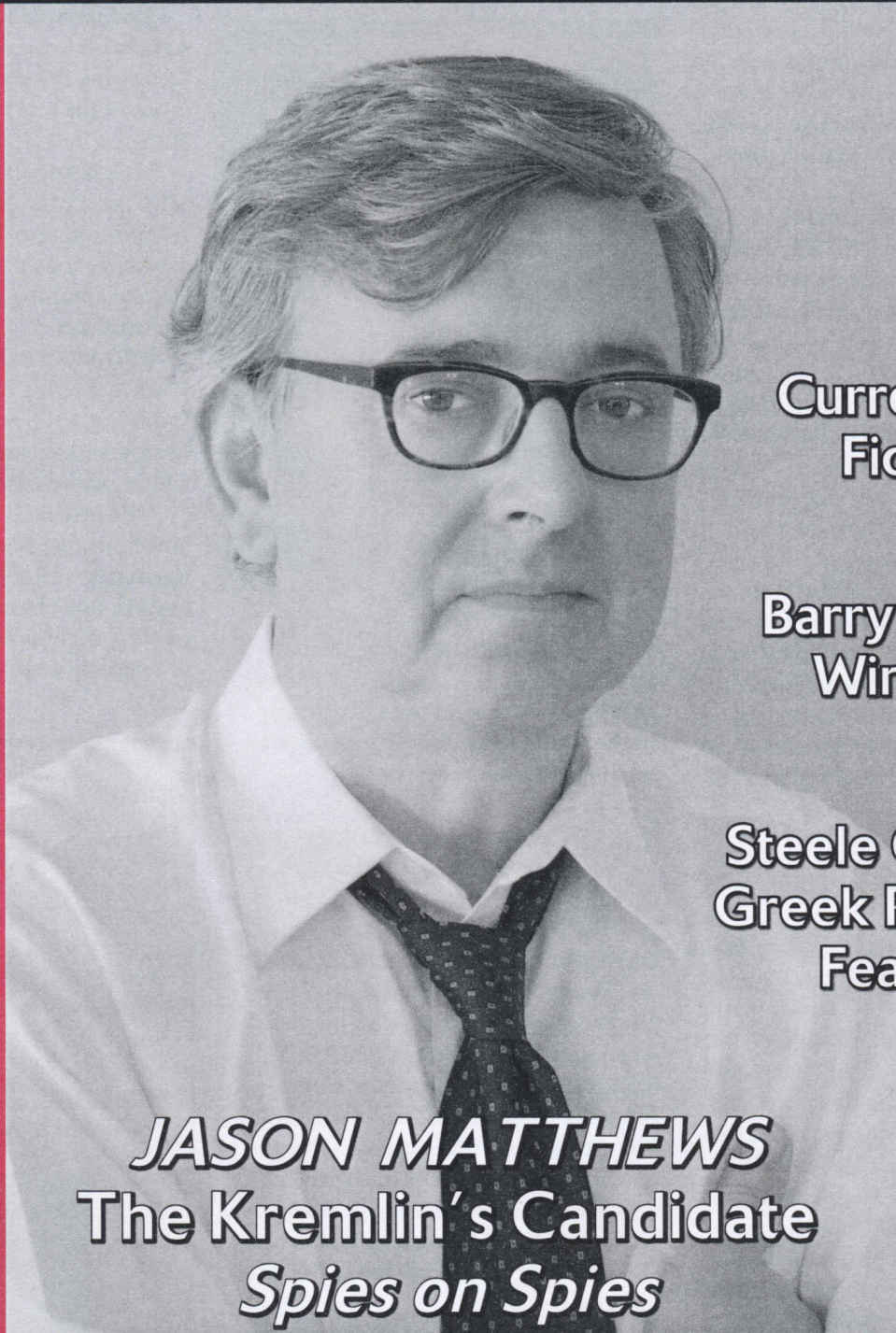


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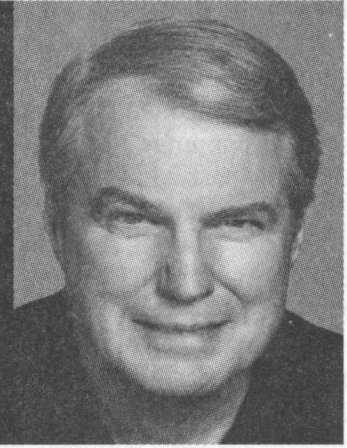
Steele Curry's
Greek Reading
Feast

JASON MATTHEWS
The Kremlin's Candidate
Spies on Spies

My Greek Reading Feast

2017

By Steele Curry



A BACCHANALIA OF MYSTERIES & THRILLERS IN GREECE

At the start of June, my wife Judy and I returned to the Greek island of Skiathos for our annual three-month stay at our summer home, "Lizard in the Sun." For us, this is paradise where our family has been coming every summer for over 40 years to enjoy island life in the Aegean Sea, due north of Athens.

Some eight miles long and four miles wide, Skiathos is probably the most beautiful island in Greece with lots of vegetation, about 40 beaches, a picturesque village and many excellent restaurants and tavernas. While the country itself has endemic economic and political problems, the Greeks here on Skiathos do everything they can to ensure that their tourist visitors and summer residents have a wonderful local experience. The fact that the weather is consistently warm and sunny from early May through at least to the end of September is also a plus.

I spend a lot of my time at Lizard in the Sun reading on a terrace that has a magnificent view overlooking the Aegean Sea. Each summer here, I usually read 30-35 books, mostly mysteries and thrillers, including many translated novels by new authors. Here are some of the notable books I read this past summer in Skiathos:

SANTORINI CAESARS by Jeffrey Siger (Poisoned Pen Press, \$26.95, \$15.95, 2015). To quickly get into a proper Greek mind-frame, I have adopted a practice of always beginning my summer reading with Jeff Siger's latest mystery featuring Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis and his colorful cohorts

at the Special Crimes Unit based in Athens. Each of the author's eight novels highlights a particular island or region of Greece and its historical background. This time it's the popular tourist destination of Santorini.

