accomplish the task, the threat that motivates her is serious. But will she carry out the execution?



A Solitude of Wolverines by Alice Henderson starts off with a bang! Alex Carter is attending a ceremony dedicating a bit of wetlands to be a wildlife sanctuary, she donated her abilities as a wildlife biologist to Save Our Wetlands Now and completed an environmental impact statement scuttling plans for a condo development. Not everyone is pleased by the outcome, the ceremony erupts in violence.

Alex followed her college sweetheart to Boston where he joined a law firm and thrived, not so much their relationship or Alex's career. Boston is a cool city, but Alex yearns for wild places. Shocked by the events of the day, her relationship in tatters, she quickly accepts an offer to study wolverines in Montana on the site of an old skiing resort. She leaves immediately for a remote lodge where she will spend the winter theoretically alone.

It is indeed a lonely remote location, the old ski resort huge and in disrepair. Alex will have encounters with a variety of Montana's wildlife. It is not the animals, but the human predators that are dangerous, and their prey is Alex. You really get a feel for the grandeur and loneliness of Montana, one of the world's most beautiful places.

This is the first book in a fun series. If you enjoy mysteries and the wilderness, this puts them together and has plenty of both! A thoroughly enjoyable read. Plus Alice Henderson's experience with wildlife adds a lot of interesting information about wolverines!



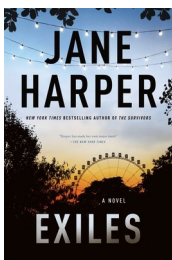
Hell and Back by Craig Johnson pits Walt against his greatest challenge, it is not just his life in danger, but his very soul.

Wyoming and Montana are beautiful country, but they can also be deadly cold. Walt wakes up in the middle of a road covered in snow, his hat nearby and his coat frozen to the ground. He doesn't remember anything, not who he is, not where he is from, not who his people are, nothing. The road is right by the remnants of the Fort Pratt Montana boarding school where 30 Native American boys perished in a fire in 1896. The name of the notorious school hangs over the gate still standing in front of the desolate site. Dusting himself off, he reasons the best course of action is to wander down the hill to the little town. Then things get even stranger. The people feel familiar, starting with the beautiful strawberry blond at the café. She gives him the first clue to his identity, reading his name in the band of his hat. There is something off about the people, something he should know if he could just remember.

In Native American lore there is an all powerful evil being, a being that wants not only to kill, but to eat the very soul of it's victim. A town where small boys perished in a fire could be just the kind of place the Taker of Souls would relish, would seek victims to feed it's hunger. What if such a thing set it's focus on Walt? What if he is running out of time, must remember who he is and what he does before it finds him?

While Walt is battling the forces of evil, Henry Standing Bear and Vic along with Dog are in Fort Pratt Montana looking for him. They don't know what has happened to him, where he might be, if he is in dire straits. They just know he may have come here seeking a missing Native American girl, Jeanne. Not a lot to go on, but then Henry is an accomplished tracker and Vic is determined. She is not the sort of woman people get away with annoying. Henry and Vic know something must have happened to Walt, they fear time may be short to find him.

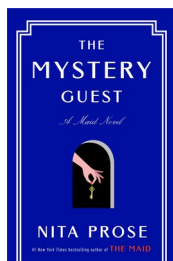
The two stories blend together, moving back and forth as Walt searches for answers while Henry and Vic search for Walt. There are so many edge of your seat moments! I read it one sitting, just could not put it down. I would be with Walt wandering about baffled while battling the forces of darkness, getting out of one tight spot after another, when the story would turn to Henry and Vic trying desperately to find Walt, then back to what happened on that fateful night in 1896. Henry Standing Bear shows just how dangerous he can be and Vic is in high gear!



Exiles by Jane Harper. Aaron Falk, a financial crimes detective from Melbourne introduced in **The Dry**, travels to the Marralee Valley in South Australia for the christening of his godson. He was honored to be asked by Sergeant Greg Raco and his wife Rita to play that role in their son's life. Greg's brother Charlie has a vineyard, Aaron will be staying in the guest house overlooking the vines.

The christening was originally scheduled a year earlier, but tragedy struck the small community. A young mother, Kim Gillespie, had gone missing, leaving her infant daughter in a baby carriage on the fairgrounds. She has not been found. The Raco family had close connections with Kim, they are still reeling and no closer to resolution.

