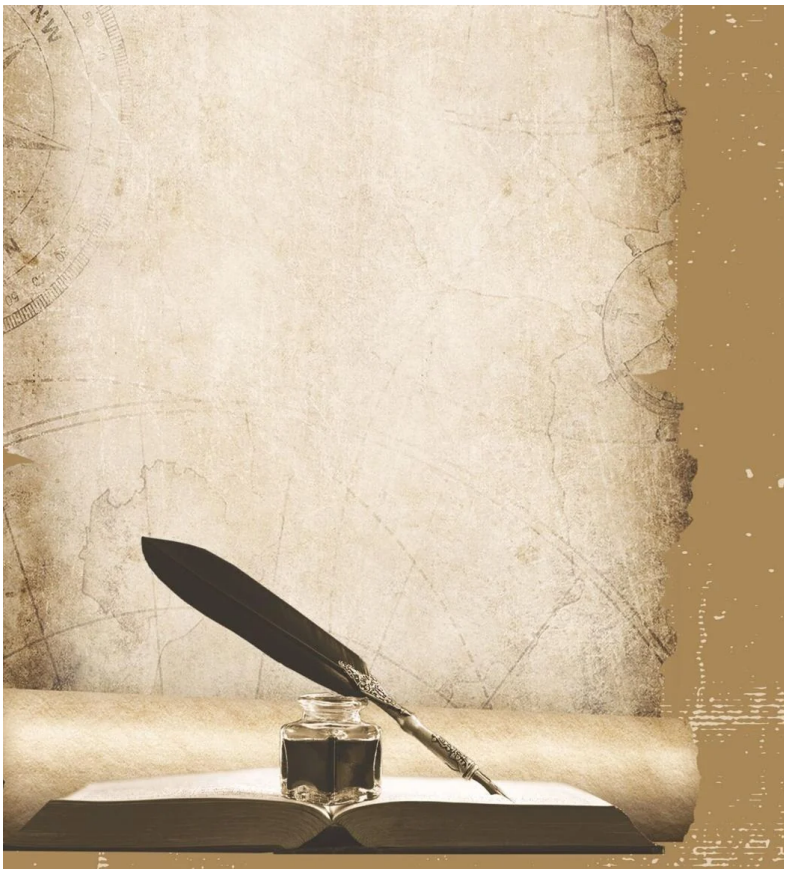
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BOOKS REVIEW

The latest historical fiction books spotligh draft dodgers and Nazi resisters

Patrick deWitt's 'Dodge City,' John Mutter's 'Fortune and Glass,' Kathe Reay's 'The Undercover Bookshop' and Fiona Valpy's 'Sisters of the Midnight Sun' reviewed.

Nov. 10, 2026 Updated at 3:41 p.m.

By Janet Somerville Special to the Star

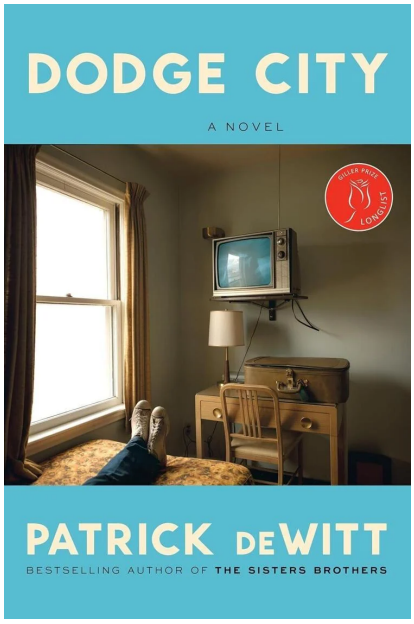
Dodge City

Patrick deWitt

House of Anansi, 240 pages, $29.99

Longlisted for this year's Giller Prize, Patrick deWitt's sixth novel follows Lee Clarke, a recently expelled UCLA student who is therefore no longer qualified for deferment. It's 1967 and he receives his Vietnam War draft notice earlier than expected, stripping him of his agency, a luxury he'd never before considered. "No one is asking you not to be fearful," Lee's laconic draft officer tells him, "but that you master your fear."

When Lee decides to try to evade enlistment, his surfer pal Robin sets him up with a luxury-car delivery



"Dodge City" by Patrick deWitt, House of Anansi, 240 pages, $29.99.

service that requires an available driver with an East Coast destination, and Lee plans a series of goodbyes to his immediate family members who are stretched like rosary beads across the northern U.S.

