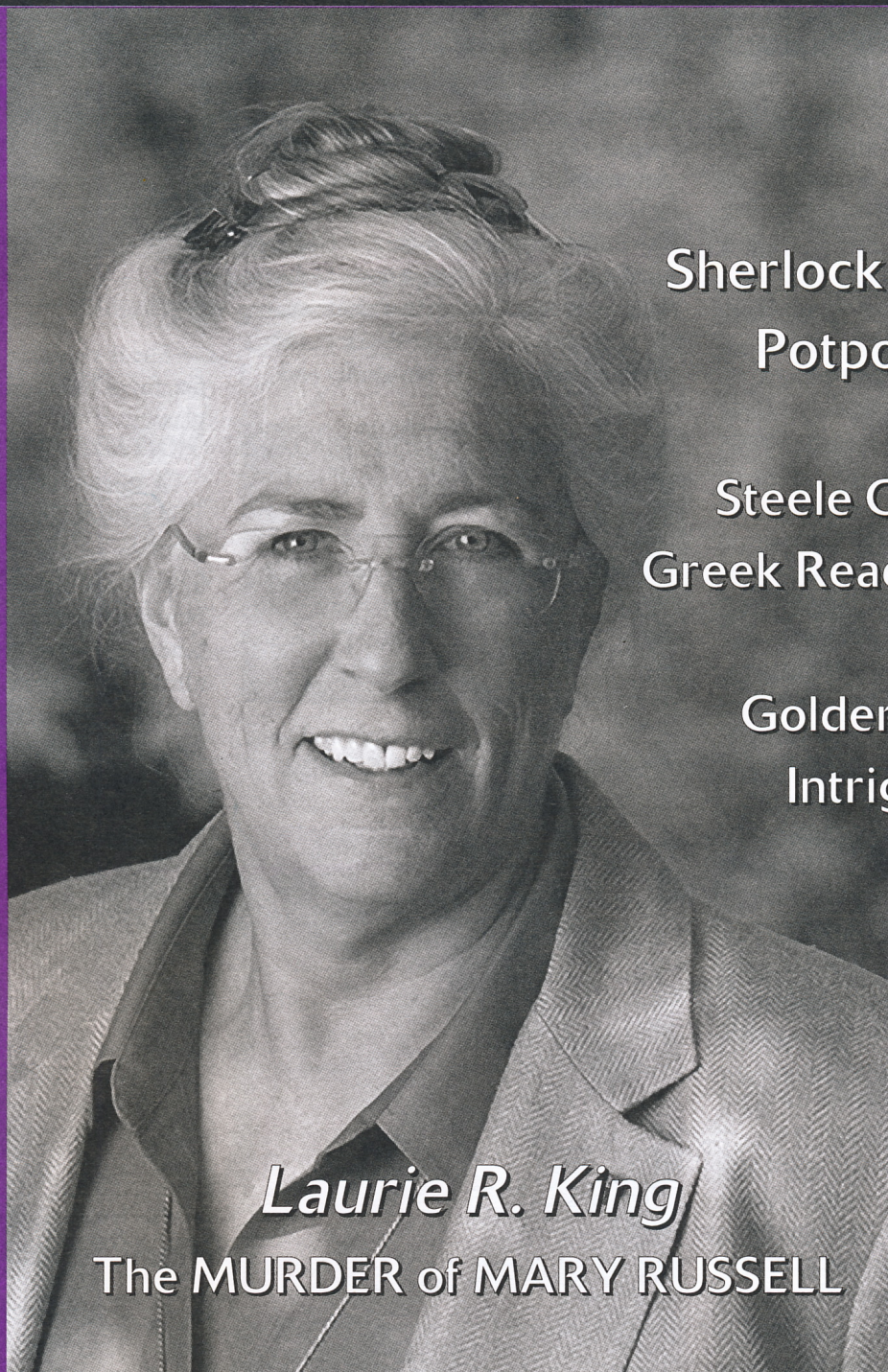


Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



Sherlock Holmes
Potpourri

Steele Curry's
Greek Reading Feast

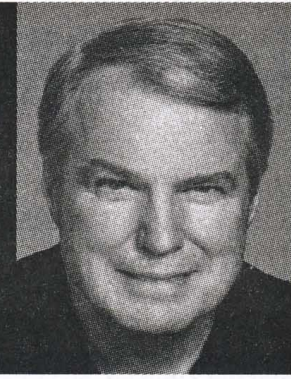
Golden Age
Intrigue

Laurie R. King

The MURDER of MARY RUSSELL

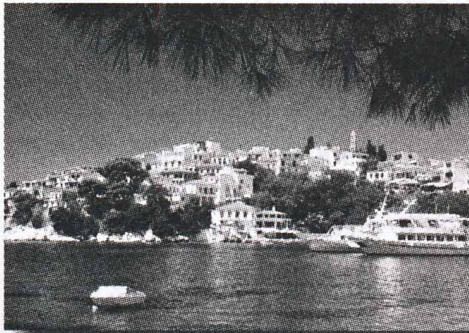
My Greek Reading Feast 2016

By Steele Curry



On June 1, we arrived back at our summer home, “Lizard in the Sun”, on the Greek island of Skiathos in the Aegean Sea for our usual three-month stay. My wife Judy and I have been coming here every summer for about 40 years. The instant I step off the plane at the airport, it’s as if all my cares and woes (such as they are) are mysteriously confiscated from my shoulders.

We are always met at the airport by our dear friend Yiannis, a neighbor who originally found the land and site for the construction of our villa by my mother in 1972. After we arrive, Yiannis and his family stock us up with fresh eggs, oranges, olives, olive oil, soft cheese and apricot preserves (to have for breakfast with Greek yogurt), all coming from their farm. On our own property, we grow olives, almonds, apricots, figs, lemons, oranges, pears, and plums.



Skiathos is a magnificently beautiful island, some eight miles long and four miles wide, with about 40 beaches, a charming village and lots of restaurants and tavernas serving excellent food in the open air. Despite all of their country’s problems, the Greeks here are extremely friendly and hospitable. Plus, the weather in Skiathos is warm and sunny virtually

day after day from early May through at least to the end of September.

Much of my time at Lizard in the Sun is spent reading on a terrace that has a gorgeous view looking across the Aegean Sea. During the summer here, I usually read 30-35 books, mostly mysteries and thrillers with many of them by new authors, often their translated novels. Here are some of the notable books I read this past summer in Skiathos:

DEVIL OF DELPHI by Jeffrey Siger (Poisoned Pen Press 2015 hardcover/trade paperback). For the last seven years, to get into a proper Greek frame of mind, the first book I read in Skiathos is the latest thriller by Jeffrey Siger featuring Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis, head of the Greek Police’s Special Crime’s Division. Kaldis