



This image is my having turned the The Oberlausitzische Library of Science, in Görlitz, Germany into an infinity of books.

Mystery Series Books I've Enjoyed

by Bruce Philpott — updated January 26, 2021

My taste in reading is pretty eclectic. I enjoy a lot of best-sellers and non-fiction as well, but I've found my favorite genre is the mystery novel series.

Of course, I've enjoyed Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Ngiao Marsh, and P.D. James. I'm not a fan of books about tracking down a serial killer. I enjoy mysteries for the puzzles they present. I'm not looking for an adrenaline rush. I don't care for the silliness of "cozy mysteries," or those which rely on the occult. I don't like gratuitous violence, pain, gore (nor the "thrillers" which threaten such), explosions or even guns. That's probably why so many of my favorite mystery novel series are British. I also like having a peek at at the similarities and differences of the cultures of the US, parts of Britain and (as you'll see) Venice.

When the hero of a book is the best in the world at everything, hired only by heads of state or the most wealthy people in history, flies in the fastest plane, has the ultimate weapons... well you get my drift... I'm not a fan of those books.

In a series of novels, an author has a greater opportunity to develop each of the regular characters over time. Therefore, I suggest you try to read each series in its own order.

I offer you this list of my favorite mystery novel series— 400 novels by two dozen authors. I've just copied and pasted these lists for you without bothering to match the text formats of the lists. I've sampled many other series of mysteries and felt they did not merit being put on this list of excellent books.

Elizabeth George - Inspector Lynley Mysteries

British crime investigation series based around aristocratic, Oxford-educated Detective Inspector Thomas Lynley and his misfit, working-class

assistant Sergeant Barbara Havers. Thanks, Beth, for introducing me to these.

1988: A Great Deliverance

1989: Payment in Blood

1990: Well-Schooled in Murder

1991: A Suitable Vengeance

1992: For the Sake of Elena

1992: Missing Joseph

1993: Playing for the Ashes

1996: In the Presence of the Enemy

1997: Deception on His Mind

1999: In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner

2001: A Traitor to Memory

2003: A Place of Hiding

2005: With No One as Witness

2006: What Came Before He Shot Her

2008: Careless in Red

2010: This Body of Death

2012: Believing The Lie

2013: Just One Evil Act

2014: A Banquet of Consequences

2018: The Punishment She Deserves

Ann Cleeves - Vera Stanhope Novels

These novels, except for The Glass Room, have been dramatized in the television series Vera on ITV, which stars Brenda Blethyn in the title role.

The program premiered in May 2011. They take place in and around Tynemouth, in the north of England.

The Crow Trap (1999)

Telling Tales (2005)

Hidden Depths (2007)

Silent Voices (2011)

The Glass Room (2012)

Harbour Street (2014)

The Moth Catcher (2015)

The Seagull (2017)

Frozen (2020)

The Darkest Evening (2020)

Ann Cleeves - Shetland Island Series

More from the author above: In 2013, Red Bones was dramatised by David Kane for BBC television as the first episode of the series Shetland, which stars Douglas Henshall as Detective Inspector

Jimmy Perez. Episodes broadcast in 2014 were based on Raven Black, Dead Water, and Blue Lightning.

Raven Black (2006); Gold Dagger Award

White Nights (2008)

Red Bones (2009)

Blue Lightning (2010)

Dead Water (2013)

Thin Air (2014)

Too Good To Be True (2016, novella)

Cold Earth (2016)

Ann Cleeves - Two Rivers Series

More from the author above: In North Devon, where two rivers converge and run into the sea,

Detective Matthew Venn is in this new book by Ann Cleeves.

The Long Call (2019)

Donna Leon - Commissario Guido Brunetti Mysteries

Another absolutely delightful series! These are set in Venice, Italy. The protagonist is a moral cop in

Death at La Fenice
Death in a Strange Country
Dressed for Death
Death and Judgement
Acqua Alta
Quietly in Their Sleep
A noble Radiance
Fatal Remedies
Friends in High Places
A Sea of Troubles
Wilful Behaviour
Uniform Justice
Doctored Evidence
Blood from a Stone
Through a Glass, Darkly

a corrupt society. Lots of character development and depth in these.