As Siger lives on the island of Mykonos for about six months of every year, he is in a good position to observe the longstanding political machinations that have continuously plagued this country and brought it to near ruin. With **SANTORINI CAESARS**, the author is writing especially "close to the bone" in depicting a Greek Prime Minister, certain cabinet members, an American consulting firm (read global investment bank Goldman Sachs), the Greek military and the Golden Dawn neo-Nazis in a manner that all closely mirrors today's real thing.

Kaldis first becomes involved when the daughter of a Brigadier general is shot dead at an Athens protest demonstration in a killing staged to cast the blame on the police or Greek military. Next, he becomes aware of a possible conspiracy being hatched at a meeting of high-ranking military officers on the island of Santorini. Surveillance by the Special Crimes unit reveals that the Prime Minister's closest political advisor is attempting to provoke the military establishment by making misleading statements about planned massive cutbacks of defense expenditures. Is this individual allied in some way with an outside party trying to take advantage of the country's misfortunes for its own gain? Can Kaldis discover how everything may be connected and prevent a national tragedy? Fortunately, three strong women are boosting his

chances of success.

BENEATH A SCARLET SKY by Mark Sullivan (Lake Union Publishing, \$14.95). A WW II novel based on actual people and events set from June 1943 to May 1945 in northern Italy, principally Milan. After his family's home is destroyed by Allied bombing, the teenager Pino Lella joins an underground railroad assisting Jews and downed Allied airmen escape over the Alps to Switzerland. To avoid Pino being drafted into an Italian army combat unit that would be sent to the Russian front, Pino's parents compel him to enlist as a German soldier.