and his colorful squad of detectives investigate high-profile cases frequently involving political corruption and organized crime. *Devil of Delphi* concerns the burgeoning trade in counterfeit name brand liquor and wines, a multi-billion dollar global business fronted in Greece by a member of a powerful politically connected family in partnership with an international crime lord. Along with lots of action, each of Siger’s novels immerses readers in the history and scenery of different regions of the country. This time it’s the area around Delphi where a talented assassin happens to reside. **DEVIL OF DELPHI** is definitely the author’s best book to date.

THE UNFORTUNATE ENGLISHMAN by John Lawton (Atlantic Monthly Press 2016 hardcover/trade paperback). Mainly set in Berlin

and London in 1963, this is Lawton’s second novel to feature Joe Wilderness who previously operated a black market business with three partners – a Russian, an American and another Englishman all working for the occupying forces in divided Berlin after the end of WW II. Wilderness is freed from a Berlin jail on the condition he rejoin British Intelligence at MI6. Despite now being married with children, Wilderness opts to leave London and take a field job back in Berlin with the responsibility for orchestrating a spy trade between the British and Russians. When an opportunity comes up to combine making a big score as part of arranging the spy swap, Wilderness calls on his former black market partners for their assistance. Naturally, nothing goes according to plan. The author is a brilliant storyteller who consistently delivers great pleasure to his readers.

THE FIRST RULE OF SURVIVAL by Paul Mendelson (Constable & Robinson 2016 trade paperback London). Mendelson’s impressive debut novel introduces Colonel Vaughn de Vries, a member of the Special Crimes Department of the South African Police Service (SAPS) based in Cape Town. De Vries is a throwback out of step in the new South Africa, despised by most of his superior officers for his unorthodox methods but tolerated (barely) for the results they usually bring. Two boys found murdered are linked to an unsolved kidnapping that occurred seven years earlier. His inability to solve the prior case has haunted de Vries ever since then. This time, de Vries is determined to

