

# CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS GREAT MYSTERY SERIES, VOL. I GENRE

Being an inherently limited and decidedly contemporary look at several series within specific mystery subgenres.

## HISTORICALS AND POLICE PROCEDURALS HISTORICALS AND POLI

BY PAT TOMPKINS

**A** NOVEL WITHOUT SUSPENSE is usually dead in the water. Yet novels that rely on suspense are often dismissed, as though mystery authors aren't as worthy of our attention. As a result, mysteries are both popular and marginalized. There are now more than 75 independent mystery bookstores in the United States, but the genre gets a separate but seldom equal treatment from reviewers.

Some of our most loved novels are mysteries: *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens, *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and more recently, *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold. Sebold's novel, along with *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, are two recent best-selling mysteries that showcase the genre's range. It's far more than tough-talking private eyes in urban jungles and old ladies bumbling around English villages. That's one reason for the popularity of mysteries: there's something for everyone. Consider the spectacular success of Alexander McCall Smith's series set in Botswana, beginning with *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency*. Alongside Precious Ramotswe's adventures—inevitably described as charming—the best-seller list has room for the satirical mysteries of Carl Hiassen, set in the bizarre world of southern Florida. And even if you haven't read the dark, violent mysteries of George Pelecanos, Dennis Lehane, and Richard Price, you may have

encountered their work at the movies (*Sea of Love*, *Mystic River*) or on HBO's acclaimed *The Wire*.

The key to mysteries is crime: murder, kidnapping, theft, and other malicious acts. And crucial to a satisfying mystery is the ending; usually the bad guys are punished, and at the very least, you know whodunit. In Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*, a woman disappears. (Spoiler alert! Skip the rest of this paragraph if you haven't read the book. Ready?) Was she murdered, or the victim of an accident? Did she desert her husband? To readers' frustration, they never find out. O'Brien claims that if he had revealed what happened, it wouldn't have been a mystery. Sorry, that's the wrong answer.

Here we'll look at two types of mystery series: historicals and police procedurals. Keep in mind that these categories are only convenient labels; many mysteries overlap into more than one. Elmore Leonard's books—such as his latest, *Mr. Paradise*—are often hilarious, but have plenty of grit, too. Additionally, we have bypassed classic mystery authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Raymond Chandler to focus on contemporary U.S. and U.K. writers.

# HISTORICAL MYSTERY SERIES TIMELINE

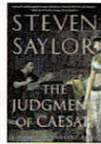
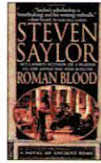
IN HISTORICAL MYSTERIES, THE WHEN is as important as the who and why. In addition to the usual burdens of creating a compelling plot, the author must compose plausible dialogue and keep period research and details from overwhelming

## ★ ROMA SUB ROSA THE INVESTIGATIONS OF GORDIANUS THE FINDER

**ERA:** Ancient Rome, 1st century B.C.  
**AUTHOR:** Steven Saylor  
**SERIES BEGINNING:** *Roman Blood* (1991)

**ABOUT THE SERIES:** The honorable Gordianus's cases are often entangled with the politics of ancient Rome—he crosses paths with Julius Caesar, Cicero, and Pompey. Saylor's series is more sober and steeped in history than the Marcus Didius Falco series by Lindsey Davis.

**THE LATEST:** *The Judgment of Caesar* (2004) [10th in the series]



## ★ THE CHRONICLES OF BROTHER CADFAEL

**ERA:** 12th-century England  
**AUTHOR:** Ellis Peters, the pseudonym of Edith Pargeter (1913-1995).  
**SERIES BEGINNING:** *A Morbid Taste for Bones* (1977)

**ABOUT THE SERIES:** Brother Cadfael has loved and lost, fought in the Crusades, and traveled far and wide before joining the Benedictine Monks late in his life. His responsibilities to his order bring him into contact with murders more frequently than one might expect.

**THE LAST:** *Brother Cadfael's Penance* (1994) [20th in the series]



## ★ BENJAMIN JANUARY

**ERA:** Antebellum New Orleans  
**SERIES BEGINNING:** *A Free Man of Color* (1997)  
**AUTHOR:** Barbara Hambly, who also writes fantasy and science fiction novels.

