BOOK OF THE WEEK
The Widow by Fiona Barton
Publisher: Bantam Press.
Available: January 14.
HOTLY tipped as 2016’s The Girl On The Train, The Widow certainly comes with great expectations as this year’s unputdownable psychological thriller. Fiona Barton’s crime debut is an emotional rollercoaster from the get-go. The titular character is Jean Taylor and the novel maps her journey as the loving and devoted wife of accused murderer, Glen. Each chapter is told from a different perspective of those involved in the case, including the sceptical detective, the savvy reporter and the worn-down widow. Barton expertly jumps back and forth between time frames from the original date that ‘Baby Bella’ vanished from her front garden, to the present day where Jean Taylor is dealing with the repercussions of her husband’s sudden death. As the story unfolds, Barton sheds light on the turmoil that Jean faces, desperate to protect the man she loves, but each day growing more concerned for the truth about Bella’s disappearance.

Jean and Glen’s relationship was riddled with its own problems; Glen’s secrecy, Jean’s obsession with children and the fact the couple were never able to reproduce. The character of Kate, the hardnosed reporter is also fascinating as she manages to gain the trust of many of the key players within the case. As the story develops, it is extraordinary to watch the changes in each character, as new pieces of information are revealed from past and present. This progression is beautifully crafted and we soon start to question the honesty of Jean’s perspective and she transforms into the ultimate unreliable narrator.

A fast-paced, relevant and gripping read, The Widow isn’t one to be missed.
Rating ★★★★★

FICTION
Strictly Between Us by Jane Fallon
Publisher: Penguin.
Available: January 14.
THIS lively and witty novel from best-selling novelist Jane Fallon tells the story of Tamsin and Michelle, who have been inseparable since childhood and have shared everything together. When singleton Tamsin hears rumours that Michelle’s husband is cheating on her, she sets her trusted assistant Bea on a mission to seduce him as a test. Bea, who is reluctant at first, eventually agrees, but it seems she has her own agenda...

This is a fantastic exploration of friendship, infidelity and trust and is pacey, original and really enjoyable.
Rating ★★★★★

The Promise by Robert Crais
Publisher: Orion.
Available: January 14.
THE Promise is the 16th novel in Robert Crais’ series of books following LA detectives Elvis Cole and Joe Pike. But this time they are joined by LAPD officer Scott James and his faithful patrol dog Maggie, the heroes of his stand-alone novel, Suspect.

The two worlds collide right from the opening chapters, when Cole’s investigation into the disappearance of a grieving mother leads him to the same house that James is chasing an armed thief into.

What James discovers inside immediately throws his life into danger, and it is soon in all their best interests that the woman is found.

Fitting between narratives, the tension is held taut and the action
doesn’t stop. The inclusion of chapters from Maggie’s point of view are a bit ridiculous, and Crais’ love of dogs is maybe pushed too hard.

However, with themes of terrorism, war and the devastating nature of loss running throughout, this is a clever tale that is much more than just another cheesy thriller.

Rating ******

NON-FICTION
Dark Matter And The Dinosaurs: The Astounding Interconnectedness of The Universe by Lisa Randall
Publisher: Bodley Head
Available: January 14.

IN RENOWNED theoretical physicist Lisa Randall’s latest book, she suggests a wildly exciting idea – that dark matter could be responsible for influencing the movement of celestial bodies.

As a result, she suggests, the asteroid or comet falling to Earth that brought about the extinction of the dinosaurs could be down to this invisible force – and, in turn, have had a huge influence over the development of our own species too.

Randall is transparent from the off that this is a theory - not proven fact. So as a result, you’re drawn on an exciting journey exploring the depths of her ideas.

What’s great is that Randall’s style is plain, clear to understand and engaging, even when she’s exploring the kinds of concepts that you’d usually only find inside a university’s physics department.

A great read for a little more perspective than usual.

Rating ******

Why Fonts Matter by Sarah Hyndman
Publisher: Virgin Books.
Available: January 28.

CAN fonts really alter the taste of your food? Or even change what certain words mean to you?

One graphic designer certainly thinks typography plays a big influence in our lives and that we respond emotionally to fonts – whether we know it or not.

Sarah Hyndman, who has worked in the industry for over a decade, explains how fonts have different personalities while pointing out that there’s a subtle art behind how they elicit emotional responses. She uses the example of American clothes retailer Gap, who changed their logo five years ago to a new font, only to scrap its redesign and revert back to the original logo following protests from loyal customers.

The author also makes another point about typeface, saying that research suggests fonts on food packaging are “designed to stimulate a craving or hunger.”

Rating ******
TOP TEN

1. Follow You Home, Mark Edwards
2. Mr Mercedes, Stephen King
3. The Last Letter from Your Lover, Jojo Moyes
4. Holy Island: A DCI Ryan Mystery, LJ Ross
5. Someone to Save You, Paul Pilkington
6. The Other Son, Nick Alexander
7. All the Light We Cannot See, Anthony Doerr
8. How I Lost You, Jenny Blackhurst
9. The Lady in the Van, Alan Bennett
10. The Girl on the Train, Paula Hawkins

1. How it Works: The Husband, Jason Hazeley
2. How it Works: The Wife, Jason Hazeley
3. The Ladybird Book of the Hangover, Jason Hazeley
4. Private Eye Annual 2015, Ian Hislop
5. The Ladybird Book of Mindfulness, Jason Hazeley
6. The Road to Little Dribbling, Bill Bryson
7. The Ladybird Book of the Mid-Life Crisis, Jason Hazeley
8. Grandpa's Great Escape, David Walliams
9. The Ladybird Book of the Shed, Jason Hazeley
10. Diary Of A Wimpy Kid: Old School, Jeff Kinney

(Hardback and paperback chart from Waterstones.com)