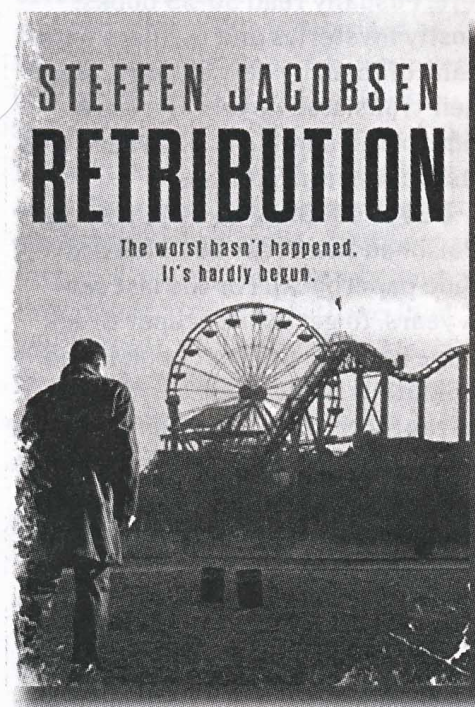
let nothing stop him from obtaining justice for the crimes committed. Fortunately, his closest friend is a former British intelligence agent. The author's second de Vries novel, *The Serpentine Road*, published in 2015 is also an excellent read.

THE HISTORY OF BLOOD by Paul Mendelson (Constable 2016 trade paperback). The author's third novel featuring Colonel Vaughn de Vries, a member of the Special Crimes Department of the South African Police Service (SAPS) based in Cape Town. Apartheid ended in 1994 but the country continues to struggle with endemic crime, corruption at every level, and predictably deep-seated racial antagonism. What started with the suicide of the daughter of a high-profile former Apartheid-era politician leads de Vries into an intensive investigation of a powerful criminal gang involved in human trafficking and the smuggling of drugs, ivory and rhino horns out of South Africa, primarily to the Far East. Once again, de Vries draws on the support of his capable police team and his close friend, former British intelligence agent Marantz, in attempting to shut down this gang before they can harm his family. The quality of Mendelson's writing just keeps getting better and better as he reveals much of South Africa's history and its current challenges.

ROSARITO BEACH by M.A. Lawson (Blue Rider Press 2013 hardcover/2015 trade paperback). O.K., sometimes I'm slow getting to the good stuff. After a long run with his Joe Demarco series (which continues), this is the Mike Lawson's first novel to feature Kay Hamilton, a DEA agent stationed in Southern California. When her daughter Jessica is kidnapped by the most powerful drug lord in Mexico who wants to force Hamilton to spring his brother from U.S. imprisonment, Hamilton goes into John Wayne mode to attempt to save Jessica. Of course, Hamilton is gorgeous, fearless, resourceful, bright and tough. Did I mention that she is also somewhat amoral? Anyway, the author successfully delivers an entertaining, action-packed, terrific

story even if the ending is somewhat predictable. In 2015, the second Kay Hamilton novel, **VIKING BAY**, was published.

RETRIBUTION by Steffen Jacobsen (Quercus 2016 trade paperback London). This is the third thriller written by this hugely talented Danish author. While set in Denmark following the fictional bombing of Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens that claimed 1,241 victims, **RETRIBUTION** is a metaphor describing the growing severity of the jihad terrorist threat facing all Western countries. As an informed terror expert states in the novel, "No one in the Middle East can – or wants to – break



the cycle now. Violence is inevitably paid back with more violence, creating more orphans with a deep hatred of the West and Israel." The Islamic terrorists and their supporters are fueled by a lust for retribution over centuries of real and perceived grievances with little hope for a better future in this world. Confronting the likelihood of another major bombing in Copenhagen are Lene Jensen, a Superintendent with the Danish national police force, and Michael Sander, a London-based security consultant and former lover of Lene's. It's too easy for the terrorists to get into the country, their targets are not easily

predictable and their methods are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Plus, some members of the Danish Intelligence and Security Service are delusional about their ability to penetrate the responsible terrorist cell. Jacobsen is a masterful storyteller.