After being wounded in a rail yard bombing, Pino is recruited to serve as the personal driver for General Hans Leyers, the second most powerful German official in the Italian occupation. This places Pino in an ideal position to provide the local partisans and Allies with invaluable intelligence on German battle plans for its armies in northern Italy. Pino together with his family and friends suffer gravely under the Nazi occupation of their country and its aftermath. Along the way, he falls in love with an older woman and develops a unique relationship with General Leyers.

Sullivan has written 18 prior novels, including five co-authored with James Patterson. **BENEATH A SCARLET SKY** is probably his best novel to date.

THE 7TH WOMAN: A PARIS HOMICIDE MYSTERY by Frédérique Molay (Le French Book, \$34.95/\$16.95, 2014). French author's first Paris Homicide novel, introducing Nico Sirsky, "Chief of Police" heading up the Paris Criminal Investigation Division

(known as the Brigade Criminelle) and its twelve squads of detectives responsible for investigating major crimes, including homicides, terrorist threats, kidnappings, sexual assault and missing persons. Sirsky supervises a Divisional staff of some 300 investigators and specialists based in Paris. He is highly regarded by the police hierarchy and his staff but may have met his match in the urgent case now confronting him.

On a Monday, a dead woman is found who has been whipped, mutilated and stabbed. The killer has left a message of his (or her) intention to similarly murder another victim each of the remaining six days of the week. The perpetrator appears to be knowledgeable about police investigative techniques and has left no evidence at the crime scene. As more bodies are found on successive days, the killer leaves messages indicating that these deeds have a personal connection to Sirsky.

This series debut was a winner of France's most prestigious crime fiction award, the Prix du Quai des Orfèvres. Much more than just a police procedural novel, **THE 7TH WOMAN** portrays the appealing character of Sirsky, the twisted mind of a serial killer, and the French justice system in action. Since its publication, the author has had three additional Paris Homicide novels published in English. Of course I'm compelled to order them.

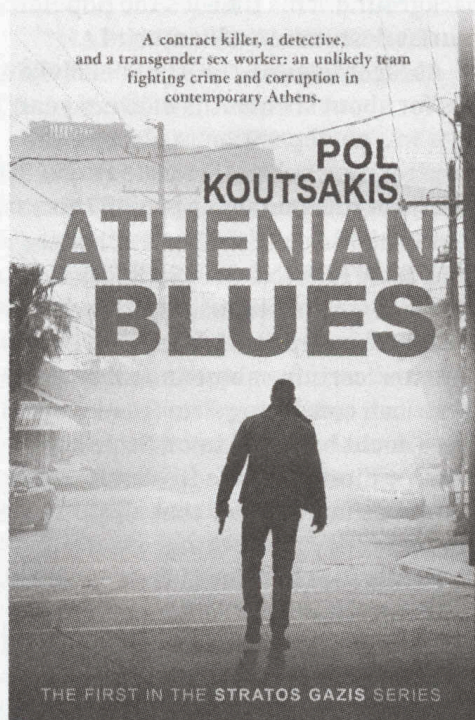
THE LIAR by Steve Cavanagh (Orion, £13.99, 2017 trade paperback). Author's third novel featuring the New York ex-conman now lawyer Eddie Flynn. On the front cover is a blurb by Ian Rankin stating, "Plotting that takes the breath away" – that's a major Scottish understatement. From start to finish, **THE LIAR** is a high-octane, fast moving, locomotive of a story full of surprises with not a wasted word.

Lenny Howell, an old friend of Flynn's father's whose daughter has just been kidnapped, asks Flynn to act on his behalf. Howell is a decorated Marine who owns a security firm specializing in personal protection, hostage negotiations and threat assessment. He knows that Flynn had been successful in rescuing his own daughter in an ear-

lier kidnapping. Both the FBI and the NYPD are heavily involved in finding Howell's daughter and her kidnappers but Flynn discovers Howell has his own plans for dealing with the ransom payment.

