



The Best American Mystery Stories 2018

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#1 *New York Times* best-selling author of the Chief Inspector Armand Gamache novels, Louise Penny brings her “nerve and skill—as well as heart” (Maureen Corrigan, *Washington Post*) to selecting the best short mystery and crime fiction of the year.

Writing short stories takes “Skill. Discipline. Knowledge of the form while not being formulaic,” contends Louise Penny in her introduction. “In a short story there is nowhere to hide. Each must be original, fresh, inspired.” Originality is just what’s in store for readers of the twenty clever, creative selections in *The Best American Mystery Stories 2018*. There’s no hiding from a Nigerian confidence game, a drug made of dinosaur bones, a bombing at an oil company, a reluctant gunfighter in the Old West, and the many other scams, dangers, and thrills lurking in its suspenseful pages.

The Best American Mystery Stories 2018 includes T. C. Boyle, James Lee Burke, Lee Child, Michael Connelly, Charlaine Harris, Andrew Klavan, Martin Limón, Joyce Carol Oates, and others.

The Best American Mystery Stories 2018 Details

Date : Published October 2nd 2018 by Mariner Books

ISBN : 9780544949096

Author : Louise Penny (Editor)

Format : Paperback 432 pages

Genre : Mystery, Short Stories, Fiction, Anthologies

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Download and Read Free Online The Best American Mystery Stories 2018 Louise Penny (Editor)

From Reader Review The Best American Mystery Stories 2018 for online ebook

In says

Of course there are some I favor over others, but I really enjoyed the writing.

Ruben Castaneda says

As always, this is an amazing set of stories. Almost all are great, a handful are merely very good, and all are worth reading.

Ryan Garton says

Review will likely contain SPOILERS because I'm not a professional literary critic, and dancing around key points in the story feels more trouble than it's worth. This review may serve as a memory jog for me years later when I've totally forgotten what I've read. Also probably won't contain spoilers because who gets off on spoiling mysteries of all things?

I never read short (and rarely read long) mystery stories, so I had no idea what to expect. I have read other books in the Best American series; always mixed results, as to be expected.

QUICK THOUGHTS (in order of appearance):

Banana Triangle Six A nice, tight little story that felt a wee bit Black Mirror-ish. It's been a few weeks since I read this one, but it reminded me a little of Shirley Jackson.

Y Is for Yangchuan Lizard I kinda want to try just a small snort of that Y. And then maybe just another one. . .

The Designee Broke my heart. I love the observation about the boredom that accompanies a death-bed vigil. What an unspoken and complicated little emotion that is.

Smoked This one was pretty fun, and it made me very hungry for barbecue.

Wild Side of Life ~~Stray observation omitted because I have forgotten what it's about.~~

Too Much Time Despite not being intimately familiar with Reacher, I fell right into it. The right amount of grab and a slick, confident hero.

The Third Panel I see you, HB.

Gun Work A Wild West Detective Noir? The genre I never knew I was missing from my life.

Cabin Fever The premise had me so excited after the first few bits, but slowly and steadily I felt like I was

reading from further and further away, until I disappeared into the great who-cares-ness.

Small Signs Had some really fun Kill Bill moments and I still have no idea who I am rooting for.

Takeout Gussed the ending, which made me feel smart. So I suppose there's that?

Death in the Serengeti More action than mystery and I would have liked an even more cathartic comeuppance.

All Our Yesterdays Loved it. Put the pieces together as it unfolded, but in that totally satisfying 500-piece jigsaw kinda way. Liking these mystery stories that blend genres.

PX Christmas Made it about halfway until I abandoned. No explanation as to why.

Windward Appreciated the landmarks as a 20 year LA resident. Really want to visit that bunker/office just for a tour. Committed to working "petrichor" into my vocabulary.

Phantomwise: 1972 Among my favorites as well as the longest. I really felt for the heroine of this story and begrudgingly accept the injustice of the resolution. VERY begrudgingly.

Rule Number One Ahead of the game on this one too, but that didn't make it any less fun. Quick.