Suffer the Little Children
The Girl of His Dreams
About Face
A Question of Belief
Drawing Conclusions
Beastly Things
The Golden Egg
By Its Cover
Falling in Love
The Waters of Eternal Youth
Earthly Remains
The Temptation of Forgiveness
Unto Us a Son Is Given
Trace Elements

Michael Connelly - Harry Bosch Novels

Connelly presents fully developed, interesting characters who grow with each novel and his plots continue to entertain. His Harry Bosch (with Renee Ballard) novels sometimes overlap with his (the character's half-brother) Mickey Haller novels.

The Black Echo (1992)
The Black Ice (1993)
The Concrete Blonde (1994)
The Last Coyote (1995)
Trunk Music (1997)
Angels Flight (1999)
A Darkness More Than Night (2001)
City Of Bones (2002)
Lost Light (2003)
The Narrows (2004)
The Closers (2005)
Echo Park (2006)
The Overlook (2007)

More recently, Connelly has introduced reporter Jack McEvoy and Rachel Walling. The characters overlap in the books. While many series seem to become formulaic over time, Connelly continues to improve.

The Brass Verdict (2008)
Nine Dragons (2009)
The Reversal (2010)
The Fifth Witness (2011)
The Drop (2011)
The Black Box (2012)
The Burning Room (2014)
The Wrong Side Of Goodbye (2016)
Two Kinds of Truth (2017)
Dark Sacred Night (2018)
The Night Fire (2019)
The Law of Innocence (2020)

Michael Connelly - Mickey Haller Novels

The Lincoln Lawyer (2005)
The Brass Verdict (2008)
Nine Dragons (2009)
The Reversal (2010)

The Fifth Witness (2011)
The Gods of Guilt (2013)
The Crossing (2015)

Charles Finch - Charles Lenox Mysteries

Charles Finch writes believable books rich with detail, interesting historical tidbits and some surprising twists. Charles Lenox, our main character, is a high-born amateur detective in

Victorian England. (Books below are sequential order, even though they were written out of sequence.)

The Woman in the Water (2018)
The Vanishing Man (2019)
The Last Passenger (2020)
A Beautiful Blue Death (2007)
The September Society (2008)
The Fleet Street Murders (2009)
A Stranger in Mayfair (2010)
A Burial at Sea (2011)

An East End Murder (2011)
A Death in the Small Hours (2012)
An Old Betrayal (2013)
The Laws of Murder (2014)
Home by Nightfall (2015)
The Inheritance (2016)
Gone Before Christmas (2017)
An Extravagant Death (2021)

Tana French - Dublin Murder Squad series

The New Yorker Magazine said, "The Dublin Murder Squad books are a mystery series in name only; in multiple respects, the series transgresses the well-established conventions of the genre, the first of which is a reliable continuity in tone and dramatis personae." These each have a different

protagonist. Some of the characters overlap and may relate to one another, but it's not your average series with a hero, a sidekick, etc. The books are fascinating looks at society, motivations, and philosophies.

In the Woods, 2007
The Likeness, 2008
Faithful Place, 2010
Broken Harbour, 2012

The Secret Place, 2014
The Trespasser, 2016
The Witch Elm, 2019

Jane Harper - Australian mysteries

These few novels (so far) aren't a cohesive series as the others on this page, but I had to include them

The Dry - 2016

Force of Nature - 2017

because they're riveting and exceptionally well written.

The Lost Man - 2018

The Survivors - 2020

Elly Griffiths - Ruth Galloway series

Author Domenica de Rosa wrote under her own name until (in her words) she turned to crime. Her character, forensic archaeologist Dr. Ruth Galloway, is in her late thirties. She lives happily alone with her two cats in a bleak, remote area

The Crossing Places

The Janus Stone

The House at Sea's End

A Room Full of Bones

Ruth's First Christmas Tree

Dying Fall

The Outcast Dead

near Norfolk, UK, when she is called by Detective Chief Inspector Nelson to help in an investigation. I don't want to spoil the series too much, but she is a single mom for most of this series.

The Ghost Fields

The Woman in Blue

The Chalk Pit

The Dark Angel

The Stone Circle

The Lantern Men

The Night Hawk

Colin Dexter - Inspector Morse Novels

These thirteen novels inspired the 33 ITV episodes of Inspector Morse. These are wonderful puzzles. Morse is not a likeable guy. He's an arrogant alcoholic who can't get romantic relationships to work and usually treats his sidekick, Lewis, and

Last Bus to Woodstock (1975)

Last Seen Wearing (1976)

The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn (1977)

Service of All the Dead (1979)

The Dead of Jericho (1981)

The Riddle of the Third Mile (1983)

The Secret of Annexe 3 (1986)

everyone else with little respect. Even though he gets it entirely backwards a few times, Morse eventually solves murders which would remain unsolved forever.

