

PAPERBACK OF THE WEEK

Police take a back seat to the townsfolk

THE INTERPRETATIONS

David Shaw Mackenzie
Sandstone Press, £8.99

As it's a story about an ambitious sleight of hand in the first place (not a spoiler, as that's quite obvious from the outset), it's appropriate that *The Interpretations* should begin by playing with readers' expectations. It starts with a case of bullying in a Highland fish processing plant which escalates into a police shoot-out before a young man, Tom Kingsmill, leaps to his death from a new road bridge. Or does he? Given that the bridge was crawling with witnesses at the time, it's as though Kingsmill simply vanished into thin air.

Despite this dramatic opening, *The Interpretations* resists the pull of the crime thriller. The appearance in the first few pages of Chief Inspector Alex Crathie, whom we expect to fulfil the role of sleuth, turns out to be a red herring. In fact, law enforcement takes a back seat to the townspeople of Dalmore, their pub, kirk and local newspaper. And to two of Tom Kingsmill's friends, Mike Delvan and Jim Fisher, who leave the mystery of the vanishing man back in the 1980s and get on with their lives – until, of course, unforeseen circum-



David Shaw Mackenzie's crime thriller starts with a case of bullying in a fish processing plant in the Highlands

PICTURE: ALEX ZABUSIK/SHUTTERSTOCK

stances rake the past back up again.

With the central mystery bubbling away in the background, Mackenzie shows us a community in transition, from the construction of the bridge in 1982 to a time two decades later when local businessmen are tempted to drum up some tourist action with dubious heritage centres. The newspaper office where Jim Fisher still

works has somehow survived, the paper's star reporter never allowed to forget his brief stint as its astrologer. In the second half of the novel, the Rev JP McFerran has become a more sympathetic character with his great age, the fierce and caustic opponent of the bridge living a quieter life in a care home – in a room that faces away from the "abominable" construction.

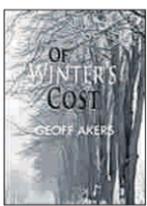
Mackenzie evokes, satisfyingly, the life of Dalmore and how Jim Fisher rises to a new challenge. The mystery of the vanishing man, while by no means convoluted enough to give bestselling crime writers sleepless nights, reaches a conclusion which, in the context Mackenzie has established, works extremely well.

ALASTAIR MABBOTT

PAPERBACKS

OF WINTER'S COST

Geoff Akers
Grosvenor House, £9.99



Impossible to read dispassionately, this is an emotive novel with some bloodthirsty attitudes on display. Flitting between the West Bank in the 1990s and early 2000s and Poland during the Second World

War, it begins with a Zionist mob setting out to stone Arab houses in the hope they'll retaliate and provide an excuse to kill a few. Sam is part of the mob, accompanying his father, but has misgivings and starts to understand his mother's insistence that his grandfather, Leo, who lived through the Holocaust, would never have done such a thing. As we see, in the war, Leo had to defy his own father's conviction that the advancing Germans presented no threat to Polish Jews, and now Sam finds himself in conflict between respecting his elders and recognising the entrenched attitudes of the older generation will never provide a solution. Akers nails his colours to the mast here, in a provocative and heartfelt plea for peace.

STRANGE WEATHER IN TOKYO

Hiroimi Kawakami
Portobello, £10.99

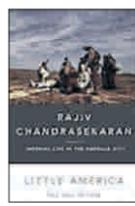


At nearly 40 years old, Tsukiko doesn't seem to recognise how isolated she is in the city until the night she bumps into one of her old schoolteachers in a bar. With Tsukiko respectfully addressing him always as "Sensei", these

two lonely people forge an instantaneous bond, becoming drinking buddies who can go for weeks without seeing each other but are rarely out of each other's thoughts. What's most fascinating about Hiroimi Kawakami's Japanese bestseller is the way that, without a model to follow, the old man and his former pupil work out the rules of their relationship in an unspoken way, an almost courtly formality barely hiding the growing tenderness between them as they go on mushroom-picking expeditions, attend cherry blossom parties and drink endless cups of saké. Told with warmth and sensitivity, it's a gracefully written, unconventional love story about two unlikely people reaching out to each other from their respective solitudes.

LITTLE AMERICA

Rajiv Chandrasekaran
Bloomsbury, £8.99



Having covered America's misadventures in Iraq in *Imperial Life In The Emerald City*, the Washington Post journalist turns his attention to US involvement in Afghanistan, specifically after Obama's "surge", in which

thousands of civilian experts were dropped into the country to turn people away from the Taliban. What emerges is a catalogue of errors brought about by the White House, Pentagon and US International Development agency all pursuing separate policies, and Obama's special representative Richard Holbrooke promoting his own agenda. All of which is bad enough, but when each arm of the state demonstrates incompetence, misunderstanding and dogmatic inflexibility, disaster is bound to ensue. While showing respect for those risking their lives at "grunt level", Chandrasekaran is merciless on those higher up the chain of command who allowed the situation to slip out of their control in this forensic exposé.

THE KINGS OF COOL

Don Winslow
Arrow, £7.99



Oliver Stone liked Don Winslow's *The Savages* so much he made a film of it. And Winslow, knowing when he's on to a good thing, has penned a prequel that goes back to Southern California in the 1960s and shows how his

protagonists, Ben, Chon and O, came to be a drug-dealing menage a trois. It's set partly in 2005, when the trio's hydroponically-grown grass attracts the attention of a drug cartel called *The Association*, and things threaten to get ugly when they refuse to give in to the cartel's demands. But in the flashbacks we see how their own parents got involved in the drug culture and how they were inextricably involved in the set-up of *The Association* in the first place, albeit in a naively idealistic way. Packing more of an emotional heft than *The Savages*, it's written in the leanest prose possible, with a single-word paragraph being nothing unusual but managing to say more than you'd expect.

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