THE DEFENCE by Steve Cavanagh (Orion 2016 trade paperback London/apa "The Defense": Flatiron Books 2016 hardcover New York). Author's first novel, introducing Eddie Flynn, a New York con man turned lawyer. Flynn's ten year-old daughter is kidnapped to force Flynn into defending Olek Volchek, the head of the Russian mafia, against murder charges. To add to the pressure, the Russian have strapped a bomb-filled jacket to Flynn. It appears to be a hopeless case as the prosecution has a star witness prepared to testify that Volchek ordered the hit on the murder victim. Fortunately, Flynn has some unusual allies who might be able to help him save his daughter and survive himself. This is a well-written, fast-paced thriller packed with clever courtroom drama and tough-minded action. The second Eddie Flynn novel, *The Plea*, is being published this summer.

THE PLEA by Steve Cavanagh (Orion 2016 trade paperback London). Author's second novel featuring conman/lawyer Eddie Flynn is even better than his first one, **THE DEFENSE**. This time Flynn is forced into defending a billionaire accused of murdering his girlfriend in his opulent Manhattan condo. To add to the pressure on Flynn to convince his client to plead guilty, Flynn's wife is arrested for being a party to money laundering at her prominent New York law firm. The CIA and Justice Department have formed a joint task force to recover \$8 billion in laundered funds, most of it belonging to a Mexican drug cartel, and are convinced that securing such a plea from Flynn's client is key to doing so. The plot moves swiftly from twist to twist inside the courtroom and out, helped by sharp dialogue and a succession of colorful characters. Cavanagh is a talented story-spinner.

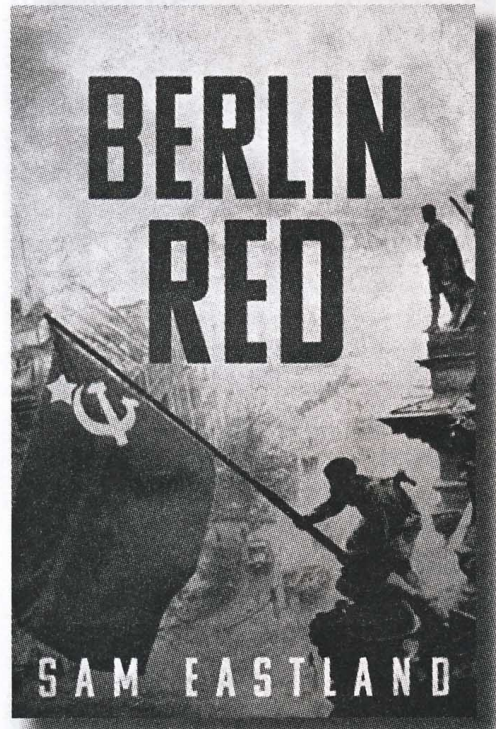
CITY OF JACKALS by Parker Bilal (Orion 2016 trade paperback London/Bloomsbury U.S. 2016 hardcover). This is Parker Bilal's fifth novel featuring Makana, a former Sudanese police officer now a private investigator in Cairo. This time Makana is retained to find a missing university student by his family plus is asked by a Cairo policeman friend to assist in a murder case where only the victim's head was found. As in the previous novels, Makana has to navigate his way in the endemically corrupt, chaotic, volatile metropolis of modern Cairo. While I've enjoyed each of the author's past Makana's novels, I think it's high time he got on with it and wrote a Makana novel set in the midst of Egypt's Arab Spring uprising. Parker Bilal is the pseudonym of Jamal Mahjoub.

PARADIME by Alan Glynn (Faber 2016 trade paperback London). Iraq War veteran Danny Lynch takes a kitchen job with a large private U.S. military contractor at a forward base in Afghanistan where he witnesses a deadly incident that his powerful employer wants to cover up. Laid off, Danny is back in New York with his girlfriend without any prospects, struggling to survive. This all changes when Danny discovers that a hugely successful billionaire venture capitalist shares his identical physical appearance. The author masterfully plays out this tale of mixed personal identities and corporate malfeasance on a grand and frightening scale. As the saying goes, you can't put it down.

A FINE LINE by Gianrico Carofiglio (Bitter Lemon Press 2016 trade paperback London/New York). What a fabulous novel, the fifth in this series. This Italian author writes like a dream. While telling a wonderful story, he expresses some profound truths about life, "justice" and personal character. I especially enjoyed the compelling characterization of defense lawyer Guido Guerrieri, his girlfriend Annapaola and of course the nasty Judge Larocca. This book transcends any form of legal thriller to become a thoroughly engaging novel on many levels. Kudos also to the translator for doing such a superb job. I only hope that we don't have to wait as long for the

author's next Guido Guerrieri novel.

