

PUBLISHING NOW

What do the publishers predict people will be reading in 2021? Kathleen Whyman finds out

It's a new year (and am I glad to see the back of 2020!) which means a new To Be Read pile. But what will be on that pile?

'The received wisdom is that in times of trouble readers move to escapism in fiction, which is almost categorically untrue if you look at past sales data,' says Tom Tivnan, managing editor of *The Bookseller*. 'However, a definite trend emerging out of this pandemic is cosy crime. Crime always sells, but the trend of the last few years has been psychological thrillers. In 2021, gentle deaths and an ordered world with a satisfying conclusion is the escape people will look for.'

'There has been a lot of big acquisitions of cosy crime books coming out next year,' he continues. 'These include SJ Bennett's *The Windsor Knot*, which has Queen Elizabeth II solving crimes in the midst of her royal duties, *Death in Paradise* creator Robert Thorogood's *The Marlow Murder Club*, Tom Hindle's *A Fatal Endeavour* and Kate High's debut *The Cat and the Corpse in the Old Barn*.'

Phoebe Morgan, editorial director at HarperFiction & Avon, cites the same trend. 'It'll be interesting to see how the big autumn books of 2020 influence the next year of publishing,' she says. 'For example, will Richard Osman's *The Thursday Murder*

Club lead to a spate of cosy crime? It's been a phenomenal success so far and I'm keen to see if we get a wave of cosier crime as a result.'

'As the pandemic continues I think we'll continue to see readers being gripped by escapist thrillers,' she adds. 'I've had lots of books in recently that feature doctors or other medical professionals as key characters. I wonder if this is a trend that will spike next year, as public interest in the Covid-19 crisis continues. Consumer insight shows that more people are becoming interested in medicine (more school students wanting to become doctors!) and this could be something that starts being reflected in fiction.'

Genevieve Pegg, publishing director at HarperNorth, agrees. 'Everyone will be seeing what can be learnt from the big hits of autumn 2020 – the stellar outings from Richard Osman and Jay Shetty (*Think Like a Monk*), for example,' she says. 'But publishers will also be keen to make successes from titles that might be seen as dark horses – these are often where word-of-mouth hits come from.'

'Never has a year been so difficult to predict, what with all that's happened in 2020,' says Iain Millar, managing director of Canelo. 'I hope we see a rush of people supporting bookshops, after a difficult year for them and limited access. If that's the case, personal recommendations will be more important than ever – the feeling of trying something new and loving it. Maybe quirkier books too; books that have affected people in unexpected ways will prosper.'

A new hope

Morgan believes novels that bring hope will perform well: 'books that put an emphasis on friendship and connection,' she says, using Ruth Jones's *Us Three* as an example.

'The market feels more competitive than ever of late and I wonder whether this means we'll see more high-concept novels getting cut-through in the market space. Perhaps even supernatural novels or those that put a fresh spin on an existing genre. I'm very excited to publish *Sleep Tight* by CS Green in March 2021, a police detective novel with a supernatural twist. It feels fresh and different. I think readers will be craving stimulation after months at home.'



The Bookseller's
Tom Tivnan

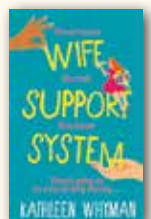
'In 2020, many of us went back to old favourites for comfort and reassurance,' says Millar, 'be that a great police procedural, a happy-ever-after romance or a nostalgic family saga. In 2021, I think you might still get those genres but served with a bit of a twist.'

Tivnan has noticed a raft of titles that deal with the difficulties of getting to sleep. 'This has been a bubbling-under trend of recent years, and sort of chimes with the overall wellness/mindfulness trends of recent years, with hits such as Matthew Walker's *Why We Sleep*,' he says. 'Perhaps Covid-related – or more accurately Covid anxiety-related – it seems to be full boil lately, with many books coming out to help people sleep.'

'Interestingly,' he notes, 'this stretches to fiction, too, with thrillers such as Liam Bell's *The Sleepless*, set in a commune where "sleep is considered an unnecessary social construct"; Louise Mumford's similarly titled *Sleepless*, in which a young woman insomniac takes part in a sleep trial on a Scottish island "where nothing is what it seems"; and Jemma Wayne's *While Sleeping*, where a woman's sleep disorder "comes back to haunt her when her high school sweetheart's daughter goes missing".'

So, we have comfort reads in the form of cosy crime and hope. And stimulation from the novels featuring twists, thrills and the supernatural. And if they prove to be too stimulating, then there will be plenty of books advising us how to get to sleep afterwards. 2021's To Be Read list is sorted.

• Kathleen's comic novel *Wife Support System* (Hera Books) is available as an ebook from Amazon, Kobo and Apple



Phoebe Morgan
of HarperFiction