**ABOUT THE SERIES:** January is, as the title of the series debut says, "A Free Man of Color," trained as a doctor but earning his living as a musician. In *Sold Down the River*, he goes undercover on a sugar plantation to solve a murder.

**THE LATEST:** *Dead Water* (2004) [8th in the series]



**AMEROTKE BY P.C. DOHERTY.** Four books: *The Mask of Ra* (1999) to *The Slayers of Seth* (2002).  
**ARISTOTLE DETECTIVE BY MARGARET DOODY.** Four books: *Aristotle Detective* (1978) to *Poison in Athens* (2004).  
**MARCUS DIDIUS FALCO BY LINDSEY DAVIS.** Sixteen books: *The Silver Pigs* (1989) to *Scandal Takes a Holiday* (2004).  
**SISTER FIDELMA BY PETER TREMAYNE.** Sixteen books: *Absolution by Murder* (1994) to *Whispers of the Dead* (2004).  
**DOMESDAY BY EDWARD MARSTON.** Eleven books: *The Wolves of Savername* (1993) to *The Elephants of Norwich* (2000).  
**HUGH CORBETT BY P.C. DOHERTY.** Five books: *Satan in St. Mary's* (1986) to *Corpse Candle* (2002).  
**SHAKESPEAREAN MURDER MYSTERY BY PHILIP GOODEN.** Five books: *That Sleep of Death* (2000) to *Mask of Night* (2004).

1300<sub>BC</sub>

AD |

600

1000

1300

ANCIENT EGYPT  
14TH CENTURY B.C.

ANCIENT GREECE  
4TH CENTURY B.C.

ANCIENT ROME  
1ST CENTURY B.C.

IMPERIAL ROME  
1ST CENTURY A.D.

IRELAND  
7TH CENTURY

ENGLAND  
11TH CENTURY

ENGLAND  
12TH CENTURY

ENGLAND  
14TH CENTURY

ENGLAND  
16TH CENTURY

★ **ABEL JONES**

**ERA:** Civil War America

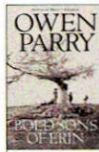
**SERIES BEGINNING:** *Faded Coat of Blue* (1999)

**AUTHOR:** Owen Parry, the pseudonym of retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters, also writes nonfiction (*Beyond Terror: Strategy in a Changing World*) and military thrillers (*The Devil's Garden*).

**ABOUT THE SERIES:**

Major Abel Jones is a tight-laced Union Army detective working for generals and President Lincoln to solve crimes.

**THE LATEST:** *Bold Sons of Erin* (2003) [5th in the series]



★ **AMELIA PEABODY**

**ERA:** Victorian England (with a nod to Ancient Egypt)

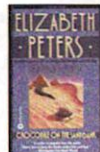
**AUTHOR:** Elizabeth Peters has a doctoral degree in Egyptology and has received grandmaster and lifetime achievement awards from leading mystery groups.

**SERIES BEGINNING:** *Crocodile on the Sandbank* (1975)

**ABOUT THE SERIES:**

The long-popular Peters covers two bases—Edwardian and ancient Egypt—in her series featuring archaeologist Amelia Peabody, her husband, Radcliffe Emerson, and their son, Ramses.

**THE LATEST:** *Guardian of the Horizon* (2004) [16th in the series]



★ **WORLD WAR ONE NOVELS**

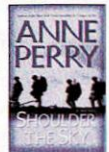
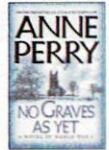
**ERA:** World War One (England)

**AUTHOR:** Anne Perry is best known for her two Victorian series, one with Thomas and Charlotte Pitt (*Seven Dials*), the other PI William Monk (*Funeral in Blue*).

**SERIES BEGINNING:** *No Graves as Yet* (2003)

**ABOUT THE SERIES:** The books center on the Reavley family—adult children whose parents die in a car crash on the same day that the Austrian Archduke of Serbia is assassinated. Matthew, an intelligence officer, teams up with his brother Joseph, a professor and Chaplin at Cambridge, to solve their parents' murder.