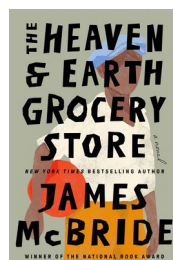
December and January it is dark early, before 5 PM. While December has Holidays to keep people busy inside, January has books! Settle in by the fireplace with a good book and a cup of cocoa for a perfect evening. Then come to Book Club! Discuss the book with a friendly community of readers. Everyone is welcome. If you would like to attend one of the discussions, email sunriverbooks@sunriverbooks.com



January 8 at 6 PM via Zoom and January 15 at 4:30 in person the Mystery Book Club discusses ***The Mystery Guest*** by Nita Prose which continues the adventures of Molly from ***The Maid***. Molly Gray is head maid at the ritzy Regency Grand Hotel, a role she takes great pride in performing to perfection. Molly's take on the world is a little different, she is keen on order and cleaning, but doesn't get social cues easily. A famous author, J.D. Grimthorpe, is scheduled to speak in the hotel's recently refurbished event room, he has promised his readers he will reveal a secret. But he doesn't get the chance. He barely gets set up at the podium, when he takes a drink of tea and falls over quite dead.

Detective Stark is not pleased to have another case with any involvement by Molly. Their last interaction did not encourage in Detective Stark any enthusiasm for time spent with Molly. There are plenty of suspects to keep the good detective busy trying to suss out who done it. Molly's trainee, Lily, was helping and nearby when the author pitched over, but Lily is almost catatonic with shock and will not speak. The author's out of control fan club were right on hand. And his beautiful secretary Serena seems a bit dodgy.

Molly has a secret of her own. She knew the author when she was a child and her grandmother worked as a maid in his home. A bit of information Molly is not sharing with Detective Stark. The story moves from the present back to Molly's childhood and the Grimthorpe mansion.



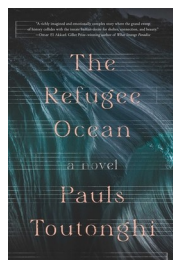
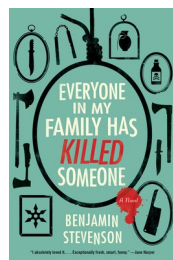
January 22 at 6 PM via Zoom and January 29 at 4:30 in person the Fiction Book Club discusses ***The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store*** by James McBride. It is set in Pottstown Pennsylvania in the Chicken Hill neighborhood where the poor Jewish and Blacks live.

In the 1920's an ambitious young Jewish immigrant entrepreneur, Moshe, fell in love with the Rabbi's beautiful daughter, Chona. Moshe prospers, owning two theaters that book Jewish and Black bands, a bold move for the times. Chona runs the grocery store and is invested heavily in the community. Chona is a pistol, she is big on social justice, and not at all pleased with the town's annual parade featuring the Ku Klux Klan.

Nate works for Moshe and Addie helps Chona out at the store. The couple were childless until they took in their orphaned nephew Dodo. They love the boy and were happy to share their home. Then the state steps in, Dodo is deaf and the authorities want to institutionalize him in a grim facility for the disabled. Chona who limps from a childhood bout of polio, is outraged. When Nate and Addie need help, Chona is glad to lend a hand. Things, of course, go from bad to worse. But these people are resourceful and they are not going to give up easily.

In 1972 a skeleton is found in an old well by construction workers. It appears to have been in the well for a long time. Who could it have been and how did it get into the well?

This is a lively story about, class, prejudice, the power of the state, and the power of the people. Good reading.



Upcoming Book Club Dates for Monday Evenings

Everyone is welcome, Meetings are held in person at 4:30 & via Zoom at 6 PM on Mondays.

February

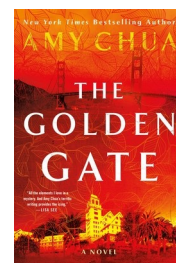
2-5 via Zoom & 2-12 in-person ***Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone*** by Benjamin Stevenson **Mystery Book Club**

2-19 via Zoom & 2-26 in-person ***Refugee Ocean*** by Pauls Toutonghi **Fiction Book Club**

March

3-4 via Zoom & 3-11 in-person ***The Golden Gate*** by Amy Chau **Mystery Book Club**
3-18 via Zoom & 3-25 in-person ***Master and Commander*** by Patrick O'Brian **Fiction Book Club**

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