The Wench is Dead (1989)

The Jewel That Was Ours (1991)

The Way Through the Woods (1992)

The Daughters of Cain (1994)

Death Is Now My Neighbour (1996)

The Remorseful Day (1999)

Louise Penny - Chief Inspector Armand Gamache Mysteries

Our friend Sally Baker introduced me to this series. It's set around the life of Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of Sûreté du Québec, the provincial police force for Quebec. Books in the series have been nominated and received numerous awards. The first book in the series, *Still Life*, was released in 2006 and won the New Blood Dagger award,

Still Life
A Fatal Grace/Dead Cold (same book, different title)
The Cruellest Month
A Rule Against Murder/The Murder Stone (same book, different title),
The Brutal Telling
Bury Your Dead
A Trick of the Light

Arthur Ellis Award, the Dilys Award, 2007 Anthony Award, and the Barry Award. All subsequent novels in the series have won major crime-writing awards in three countries. Many have also made the New York Times Best-Seller List, debuting as high as #1.

The Beautiful Mystery
How the Light Gets In
The Long Way Home
The Nature of the Beast
A Great Reckoning
Glass Houses
Kingdom of the Blind
A Better Man

Tony Hillerman - Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee Mysteries

I read these wonderful mysteries years ago, and our book group has enjoyed them, too. Hillerman's writing is noted for the cultural details he provides about modern-era Native American culture.

The Blessing Way (1970)
Dance Hall of the Dead (1973)
Listening Woman (1978)
People of Darkness (1980)
The Dark Wind (1982)
The Ghostway (1984)
Skinwalkers (1986)
A Thief of Time (1988)
Talking God (1989)

The novels are set in the Four Corners area of New Mexico and Arizona, sometimes reaching into Colorado and Utah, with occasional forays to big cities.

Coyote Waits (1990)
Sacred Clowns (1993)
The Fallen Man (1996)
The First Eagle (1998)
Hunting Badger (1999)
The Wailing Wind (2002)
The Sinister Pig (2003)
Skeleton Man (2004)
The Shape Shifter (2006)

Charles Todd - Inspector Rutledge Mysteries

This series is (as the others) wonderfully written, but it has a couple of quirks which set it apart. It takes place around 1920, so there's very little modern convenience/technology, and our hero suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome ("shell

shock"). This manifests itself in the ever-present "ghost" of Hamish MacLeod (an hallucination unseen by others), a young Scots soldier Rutledge was forced to execute on the battlefield for refusing an order.

A Test of Wills (1996)

Wings of Fire (1998)

Search the Dark (1999)

Legacy of the Dead (2000)

Watchers of Time (2001)

A Fearsome Doubt (2002)

A Cold Treachery (2005)

A Long Shadow (2006)

A False Mirror (2007)

A Pale Horse (2008)

A Matter of Justice (2009)

The Red Door (2010)

The Kidnapping (2010)

A Lonely Death (2011)

The Confession (2011)

Proof of Guilt (2013)

Cold Comfort (2013)

Hunting Shadows (2014)

A Fine Summer's Day (2015)

No Shred of Evidence (2016)

Racing the Devil (2017)

The Piper (2017)

The Gatekeeper (2018)

The Black Ascot (2019)

A Divided Loyalty (2020)

Scott Turow legal novels

Turow's aren't murder mysteries, but beautifully written legal procedurals. The characters and legal maneuvering are all fascinating.

Presumed Innocent (1987)

The Burden of Proof (1990)

Pleading Guilty (1993)

The Laws of Our Fathers (1996)

Personal Injuries (1999)

Reversible Errors (2002)

Limitations (2006)

Innocent (2010)

Identical (2013)

Testimony (2017)

The Last Trial (2020)

Ian Rankin - Inspector Rebus Books

This series of police procedurals takes place over a couple of decades in Scotland. In addition to fine mysteries, we get to meet marvelous characters (all of them flawed - even the villains aren't all bad), and watch many of them evolve over time.