Forgive this minor spoiler but Howell ends up being accused of murdering his own daughter with Flynn as his lawyer defending him in court. Flynn's success in this case depends on him uncovering the truth before it is too late. For sheer suspense, courtroom drama and crisp dialogue, Cavanagh is definitely at the top of his game. I'm counting on reading more Eddie Flynn novels.

ATHENIAN BLUES by Pol Koutsakis (Bitter Lemon Press, £8.99, trade



paperback 2017). Bitter Lemon continues its tradition of publishing excellent translated mysteries by leading international authors previously unknown to English readers. **ATHENIAN BLUES** is the first in a series of crime novels featuring the Greek hitman (he prefers to be thought of as a "caretaker") Stratos Gazis and his three closest Athenian associates – a homicide cop, a transgender sex worker and a childhood girlfriend of both Stratos and the cop.

Aliki, a popular actress, attempts to retain Stratos to murder her abusive husband who happens to be the highest profile lawyer in Greece. Shortly after a

lookalike actress is gunned down driving Aliki's BMW, the lawyer husband tries to retain Stratos to protect his wife from unknown parties intent on killing her. While Stratos is conducting "research" on the background of his two conflicting potential clients, other murders occur. The gritty ambience and troubled character of contemporary Athens provide a colorful setting for the author's first mystery novel.

BLACKOUT: TOMORROW WILL BE TOO LATE by Marc Elsberg (Black Swan/Penguin, £7.99, 2017 trade paperback). First published in Germany in 2012, this book quickly became an international bestseller. An unknown group of hackers cause a shutdown of the inter-connected electrical power grids starting in Italy and then fast spreading throughout the rest of Europe. This results in an almost total breakdown of all economic sectors, public services, food distribution, health care, waste disposal, emergency services and financial markets. Many of the continent's nuclear power plants also begin to experience serious malfunctions. After three or four days of the shutdown, civil unrest breaks out in many parts of Europe. Hospitals and prisons close. Thousands start dying. Successful military coups occur in three European countries (including Greece of course). Is the U.S. the next target for an electrical grid shutdown?

Who is responsible for creating this catastrophe – Russia, China, North Korea, Iran or some shadowy group of terrorists? One man may be able to find the answer, the Italian Piero Manzano. A former radical and talented hacker himself, Piero might have the capability of thwarting the perpetrators but unfortunately he's become the prime suspect in the eyes of Interpol and the European security services.

BLACKOUT is an impressive debut novel. The author is going to have a tough time writing an encore. Is it too much to hope for that governments and major power providers have taken action to prevent such a future blackout? Oops, Trump's first budget called for cutting the funding of measures designed to do so in the U.S. by half.

BEFORE THE FALL by Noah Hawley (Grand Central, \$26.00, 2016).

Winner of the T. Jefferson Parker Mystery Award and the Edgar Best Novel Award, this novel strongly reminded me of Tom Wolfe's **THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES** only set in current times. A large hedge fund operator, a TV network mogul, a vitriolic newscaster, the art world, the rivalry of government agencies, an orphaned child, and a true hero – are all mixed together in the mystery of what caused the crash of a private jet on a short flight from Martha's Vineyard to New York.

After writing three earlier novels, Hawley created and largely wrote the Fargo TV series. This experience perhaps contributed to upping the author's ability to write a prize-winning novel and mystery. I have to admit that all the hype generated by **BEFORE THE FALL** is largely merited.

THE NUREMBERG ENIGMA by Yves Bonaveno (Lark & Frogmouth Books, £11.99, 2016 trade paperback). This is a terrific thriller by a new U.K. author. At the end of WW II when the Third Reich has collapsed, Lieutenant Peter Birkett of the U.K. Army's newly formed T Force and Captain Elizaveta Terisova of the USSR's secret police, the NKGB, first sight each other at the entrance to Hitler's bunker in Berlin in May 1945. Later they would meet again on competing missions. The T Force was a special unit charged with the responsibility of retrieving valuable scientific, military and technical secrets and assets as the German armies retreated across Europe and ultimately in the British zone of occupied Germany itself. The challenge is to secure them before the Russians do so.