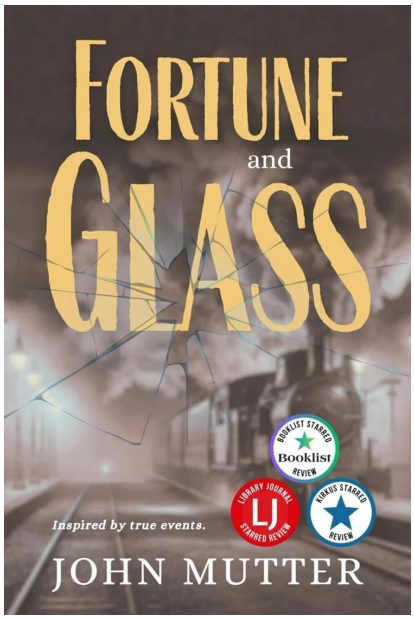
With a stash of amphetamines to keep Lee awake behind the wheel of a Jaguar E-Type sports car, his road trip takes him to his father in Washington state; his mother and her agoraphobic brother in Montana; his own brother Harry, a misanthrope in Minnesota with whom he's long held a grudge; and his twin sister Grace, a nursing student in New York with connections to draft dodgers and conscientious objectors.

The narrative drives to a word-perfect ending with Lee waiting "with no small interest to see how intention stood up against resistless power."

Fortune and Glass

John Mutter

Left Field, 390 pages, $46.95



"Fortune and Glass" by John Mutter, Left Field, 390 pages, $46.95.

Taking its title from the German saying, "Fortune and glass: how easily they break," John Mutter's affecting debut explores the lives touched by Rudi Baumann, a young foreign ministry official in 1930s and '40s Berlin, who remarkably keeps his personal opposition to Hitler a secret.

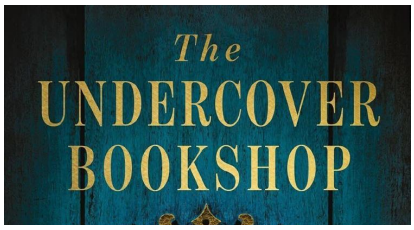
His childhood friend Hans is an unflinching member of the Gestapo and, to complicate their relationship further, both men have been in love with Sara Traum, a fiercely independent and intelligent Jewish woman. As the landscape of their friendship shifts, secrets propel the narrative to its inevitable and satisfying conclusion.

As Rudi risks his life and those he loves to not only provide the Allies with essential Nazi information but also to arrange forged papers allowing Jews to safely escape, his dangerous choices are an apt reminder that it is always the best time to do what is morally right.

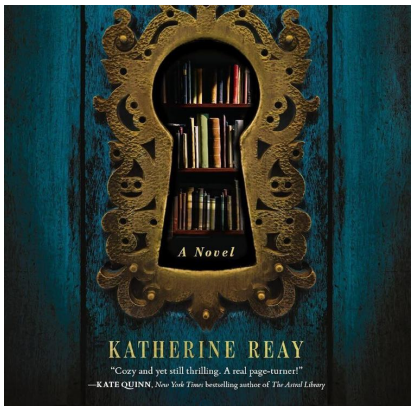
The Undercover Bookshop

Katherine Reay

Harper Muse, 320 pages, $24.99



Twenty-something protagonist Gemma Brown leaves a lonely life in London and takes a job in winter 1950 as a shop assistant in a tiny Oxfordshire village. The U.K. continues to feel the effects of the war, including suspicion of possible collaborators, who may very well live next door.



"The Undercover Bookshop" by Katherine Reay, Harper Muse, 320 pages, $24.99.

Gemma's obsession with such mystery novelists as Agatha Christie, Josephine Tey and Dorothy L. Sayers inspires her to set up a bookshop corner in the general store where she works and leads her to unofficially help the local police constable solve local crimes as she notices overlooked details that "like a kaleidoscope click into place."

Befriending other outsiders, Peggy Albright (a young church secretary whose fiancé died during the war) and Mrs. Len Buerton (a German immigrant married to a blacklisted Communist), Gemma discovers that nobody is who they seem.

Inspired by the life of Russian spy Ursula Kuczynski Beurton, who rose in the ranks to colonel and later became a bestselling novelist writing under the pseudonym Ruth Werner, Katherine Reay vibrantly imagines the complicated circumstances and community affected by her clandestine work.

Sisters of the Midnight Sun

Fiona Valpy

Doubleday Canada, 304 pages, $25

"Sisters of the Midnight Sun" by Fiona Valpy, Doubleday Canada, 304 pages, $25.

This immersive dual narrative that shifts between 2001 Shetland and Second World War Scandinavia and Europe explores the evolving, unlikely friendship between Hanna Williamson, a determined crofter in her eighties who was a wartime wireless operator, and Ruby Reid, a Scottish landscape painter in her twenties hired to be Hanna's companion.

Both women are surviving twins, each grieving her missing half. Ruby's sister Lucy died recently of metastatic breast cancer, while Hanna's sister Liv died of pneumonia 60 years earlier, when the young Norwegian-born members of the resistance were imprisoned for their politically subversive activity first in Ravensbrück and later Auschwitz.

Significant and previously little-known sacrifices made by Norwegian citizens who were arrested as Night and Fog resisters and disappeared by Nazi command are no longer in shadow under Fiona Valpy's assured hand. Her characters demonstrate paradoxical strength in fragility and endure against all odds to expose truths.

Janet Somerville is the author of "Yours, for Probably Always: Martha Gellhorn's Letters of Love & War 1930-1949."

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