**THE LATEST:** *Shoulder the Sky* (2004) [2nd in the series]



**SANO ICHIRO** BY **LAURA JOH ROWLAND**. Nine books: *Shinju* (1994) to *The Perfumed Sleeve* (2004).

**SIR JOHN FIELDING** BY **BRUCE ALEXANDER**. Ten books: *Blind Justice* (1994) to *The Price of Murder* (2004).

**HANNAH TREVOR** BY **MARGARET LAWRENCE**. Three books: *Hearts and Bones* (1995) to *The Burning Bride* (1998).

**SERGEANT CRIBB** BY **PETER LOVESEY**. Eight books: *Wobble to Death* (1970) to *Waxwork* (1978).

**MARY RUSSELL** BY **LAURIE R. KING**. Seven books: *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* (1994) to *The Game* (2004).

1700

1800

1900

**JAPAN**  
17TH CENTURY

**ENGLAND**  
18TH CENTURY

**NEW ENGLAND**  
POST REVOLUTION

**NEW ORLEANS**  
ANTEBELLUM

**AMERICA**  
CIVIL WAR

**ENGLAND**  
19TH CENTURY

**ENGLAND**  
19TH CENTURY

**ENGLAND**  
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**ENGLAND**  
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# Police Procedurals

**POLICE PROCEDURALS PROVIDE THE ULTIMATE INSTRUCTION MANUAL** on how to solve crimes. The over-exposure of this subgenre on television—see *Law & Order* and *CSI* for proliferations of proliferations—has made common knowledge of formerly arcane information. Thus, character development has become increasingly important to this sub-genre. They're a diverse lot: some series characters barely age; others divorce, dry out, or become parents. But, they all face as many obstacles in their personal lives as they do in their professional careers.

**San Francisco, CA:** Kate Gillespie by Robin Burcell. Four books: *Every Move She Makes* (1999) to *Cold Case* (2004).

**San Francisco, CA:** Kate Martinelli by Laurie R. King. Four books: *A Grave Talent* (1993) to *Night Work* (2000).

**Montana:** Gabriel Du Pre by Peter Bowen. Eleven books: *Coyote Wind* (1994) to *The Tumbler* (2004).

**Denver, CO:** Gabe Wager by Rex Burns. Eleven books: *The Alvarez Journal* (1976) to *The Leaning Land* (1997).

## ★ Harry Bosch Series

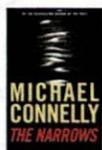
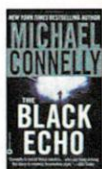
**Location:** Los Angeles

**Author:** Michael Connelly

**Series Beginning:** *The Black Echo* (1992)

**About the Series:** In the latest installment, former L.A.P.D. detective Bosch and F.B.I. agent Rachel Walling must team up to track down Robert Backus, an F.B.I. behavioral scientist-turned-serial killer.

**The Latest:** *The Narrows* (2004) ★★★★★  
Sept/Oct 2004 [10th in the series]



**Los Angeles, CA:** Jessie Drake by Rochelle Krich. Five books: *Fair Game* (1993) to *Shadows of Sin* (2001).

**Cochise County, southern**

**AZ:** Joanna Brady by J.A. Jance. Ten books: *Desert Heat* (1993) to *Exit Wounds* (2003).

## ★ Liam Campbell

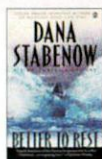
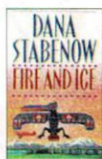
**Location:** Newenham, Alaska

**Author:** The Edgar Award-winning Dana Stabenow lives in Anchorage, Alaska and also writes the Kate Shugak mysteries.

**Series Beginning:** *Fire and Ice* (1998)

**About the Series:** At the start, alcoholic Alaskan State Trooper Liam Campbell has been exiled to this small fishing town. The second his plane touches down, a murder and an ex-girlfriend confront him. The series has more soapy elements than the Shugak mysteries.

**The Latest:** *Better to Rest* (2002) [4th in the series]



## ★ Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee

**Location:** Arizona and New Mexico

**Author:** Tony Hillerman

**Series Beginning:** *The Blessing Way* (1970)

**About the Series:** Hillerman's series features Navajo Tribal Police Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee in a world full of conflict—traditional values versus modern society and the clash of Anglo, Hispanic, and Native American cultures in the Southwest. Hillerman knows the territory so well that it's surprising to realize he's a Catholic from Oklahoma.