Terisova and her superior officer, Colonel Ivan Klimenko, were on a similar mission for the Russians, especially to obtain Germany's uranium stocks. In addition, they were ordered to find Hitler as Stalin was convinced that the charred remains found at the Reich Chancellery on May 5 were not those of the Führer.

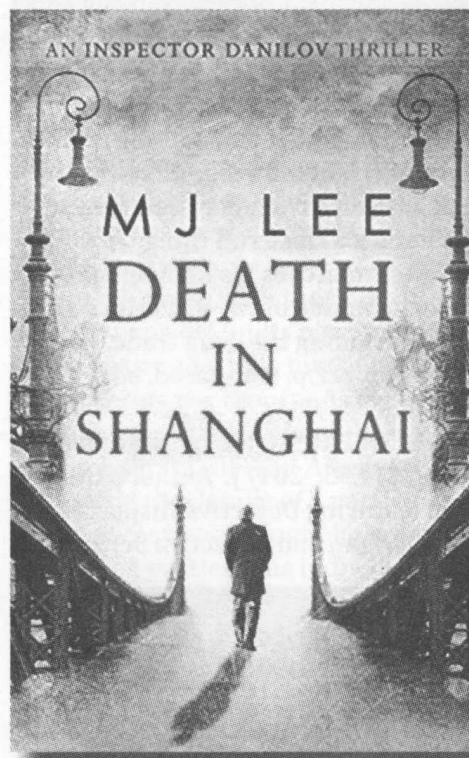
THE NUREMBERG ENIGMA covers the final days of the Third Reich in Hitler's bunker, the plight of Germans in defeat, Stalin's extermination of the kulak farming class in the region of the Volga Germans including Terisova's family, the successful efforts of

Peter's team in besting the Russians at expropriating valuable German assets, and the commencement of the Nuremberg trials of Germany's leading "war criminals".

Along the way, outside a large bombed mine shaft in the small German town of Kamen, Terisova captures one of the Doppelgänger's specially recruited and trained by Goebbels to impersonate the Führer. Except, Terisova is convinced that this is actually Hitler impersonating one of his doubles. Confirming the identity of this individual is obviously a matter of great importance to the Nuremberg trials.

Bonaveno is a wonderful storyteller. I greatly look forward to his next novel.

DEATH IN SHANGHAI by M. J.



Lee (HQ/Harper Collins, £7.99, 2017). Oh the joys of discovering the start of a new series by a talented author. This one features Inspector Pyotr Danilov, formerly of the Russian Imperial Police in Minsk and then Scotland Yard before taking his current position with the Shanghai Municipal Police in 1926.

Originally founded as a commercial center to facilitate trade between the Chinese and Western powers, in the 1920s and early 1930s Shanghai became known as the "Paris of the East", attracting large numbers of White Russian émigrés and other refugees from

many parts of the world who were drawn by the freedom, opportunities and high life the city seemed to offer, especially in its International Settlement and the French Concession.

In 1928, Danilov and his half Chinese half Scottish assistant Detective Constable Strachan are drawn into investigating a series of murders in Shanghai with many similarities to how each victim was killed, including having different Chinese characters carved into their chests. Even after five such murders are discovered, the Shanghai authorities do not want to admit that a serial killer is on the loose in their city. Treated as outsiders by most of the Shanghai police force, Danilov and Strachan are forced to resort to their own unorthodox methods in pursuing the perpetrator.

Lee paints a vivid picture of this period of history and the city of Shanghai. Plus, in Danilov and Strachan he has created two wonderful characters for this series.

