

Book Review: *The Women in White*
By Sarah Pekkanen

Thanks to NetGalley and St. Martin's Press for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "The Women in White" is scheduled for release on August 4, 2026.

In the 1960s, Duke University's Parapsychology Laboratory conducted extensive, and perhaps somewhat ethically questionable, research into psychic phenomena, such as ESP, precognition and clairvoyance. That's a fact. In "The Women in White" author Sarah Pekkanen offers a fictional representation of that research and its impact on four young women.

The story is told in dual timelines: present day, and 1964, the latter presented in alternating perspectives of the four women who participated in the research.

Riley Bell, age 32, is recently divorced from her gambling addicted husband and living out of her car after creditors pulled her home and everything in it out from under her. When she answers an ad for a caretaker job for 81-year-old, wheelchair-bound Betty Sadler, she steps into a world that time has forgotten. Betty's home looks as it did in 1964. Zero modern amenities.

Betty, we learn from the flashback chapters, was a volunteer in parapsychology experiments nearly 60 years ago. And in the twilight of her life, she has one remaining wish: to reconnect with the three other young women with whom she bonded during the experiments. But when Riley endeavors to track down the three women she uncovers more than she bargained for. Someone is resurrecting the old experiments, and the more Riley digs, and the more Betty reveals of the decades-old horrors the women endured, the two women find themselves on dangerous ground.

The well-documented narrative is chilling in spots and illustrates the treatment women accepted in the 1960s being told their main charge in life was to be a good wife and make a good home for their husband. Some of it can be hard to stomach.

Beyond the historical elements, the pacing slows in spots and the dialogue is a bit forced. I was very young in the early 1960s but still find it hard to believe women spoke to each other with royalty-like reverence in their words toward their husbands. The climax the story builds toward wasn't much of a climax, so that was a bit of a letdown.

“The Women in White” is an interesting read from a historical perspective but comes up a little short in the thrilling and mystery departments. Three stars.