Knots and Crosses (1987)
Hide and Seek (1991)
Tooth and Nail (1992)
Strip Jack (1992)
The Black Book (1993)
Mortal Causes (1994)
Let It Bleed (1995)
Black and Blue (1997)
The Hanging Garden (1998)
Dead Souls (1999)
Set in Darkness (2000)
The Falls (2001)
Resurrection Man (2002)
A Question of Blood (2003)
Fleshmarket Alley (2004)
The Naming of the Dead (2006)

In the period covered, technology changes, too, of course. In the early novels, they're dependent upon pay phones and borrowing the use of phones in pubs and other businesses.

Exit Music (2007)
Standing in Another Man's Grave (2012)
Saints of the Shadow Bible (2014)
Even Dogs in the Wild (2016)
Rather Be The Devil (2017)
In A House of Lies (2018)

Other novels by Ian Rankin

Witch Hunt (1993)
Bleeding Hearts (1994)
Blood Hunt (1995)
The Complaints (2009)
The Impossible Dead (2011)
The Flood (1986)
Watchman (1988)
Westwind (1990)
Doors Open (2008)

Peter Robinson - Inspector Banks series

A well-developed cast of characters and original, interesting plots. These are centered in Yorkshire,

Gallows View (1987)
A Dedicated Man (1988)
A Necessary End (1989)
The Hanging Valley (1989)
Past Reason Hated (1991)
Wednesday's Child (1992)
Dry Bones that Dream (1994) (published in the USA as Final Account)
Innocent Graves (1996)
Dead Right (1997) (published in the USA as Blood at the Root)
In a Dry Season (1999)
Cold is the Grave (2000)
Aftermath (2001)

England - just south of where the Vera Stanhope novels (above) take place.

The Summer that Never Was (2003)
(published in the USA as Close to Home)
Playing with Fire (2004)
Strange Affair (2005)
Piece of My Heart (2006)
Friend of the Devil (2007)
All the Colours of Darkness (2008)
Bad Boy (2010)
Watching the Dark (2012)
Children of the Revolution (2013)
Abattoir Blues (2014) (published in the USA as In the Dark Places)
When the Music's Over (2016)
Sleeping in the Ground (2017)

“Ellis Peters” (Edith Pargeter) - The Cadfael Chronicles

I told our friend Sunshine that I was enjoying the series above, and she told me about this series. Brother Cadfael has taken Holy orders only after having experienced life as a soldier in the Crusades. He’s an herbalist skilled in observing

human nature. It’s interesting to have the mysteries set in the 12th century when no one knew about finger prints, DNA, etc, and no one had telephones.

1. A Morbid Taste for Bones (set in 1137)
2. One Corpse Too Many (set in 1138)
3. Monk’s Hood (set in 1138)
4. Saint Peter’s Fair (set in July 1139)
5. The Leper of Saint Giles (set in 1139)
6. The Virgin in the Ice (set in 1139)
7. The Sanctuary Sparrow (set in 1140)
8. The Devil’s Novice (set in 1140)
9. Dead Man’s Ransom (set in 1141)
10. The Pilgrim of Hate (set in 1141)
11. An Excellent Mystery (set in 1141)
12. The Raven in the Foregate (set in 1141)
13. The Rose Rent (set in 1142)
14. The Hermit of Eyton Forest (set in 1142)
15. The Confession of Brother Haluin (set in 1142)
16. The Heretic’s Apprentice (in 1143)
17. The Potter’s Field (set in 1143)
18. The Summer of the Danes (set in 1144)
19. The Holy Thief (set in 1144)
20. Brother Cadfael’s Penance (set in 1145)

Julia Spencer-Fleming - The Rev. Clare Fergusson/Russ Van Alstyne series

Spencer-Fleming has won the Agatha Award, Anthony Award, Macavity Awards, Dilys Award, Barry Award (for crime novels), the Nero Award, and Gumshoe Awards. She has also been a finalist for the Edgar Award. Her books feature

Clare Fergusson, a retired helicopter pilot turned Episcopal priest and Russ Van Alstyne, a police chief. They are set in Millers Kill, a fictional town in upstate New York.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| In the Bleak Midwinter (2002) | I Shall Not Want (2008) |
| A Fountain Filled With Blood (2003) | One Was A Soldier (2011) |
| Out of the Deep I Cry (2004) | Through the Evil Days (2013) |
| To Darkness and To Death (2005) | Hid from Our Eyes (2020) |
| All Mortal Flesh (2006) | |