BERLIN RED by Sam Eastland (aka Paul Watkins) (Faber & Faber 2016 trade paperback London/New York). The seventh novel in the author's Inspector Pekkala series, **BERLIN RED** is set mainly in Berlin in 1945 just before it was overrun by the Red Army. In Moscow, British Intelligence asks Stalin to assign Pekkala to assist in evacuating a female agent from Berlin. With Stalin's approval, Pekkala and his aide Major Kirov are sent on a mission to do so. This novel features an impressive cast of characters – Pekkala, Stalin, Hitler, a venomous SS Officer, a German General responsible for developing the V-2 rocket program, a renowned Berlin Police Inspector



saved from the gallows and a highly placed spy who was formerly Pekkala's fiancée at the time of the Russian Revolution – plus a fast moving plot and a brilliant depiction of Berlin and Moscow at this critical juncture of history. This is an exceptionally well-written novel that may be the last in this series.

THE SCARECROW by Michael Connelly (Little Brown 2009 hardcover/Orion 2010 paperback). *LA Times* reporter Jack McEvoy is being laid off from his job but wants to write one last story about a 16-year-old drug dealer wrongly charged with murder.

He soon senses that the perpetrator may be a serial killer which is confirmed when a young female reporter is found dead with the killer's same MO. McEvoy asks his old friend FBI Agent Rachel Walling for her help in tracking down the killer, now known as The Scarecrow, resulting in them becoming the hunted. McEvoy and Walling were also the central characters in the author's earlier novel, **THE POET** (1996). This book is one more example of why Connelly is at the pinnacle of American crime writing.

THE HEIST by Daniel Silva (Harper Collins 2014 hardcover/Harper 2015 trade paperback). Gabriel Allon is coerced into finding a stolen Caravaggio painting which leads him to mount an operation against the Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad. Along the way, we learn about the global stolen art market, the savageness of the Syrian regime against its own people, and the banking system's complicity in helping to hide the billions stolen by dictators such as Assad and Putin. Allon draws on the expertise of all of his key team members at the King Saul Boulevard headquarters of Israeli Intelligence in Tel Aviv plus the support of his European network of senior foreign Intelligence officers, former British commando Christopher Keller and other covert agents in an attempt to pull off a massive heist from the Syrians. Of course, things don't always go according to plan. This is sophisticated espionage fiction at its best.

THE ENGLISH SPY by Daniel Silva (Harper 2015 hardcover/Harper 2015 trade paperback). What a treat – being able to read two Daniel Silva novels in a summer. In this novel, Gabriel Allon teams up with Christopher Keller to settle the score with a former IRA bomber, an Iranian double agent and a Russian master spy. While they're undertaking this assignment on behalf of MI6, for both Allon and Keller it's personal so you know it will be messy. The Israeli are unhappy about Allon going off on this mission as he is slated to take over as head of the country's secret intelligence service. Allon's wife is also not thrilled as she is pregnant, expecting twins at any moment. Silva's writing continues to

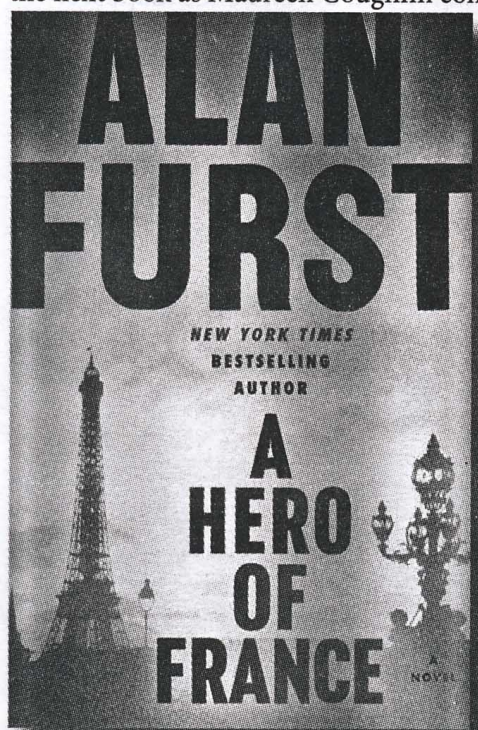
provide much entertainment, education and pleasure but no assurance that the world is becoming a safer place.