EASY MOTION TOURIST by Leye Adenle (Cassava Republic, £8.99, 2016). One of the reasons I enjoy reading so many mysteries and thrillers set in international locales is that they expose me to parts of the world that I will never experience firsthand, giving me a better understanding of the history, people, customs, and ways things operate there. Nigerian writer Leye Adenle sets his debut novel in Lagos, the largest metropolitan city in Africa with some 20 million plus inhabitants, and provides readers with a full-on, high voltage, on-the-edge exposé of life in Nigeria.

First of all, it's almost impossible to know whom you can trust in the country. Corruption is rampant at all levels, poverty is endemic everywhere, most government and police officials are on the take, public services are dilapidated, divisive tribal customs still are prevalent, crime of all types flourishes. While illegal in Nigeria, large numbers of women are forced to resort to prostitution in order to support themselves and their families with no protection available from clients who cause them bodily harm.

Guy Collins, a British hack journalist, is sent to Nigeria to cover the

upcoming national elections. Showing poor judgment, Collins finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time – the only white person outside a local bar beside the mutilated dead body of a girl. The police quickly arrive, arrest Collins and take him to a police station with dozens of other “suspects”. After being interrogated by the police chief Inspector Ibrahim, Collins is surprised to be released at the request of Amaka, a local guardian angel of Lagos prostitutes who hopes Collins can help her stop the body parts trade that is causing working girls to disappear. What follows is a pounding ride through the highs and mostly lows of Lagos.

As the saying goes, this novel is not for the faint of heart. But Adenle proves that he is an accomplished storyteller.

NIGHT SCHOOL by Lee Child (Delacorte Press, \$28.99, 2016). In the 21st book in this series, the author takes Reacher back in time to 1996 when he is a Major in the Army’s Military Police. Having just finished a successful overseas assignment, Reacher is ordered to go back to school. Except this is a cover for a secret National Security Council mission. Reacher, a senior CIA analyst and a top level FBI agent are ordered to work together to get to the bottom of a message intercepted from a Jihadist sleeper cell in Hamburg, Germany. A terrorist courier was overheard there to say, “the American wants 100 million dollars.” The circumstances all indicate that this situation poses a serious credible threat.

The assignment is simple – who is the American, what is he selling and can whatever it is be captured before it falls into the hands of the terrorist group planning to use it. Reacher, the CIA analyst and the FBI agent are given carte blanche resources to find the answers before a major terrorist incident occurs. Reacher wisely asks his old colleague Sergeant Frances Neagley to back him up.

I’ve read most of the books in the Reacher series. This is one of the best. The scene with 36 year-old Reacher interrogating an American two-star general is priceless. Lee Child shows every sign of continuing to operate at the top of his game.

TRIGGERFISH by Dietrich Kalteis

(ECW Press, \$14.95, 2016 trade paperback Toronto). Author’s third crime novel is set in Vancouver and British Columbia’s Lower Mainland. Ex-cop Rene Beckman (“Beck” for short) lives on his 32-foot yacht Triggerfish. When he takes a Pamela Anderson look-alike girlfriend into a quiet cove for some late evening lovemaking on Triggerfish, they realize they are being observed in the act by the crew of a small submarine. That makes them inconvenient witnesses who need to be eliminated by the members of a Mexican drug cartel and their Canadian biker partners in the midst of doing a big drugs-for-guns swap using the sub. Add to this mix a female terrorist on everyone’s most wanted list who is being recruited to join the Mexicans. It turns out she had knifed Beck when he was still on the police force in an earlier incident.

Packed with non-stop brawling, shooting and mayhem, nothing seems to go right for either side. Fortunately, Beck has some friends to help him survive but it’s a close run thing.

Kalteis matches his knowledge of the underside of the B.C. criminal world, including the drug trade, with a talent for crisp, fast-paced, edgy writing.