The Apex Predator Nice touch, starting it with the blurb from the Houston Chronicle.

Waiting on Joe I really do think this is my favorite one. The slow reveals were clever. I absolutely could have done without the image of the kittens that Joe used to get. That's some really awful imagery. But all in I was totally along for the ride.

Breadfruit Well at least I now know that breadfruit is a thing that exists and I have the Google search to prove it.

Did you find this review helpful? I highly doubt it. Why did I write it? I'm not entirely sure. I've always just starred books and somehow got a bee in my bonnet about writing reviews this year. There it is.

Elaine says

As always, a very mixed bag.

My usual gripes stand for these compilations, especially *The Best American Mystery Stories 2018*:

1. Most of these stories aren't mysterious
2. *Two female writers?* That's the best the *female* editor can do?

Since most of these stories don't fall under the *mystery* category, I'm sure there are plenty of female writers that qualify for this compilation.

3. I skimmed most of the stories since the majority of the themes did not interest me; case in point, I hate Westerns.

I did like *Waiting on Joe* and *The Apex Predator*.

Sara says

I expected better stories----some were very good, some very bad and the rest in between.

Jock says

I haven't had much luck with short story collections and was worried when I started this one. The first story was easily the poorest of the entire lot - hardly even a mystery. But things improved. Almost every ensuing tale quickly caught my interest and proved worth the read. There are one or two marginal pieces but, overall, this collection was an enjoyable ride.

Victoria says

What an entertaining collection this is! The stories cover a wide range of mystery/crime/suspense writing, with a fair bit of edge. Edited by Louise Penny from a collection assembled under the direction of Otto Penzler, the twenty stories, all published in the past year, first appeared in US crime magazines, in literary magazines, in themed anthologies, and in single-author collections by T.C. Boyle, Lee Child, Scott Loring Sanders).

Says editor Penny, "A great short story is like a great poem. Crystalline in clarity. Each word with purpose. Lean, muscular, graceful. Nothing wasted. A brilliant marriage of intellect, rational thought, and creativity." This edition underscores her point on every page.

Though most of the stories run to about twenty pages, Lee Child, with "Too Much Time," doubles that length. He meticulously describes how the redoubtable Jack Reacher digs himself in deeper and deeper with Maine police while all the time working on an unexpected (by this reader) solution to his precarious situation. Joyce Carol Oates also provides a near-novella with "Phantomwise: 1972," about a naïve college coed who makes consistently bad choices and the men who exploit them.

Most of the stories take place in the good old US of A, from the sketchy surrounds of Paul Marks's Venice Beach ("Windward") to James Lee Burke's Cajun country ("The Wild Side of Life"), though a few are set in more exotic climes: Africa in David H. Hendrickson's Derringer-winning "Death in the Serengeti," the tropical and fictional island of St. Pierre ("Breadfruit" by Brian Silverman), and the Republic of Korea ("PX Christmas" by Martin Limón).

The selected authors found clever and creative ways to deploy the staple characters of crime fiction—unfaithful wives ("Waiting on Joe" by Scott Loring Sanders), assassins ("Takeout" by Rob Hart) and serial killers ("All Our Yesterdays" by Andrew Klavan). They deal with classic crime situations too: trying to escape a difficult past ("Smoked" by Michael Bracken and "Gun Work" by John M. Floyd) or the long tail of a super-secret job ("Small Signs" by Charlaine Harris); prison breaks ("Cabin Fever" by David Edgerley Gates), and the double or is it triple? cross ("Y is for Yangchuan Lizard" by Andrew Bourelle and "Rule Number One" by Alan Orloff).