**The Latest:** *Skeleton Man* (Nov, 2004) [17th in the series]



## ★ Carl Houseman

**Location:** Nation County, Iowa

**Author:** Donald Harstad served in Vietnam before returning to Iowa in 1974, where he served as Deputy Sheriff of Clayton County.

**Series Beginning:** *Eleven Days* (1994)

**About the Series:** Deputy Sheriff Carl Houseman is a straight-laced deputy in a rural county, fighting everything from small-time criminals to terrorists.

**The Latest:** *A Long December* (2004) [15th in the series]

**Chicago, IL:** Abe Lieberman by Stuart Kaminsky. Seven books: *Lieberman's Folly* (1990) to *The Last Dark Place* (2004).

**Lincoln Prairie, IL:** Marti MacAlister by Eleanor Taylor Bland. Twelve books: *Dead Time* (1992) to *A Cold and Silent Dying* (2004).

**Minneapolis, MN:** Mars Bahr by K.J. Erickson. Four books: *Third Person Singular* (2001) to *Alone at Night* (2004).

## ★ Joe Gunther

**Location:** Brattleboro, Vermont

**Author:** Archer Mayor

**Series Beginning:** *Open Season* (1988)

**About the Series:** Mayor juxtaposes the beauty of the New England landscape and the stoicism of its people with the darker side—drugs, sex, and murder. Into this mix comes hard-boiled police lieutenant Joe Gunther.

**The Latest:** *The Surrogate Thief* (2004) [15th in the series]



## Cincinnati, OH: Sonora Blair by

Lynn S. Hightower. Three books: *Eyeshot* (1986) to *No Good Deed* (1998).

## Nantucket, MA: Merry Folger by Francine

Mathews. Four books: *Death in the Off Season* (1994) to *Death in a Cold Hard Light* (1998).

## Harlem, NYC: Coffin Ed Johnson & Grave Digger

Jones by Chester Himes. Eight books: *For Love of Imabelle* (1957) to *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969).

## ★ 87th Precinct

**Location:** The fictional Isola, a stand-in for Manhattan

**Author:** Ed McBain also writes as Evan Hunter, whose debut novel was 1954's *The Blackboard Jungle*.

**Series Beginning:** *Cop Hater* (1956)

**About the Series:** The 87th Precinct is where Detective Steve Carella and colleagues battle the Deaf Man and other villains. After almost five decades of writing dozens of acclaimed police procedurals, McBain was confident enough to title a recent entry *The Frumious Bandersnatch* (★★★★ Mar/Apr 2004). Reviewer Marilyn Stasio of *The New York Times* sums up one of his strengths: "If cops and kidnapppers and girl singers and music industry execs don't talk the way they do in Ed McBain novels, they should."

**The Latest:** *Hark!* (2004) [54th in the series]



## Hamelin, TN (Appalachia):

**Ballad Series** by Sharyn McCrumb.

Eight books: *If Ever I Return*, *Pretty Peggy-O* (1990) to *St. Dale* (Feb 2005).

## Miami, FL: Hoke Moseley

by Charles Willeford. Four books:

*Miami Blues* (1984) to *The Way We Die Now* (1988).

## Southern Louisiana: Dave Robicheaux

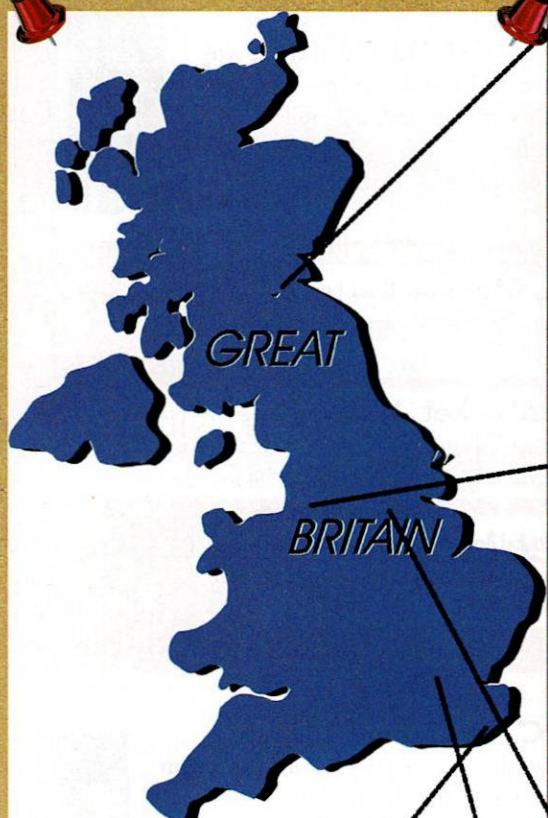
by James Lee Burke. Thirteen books: *The Neon Rain* (1987) to *Last Car to Elysian Fields* (2003).