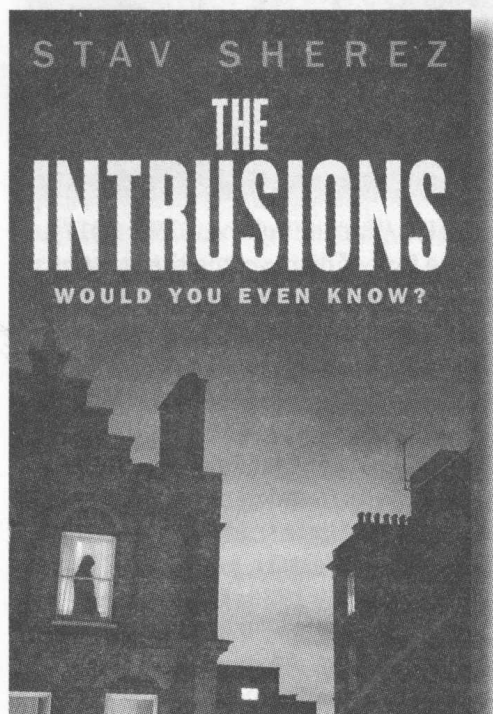
THE INTRUSIONS by Stav Sherez (Faber, \$14.95, 2017). Author’s third novel featuring Detective Inspector Jack Carrigan and Detective Sergeant

Geneva Miller in London describes some of the terrifying ways that hackers (almost always young males) use the Internet and social media to control and destroy the lives of targeted individuals (invariably young females), turning their smart phones, laptops and other electronic devices against them with Remote Access Technology (“Ratting”). In extreme cases, the victims may end up being drugged, raped and murdered or commit suicide. Often these hackers form online communities in the dark web, the unconscious part of the Internet, where they trade their so-called Net “slaves”. The book’s title refers to such Internet-driven intrusions that wreck lives.

A drugged-up hysterical young woman shows up at the police station to report that her friend Abby has been abducted and that the perpetrator said he was coming back “to claim” her. Later that week, Abby is found murdered in an abandoned house occupied only by the homeless. Both girls had lived in the same London youth hostel. Abby’s death has been staged in such a manner that Carrigan and Miller soon suspect they are dealing with a serial killer or someone similarly demented. Their investigation eventually reveals that other connected murders have occurred.

Sherz is a brilliant storyteller. I didn’t find the ending especially satisfactory but it seemed to indicate that the author intends to continue this compelling series. Again, this is another novel that is not for the faint hearted.

RADIANT ANGEL by Nelson DeMille (Grand Central, \$28.00/\$14.95, 2015). The seventh in the author’s John Corey series. Former NYPD Homicide Detective Corey has been demoted to serve under contract in the FBI’s Diplomatic Surveillance Group in New York. Corey’s current assignment is to work with FBI Special Agent Tess Faraday in maintaining full-time surveillance of Vasily Petrov, known to be a colonel in the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (the SVR), equivalent to the CIA. Petrov is officially stationed in New York as a Russian Deputy Representative to the United Nations for Human Rights Issues but given his background it is obvious that Petrov is here for some deadly purpose.



Forgive me for disclosing some of the plot but there are quite a few predictable elements in this novel. Of course, Corey and Faraday lose Petrov, of course Petrov is on a secret mission to cause massive harm to the U.S., of course Corey and Faraday discover what Petrov is up to, of course they thwart Petrov at the very last minute, and of course Corey and Faraday end up getting romantically involved. The world is saved (at least New York is), the bad guys are no more, and Corey is vindicated for breaking all the rules of his agency.

Published in the U.K. as **A QUIET END**, this is not one of DeMille's strongest novels.

OUT OF BOUNDS by Val McDermid (Atlantic Monthly, \$25.00, 2016).