Kate Atkinson - Jackson Brodie Mysteries

After I posted a link to this list on Facebook, our friend and former Sebastopol Library Director Sue Struthers suggested this series. (Sue said some

in her book group didn’t care for them. Maybe they’re not mystery fans.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Case Histories (2004) | When Will There Be Good News? (2008) |
| One Good Turn (2006) | Started Early, Took My Dog (2010) |

William Kent Krueger - Cork O'Connor series

Part Irish, part Anishinaabe Indian, Corcoran
"Cork" O'Connor is the former sheriff of Aurora,

IRON LAKE
BOUNDARY WATERS
PURGATORY RIDGE
BLOOD HOLLOW
MERCY FALLS
COPPER RIVER
THUNDER BAY

Minnesota. This is another author our friend Beth
introduced me to. Real page-turners.

RED KNIFE
HEAVEN'S KEEP
VERMILION DRIFT
NORTHWEST ANGLE
TRICKSTER'S POINT
TAMARACK COUNTY
WINDIGO ISLAND

M. C. Beaton – Hamish Macbeth Novels

This series is the closest my taste goes towards
"cozy" mysteries, which are usually not at all to my
liking. (TV series of this author's work are quite
silly.) Let's just say these short books are a bit light,
but still complex enough and well written. Hamish

Death of a Gossip (1985)
Death of a Cad (1987)
Death of an Outsider (1988)
Death of a Perfect Wife (1989)
Death of a Hussy (1990)
Death of a Snob (1992)
Death of a Prankster (1992)
Death of a Glutton (1993)
Death of a Travelling Man (1993)
Death of a Charming Man (1994)
Death of a Nag (1995)
Death of a Macho Man (1996)
Death of a Dentist (1997)
Death of a Scriptwriter (1998)
Death of an Addict (1999)
A Highland Christmas (1999)
Death of a Dustman (2001)
Death of a Celebrity (2002)

Macbeth is a village bobby in the far north of
Scotland and his ambition is to stay that way. His
maverick methods, highland intuition, and ways
with the village folks solve murders, risking his
getting promoted out of his beloved village.

Death of a Village (2003)
Death of a Poison Pen (2004)
Death of a Bore (2005)
Death of a Dreamer (2006)
Death of a Maid (2007)
Death of a Gentle Lady (2008)
Death of a Witch (2009)
Death of a Valentine (2010)
Death of a Chimney Sweep (2011)
Death of a Kingfisher (2012)
Death of Yesterday (2013)
Death of a Policeman (2014)
Death of a Liar (2015)
Knock, Knock, You're Dead (2016)
Death of a Nurse (2016)
Death of a Ghost (2017)
Death of an Honest Man (2018)

Jefferson Bass - Body Farm Novels

Finding myself almost bookless before a weekend library closure, I randomly grabbed one of Jefferson Bass's Body Farm Novels. Turns out the author's nom de plume is a combination of two

Carved in Bone. 2006.
Flesh and Bone. 2007.
The Devil's Bones. 2008.
Bones of Betrayal. 2009.

names. Dr. Bill Bass is a world-renowned forensic anthropologist, and Jon Jefferson is a writer. Together they've put together some pretty off-beat, entertaining mysteries.

The Bone Thief. 2010.
The Bone Yard. 2011.
The Inquisitor's Key. May 2012.
Cut to the Bone. September 2013.

Comedy crime books (*believe it or not!*)

Both of the authors below have given me many chuckles and several guffaws.

Donald E. Westlake - John Dortmunder novels

The Hot Rock. 1970.
Bank Shot. 1972.
Jimmy the Kid. 1974.
Nobody's Perfect. 1977.
Why Me? 1983.
Good Behavior. 1985.
Drowned Hopes. 1990.

Don't Ask. 1993.
What's the Worst That Could Happen? 1996.
Bad News. 2001.
The Road to Ruin. 2004.
Watch Your Back! 2005.
What's So Funny? 2007.
Get Real. 2009.

Lawrence Sanders - Bernie Rhodenbarr novels

Burglars Can't Be Choosers (1977)
The Burglar in the Closet (1978)
The Burglar Who Liked to Quote Kipling (1979)
The Burglar Who Studied Spinoza (1980)
The Burglar Who Painted Like Mondrian (1983)
The Burglar Who Traded Ted Williams (1994)

The Burglar Who Thought He Was Bogart (1995)
The Burglar in the Library (1997)
The Burglar in the Rye (1999)
The Burglar on the Prowl (2004)
The Burglar Who Counted the Spoons (2013)