## Houston, TX: Stuart Haydon by

David Lindsey. Five books: *A Cold Mind* (1983) to *Body of Truth* (1992).



# Police Procedurals



## ★ Chief Inspector Wexford

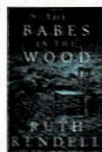
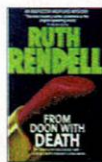
**Location:** The fictional Sussex village of Kingsmarkham.

**The Author:** Ruth Rendell, whose works could be categorized under contemporary British mysteries, police procedurals, and psychological whydunits. She is the recipient of three Edgars and four Gold Daggers from Great Britain's Crime Writer's Association. She also writes non-series mysteries (*Live Flesh*, *The Crocodile Bird*, and most recently *The Rottweiler*).

**Series Beginning:** *From Doon with Death* (1964)

**About the Series:** A long-lived procedural starring Chief Inspector Wexford, solving the horrible crimes that lie beneath the picture-postcard façade of the English countryside.

**The Latest:** *The Babes in the Wood* (2002) [19th in the series]



## ★ Inspector Rebus

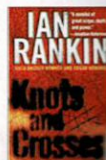
**Location:** Edinburgh, Scotland

**Author:** Ian Rankin

**Series Beginning:** *Knots and Crosses* (1987)

**About the Series:** Rebus is a loner who drinks too much, likes a certain type of music, and has trouble with authority figures. But he does rise above the clichés, and Rankin's tales of the mean streets of Edinburgh are more than a cut above. *Resurrection Men* won the Edgar Award for Best Novel of 2003.

**The Latest:** *Fleshmarket Alley* (Feb 2005) [15th in the series]



## ★ Tony Hill/Carol Jordan

**Location:** Manchester, England

**Author:** Val McDermid grew up in a Scottish mining town and attended Oxford University. She is also the author of the *Lindsay Gordon* (a "lesbian-feminist journalist") series and the *Kate Branigan* PI series. Her 2003 standalone thriller, *The Distant Echo*, was a Bookmarks Selection (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2004).

**Series Beginning:** *The Mermaids Singing* (1995)

**About the Series:** Detective Inspector Carol Jordan works with Tony Hill, a Home Office forensic psychologist in the darkest of McDermid's series.

**The Latest:** *The Torment of Others* (2004) [4th in the series]



## ★ Inspector Alan Banks

**Location:** Yorkshire, England

**Author:** Peter Robinson grew up in Yorkshire, England and now lives in Toronto, Canada.

**Series Beginning:** *Gallows View* (1987)

**About the Series:** Detective Chief Inspector Alan Banks thought he left the violence of London behind for the bucolic countryside of Yorkshire, but soon discovered that murder and violence happen everywhere. "The Alan Banks mystery-suspense novels are, simply put, the best series now on the market. In fact, this may be the best series of British novels since the [seafaring] novels of Patrick O'Brian.

Try one and tell me I'm wrong." STEPHEN KING

**The Latest:** *Playing with Fire* (2004) [14th in the series]



## ★ Inspector Adam Dalgliesh

**Location:** Scotland Yard

**Author:** P. D. James, like Ruth Rendell, was awarded the title Baroness and is a member of the House of Lords. Her long career in the British Civil Service informs her depictions of office politics and bureaucracies' follies. James is warmer and wordier than Rendell and far less prolific, but shares Rendell's interest in the why. Perhaps her finest book is the non-series novel *Innocent Blood*.

**Series Beginning:** *Cover Her Face* (1962)

**About the Series:** The suave, poetic Inspector Adam Dalgliesh solves crimes in the services of Scotland Yard ... and often while on holiday.

**The Latest:** *Death in Holy Orders* (2001) [11th in the series]