A couple of the scams were so deftly described that you may find yourself grinning with the vigilante surprise of Michael Connelly's "The Third Panel" and the flim-flamming of an elderly man in TC Boyle's

“The Designee,” in which you must decide how complicit the elderly “victim” is. It’s the best story of his I’ve ever read. There’s also a thought-provoking twist in “Banana Triangle Six” by Louis Bayard. This talented collection of authors fills their stories with great lines, though one of my favorites comes from “The Apex Predator,” by William Dylan Powell, wherein the main character claims he learned in Uncle Sam’s navy the “most useful tactical skill ever developed by humankind—and it’s not swimming or fighting or tying knots. It’s the art of bullshitting someone so you don’t get in trouble.”

If you’ve been glancing over the author names looking for (and finding) many that are familiar, you may also have noticed the near-absence of women authors. Joyce Carol Oates who has more than a hundred published books is not a surprise in this list, nor is Charlaine Harris, who’s been publishing mystery fiction since 1981. It’s a real mystery why no other accomplished, newer authors appear here. Women are somewhat more prominent in the list of “Other Distinguished Mystery Stories of 2017” at the back of the volume, where nearly a third are women (10 of 31).

Which publications brought these stories to light in the first place (and where you might find next year’s winner’s now)? Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine published four of the stories, Mystery Tribune (two), and Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, Fiction River, and Switchblade, one apiece. Also Level Best Books’ anthologies (Noir at the Salad Bar and Snowbound) produced a pair of them.

Cary Griffith says

I enjoy mysteries and I enjoy short stories, so this volume attracted me on a couple fronts. I also appreciate someone (in this case, Louise Penny and Otto Penzler, series editor) taking the time to cull the literature and decide which short mysteries are worth inclusion in their fine volume.

Generally, I enjoyed all of these stories, some more than others. I’d have to say T.C. Boyle and Joyce Carol Oates are big hitters with whom I’m familiar. Frankly, I liked Joyce’s story more than T.C.’s, however the writing and pacing in both were superb. In fact, for me, the final five stories were all pretty good. Some of the others – e.g., Death in the Serengetti – were interesting and well-constructed, but I didn’t find the language first rate.

The only reason I’m giving this four stars is because anthologies are tough to rate higher, given the unevenness of the pieces.

Greg says

Louise Penny, this year’s editor, has done a wonderful job in selecting the stories that appear in this 400-page volume! A few are stories that involve characters in places outside the United States, too, so there is an international flavor to this volume.

There were only a couple of the 20 individual stories that I really did not care for much; the others I would rank from “very good” to “superb.”

If you like mysteries, and enjoy the short-story format, I highly recommend this volume to you!

Steven Belanger says

Very good anthology of mystery stories published recently, in magazines big and small, mostly from Alfred Hitchcock and Ellery Queen, that remind me of the high level of competition I have out there when I send my own stuff out. A few are excellent. The best are "Banana Triangle Six," the first one, though it may be too sad for some, including me. My other preferred favorite is the second one, "Y is for Yangchuan Lizard," a quick slice of tone-perfect noir, my preferred mystery sub-genre. (The antho's line-up is alphabetical by author last name, so the fact that the first two are my favorites is a coincidence. The editor didn't necessarily pile it on top.) A few other stories are very good, including "Waiting on Joe," which is pitch-perfect and very smooth. Others are okay. A couple made me wonder why, and gave me hope. None are bad. The one by Joyce Carol Oates--there has to be one--is very well-written, but again a disappointment to me. I don't know what I expect from her, but I usually like her stories and yet are disappointed in them at the same time, like how I got a B+ in a high school English class one quarter, yet the teacher's third comment was "Capable of Doing Better." High praise or a back-handed compliment? You decide.

I recommend the reader also seek out past years' anthologies of the Best of..., of this and of your own preferred genre. There's lots of "Best of"s and "The Year's Best..." and tons of others. They sell well, there's never a bad story (though of course you'll prefer some more than others), they get the short story authors (besides Oates, not a rich one amongst them) a little more coin, and they're good adverts (as Tracey Ullman says) for the small magazines they sometimes appear in. Feel free to look at these small magazines, online and physical, as well. Worth your time, and it gets you the hell away from all the negative political crap out there right now. I suggest hand-held magazines over online ones, but that's just me being hardcore old-fashioned, and I admit that the online ones often pay the writer more moolah. But, still...