A LOYAL SPY by Simon Conway (Hodder 2010 hardcover/Hodder 2010 trade paperback London). A gritty thriller spanning the years 1989 to 2005 exposing the unintended consequences of the War on Terror, the dangerous power wielded by global independent security contractors, and the venality of the various American, British and Pakistani intelligence agencies as they compete with each other. Jonah Said works for a covert branch of U.K. military intelligence known only as the Department. It consists of five members that call themselves the "Afghan Guides" whose sole purpose is to conduct off-the-books black ops, especially against terrorist groups in Afghanistan, Iraq and other hot spots. When the order comes down to disband the Department, Jonah is tasked with killing his long-time protégé, Nor, a double agent who has gone over to the side of al-Qaeda. The plot also features Jonah's lover, Miranda, a lethal female originally from one of the main *clans* of the Somali people. To say that this powerful novel deservedly was selected as the winner of the 2010 Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award is an understatement. Another of the author's excellent thrillers, **THE AGENT RUNNER**, is being published in the U.S. by Arcade in 2017.

THE DEVIL IN HER WAY by Bill Loehfelm (FSG 2013 trade paperback/FSG 2013 hardcover). This seemed like the perfect book to read to prepare myself for attending the 2016 New Orleans Bouchercon. Seven years after Katrina, Maureen Coughlin decides to move from Staten Island, New York, to join the New Orleans Police Department. After graduating from the Police Academy there, Coughlin is assigned a training officer, Preacher, who has the responsibility for determining whether Coughlin is suitable to become a NOPD officer. Fortunately for Coughlin, Preacher turns out to be the ideal mentor for her as she struggles to become acclimated to her newly adopted city and the mores of the NOPD. With an abundance of courage,

energy and street smarts, Coughlin is anxious to prove herself to Preacher as they are tasked with policing murders, drug dealing, street shootings and violence in practically all forms. Coughlin first appeared in the author's prior book, **THE DEVIL SHE KNOWS**, where she was a waitress on Staten Island who almost lost her life investigating a crime on her own. Bill Loehfelm does a superb job of making the reader root for Coughlin while vividly describing both the good and bad of New Orleans.

DOING THE DEVIL'S WORK by Bill Loehfelm (FSG 2015 hardcover/Picador 2016 trade paperback). And the plot goes on from **THE DEVIL IN HER WAY** into this book and likely on into the next book as Maureen Coughlin con-



tinues her rocky career launch with the New Orleans Police Department. To say that Coughlin can't stay out of trouble in the *Big Easy* would be an understatement. Her refusal to follow orders is habitual as is her propensity for pursuing unauthorized investigations. But the stakes get higher when a cop-killing hate group, known as the Watchmen Brigade, extends its operations into New Orleans. It's hard not to get hooked on this high-octane series. The following book, **LET THE DEVIL OUT**, is being published in July 2016. Bouchercon, here I come.

A HERO IN FRANCE by Alan Furst

(Harper 2016 hardcover New York/W & N 2016 trade paperback London). This novel takes us to the spring of 1941 and Paris where a leader of the French Resistance named Mathieu is organizing the escape routes for downed British airmen to take to Spain so they can then rejoin their bombing and fighter units back in England. The Nazis are determined to capture these airmen and eliminate the members of the Resistance responsible for aiding them. Few such escape routes in France survive longer than six months. The author is a master of depicting life in occupied France and the lives of courageous individuals opposing the Nazis, including their amours.

DRAWING DEAD by Andrew Vachss (Vintage Crime/Black Lizard 2016 trade paperback). A Cross novel set in Chicago with the full cast of his crew – Ace, Buddha, Princess, Rhino, Tiger and Tracker – drawn into eliminating some despicable villains while defending themselves against an inexplicable conspiracy that's determined to wipe them out. Vachss is somewhat of an acquired taste with his prodigious talent for depicting an underworld of outrageous characters, stark violence and over-the-top evil perpetrators. This is not a part of Chicago you would want to experience first-hand.

A PURPLE PLACE FOR DYING by John D. Macdonald (Random House 2013 trade paperback). It's always a good idea to revisit this author's novels which are now being reissued by Random House. This is the third in the Travis McGee series with the usual collection of strong and weak characters trying to get McGee in trouble and even cause him some bodily harm. This time the action takes place in the American west as opposed to Florida. McGee is low on cash and needs to find some P.I. work. Of course he signs on for something that comes close to getting him killed. His clients may not be so lucky. In the end, you can count on McGee to at least be chivalrous.

More information on Steele's passion for books and his favorite current mystery/thriller authors can be found at his youth mentoring Web site at www.COTWguides.com