Steve says

This is the 2018 edition of *The Best American Mystery Stories*, the twenty-second volume in the series. All mystery and crime stories published in the United States and Canada in print or online during the calendar year are eligible for inclusion. Otto Penzler, the series editor, chooses what he feels are the fifty best of these stories from that year. Then each year a writer of some renown in the mystery field serves as "guest editor," winnowing those fifty to the twenty that are included in the book. The other thirty stories that Penzler had chosen appear on a list at the back of the book, titled as "Other Distinguished Mystery Stories" of that year. (In the previous volume, only twenty-nine were listed; this year there are thirty-one. I have no idea why.)

This year the guest editor is Louise Penny, of whom Penzler writes: "She has been a bestseller for a decade and has won or been nominated for every major award in the mystery world, often many times."

Four of the stories included in this volume are from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, two are from *Mystery Tribune*, one is from *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, and the rest are from various original anthologies and collections or from other periodicals.

Some of the stories in the 2018 anthology seem rather routine for a "best of the year" collection. At least one story appears to me quite poor. There were other mystery stories published in 2017 that I think were superior to anything in this book.

There are three stories that are parts of series, "Small Signs" by Charlaine Harris (Anne DeWitt, currently a high school principal, formerly the head of a school for undercover agents), "PX Christmas" by Martin Limón (George Sueño and Ernie Bascom, US Army Criminal Investigation Division in Seoul), and "Breadfruit" by Brian Silverman (Len Buonfiglio, bar owner on the Caribbean island of St. Pierre). "Small

"Signs" is the most cynical and nastiest story in that series.

There are two extremely downbeat stories about aging affecting mental acuity, "Banana Triangle Six" by Louis Bayard and "The Designee" by T. C. Boyle. "The Designee" has another distinction as well; it is one of only two tales in the book in which there is neither violence nor the threat of violence, the other being "The Apex Predator" by William Dylan Powell.

James Lee Burke will probably never write a story without violence, but whatever he writes about, his prose is so fine that anything he writes is worth reading. The first paragraph of his story "The Wild Side of Life" begins:

The club where the oil-field people hung out was called the Hungry Gator. It stood on pilings by a long green humped levee in the Atchafalaya Basin, a gigantic stretch of bayous and quicksand and brackish bays and flooded cypress and tupelos that looked like a forgotten piece of Creation before fish worked their way up on the land and formed feet. There were no clocks inside the Gator; no last names, sometimes not even first ones, just initials. By choice most of us lived on the rim. Of everything.

Most of the other stories here are at least competent if not outstanding. Others I particularly like include "Banana Triangle Six" by Louis Bayard, "Gun Work" by John M. Floyd (a Western!), and "Rule Number One" by Alan Orloff. The introductions by Penzler and Penny do not add much to the mix.

Patricia Baker says

chose this book to read on a recent vacation. some of the stories were just wonderful..really liked "smoked" by Michael Bracken..well written and surprise ending..had my interest throughout the story. makes you think of whom else is hiding in America. "Banana Triangle Six" should appeal to those elders in care centers. what a novel twist on picking who should vacant their apartment and the world. Lee Child's "Too Much Time" is very typical writing for him..I love his character Jack Reacher and probably will read all of these stories that he writes. this story was like a mini novel. Have been to Lancaster, Ca so the setting and characters in "The Third Panel" by Michael Connelly was very identifiedly. surprise ending with the misidentification of the FBI helicopter and its occupants. sounds like it would have happened in that desert town. overall good collection of stories..

Lisa says

I gasped out loud while reading so many of these. So well-written with twists and turns.

My favorite was "Waiting on Joe." A shout-out to "Phantonwise: 1972" as well. 5/5 stars.

Sylvia Johnson says

Quite a few of the stories could have been classified as science fiction and not my idea of mysteries. The definition here was it has to have a crime.

Joseph says

Only two stories in here that are worth seeking out, by Michael Bracken and Alan Orloff.