Author's 30th novel and the 4th in her Detective Chief Inspector Karen Pirie series. Pirie is head of Police Scotland's Historic Cases Unit. Mainly set in Edinburgh, **OUT OF BOUNDS** has Pirie ultimately investigating six unsolved murders, including one going back 20 years ago and four resulting from a small plane bombing in 1964. Pirie, still grieving over the death of her partner, is depicted as a strong, resourceful, bright investigator with a network of talented supporting associates. Despite having obstructive superior officers, Pirie's strength of character and reputation for solving daunting cold cases enables her to power on. Twice Pirie survives attempts on her life during the course of the investigation. Hers is not an easy job.

Although I thoroughly enjoyed this novel, I couldn't help but notice that most of its male characters were slow-witted and bumbling while most of the females in it were capable, engaging, sympathetic individuals. Perhaps that's the way it really is.

RAGE by Simon Conway (Hodder & Stoughton 2006 hardcover). Author's second novel, introducing Jonah Said, a British Army Major born in the U.S. of a Guyana mother and a Palestinian father, raised in Scotland, and war-weary from combat in some of the world's most vicious battlefields. To say that Said is not a model soldier is an understatement as trouble follows him everywhere. After Said is accused of



brutally abducting the boyfriend of his ex-wife, the Army banishes him to the Demilitarized Zone between Kuwait and Iraq to serve as a UN observer in 2003 just before the outbreak of the Second Gulf War.

Upon his arrival in the Zone, Said is taken to an off-limits bar by a fellow UN observer who tells him of his role in inspecting the thousands of 40-foot containers scattered about the area after the First Gulf War. After revealing to Said the details of a particularly valuable container sought by many competing parties, this individual has his throat cut and Said is imprisoned by a gang of Russian soldiers.

From here on, **RAGE** thrusts Said into a series of hellholes in the chaotic environment of Kuwait and Saddam's Iraq just before the Americans and their Coalition allies storm into Baghdad. On-the-make Americans, Brits, Russians and assorted Arabs are engaged in an underground battle over who can benefit the most from corruption, the use of armed force, and treachery in taking advantage of this situation. Unfortunately for Said, most of them believe he possesses secret knowledge that is the key to gaining a fortune. Along the way, Said gets shot, knifed twice, beaten, tortured and has his vehicle blown up by an IED. Can he survive and find redeeming love at the same time?

Author's sequel to **RAGE**, **A LOYAL SPY**, also featured Jonah Said and was the winner of the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award. Conway is a brilliant master of authentic thrillers concerning war, espionage and politics. He is a former British Army Officer and international aid worker who has cleared landmines and other hazardous debris of war in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus.

CRUSADER'S CROSS by James Lee Burke (Simon & Schuster, \$25.95, 2005).

This is a classic Dave Robicheaux novel, the 14th in the series, with many of the standard elements present in the others – a serial killer whose DNA is not in any database, a powerful wealthy family clan some of whose members are dysfunctional, the Louisiana mob, crooked cops, hired hitmen, bullies, the prevalent racism of the Deep South, Dave being back with the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Department, Dave fighting to stay with AA and off alcohol, Dave going on major benders with no recollection of what happened during them, Dave getting beat up, Dave shooting assailants, Dave having flashbacks to fighting in Vietnam, and Dave's old friend Clete Purcel backing him up. And, as usual, the author weaves everything together with his uniquely poetic style of storytelling that marks Burke as the premier crime writer of his time.

Nevertheless, I prefer the earlier novels when Dave still had his baitshop and boat rental business with Batist and was living with his then wife Bootsie and young adopted daughter Alafair.

THE ONE MAN by Andrew Gross (Minotaur Books, \$26.99, 2016).

The OSS mission for the Polish American intelligence officer Nathan Blum – to infiltrate the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp in Poland posing as a prisoner and in the next two days to locate and extract the physicist Alfred Mendl, one among thousands of prisoners, whose knowledge is critical to the success of the Manhattan Project, the American hydrogen bomb program. Unfortunately, a German Abwehr officer has deduced that the coded messages sent via BBC Radio to the Polish underground mean that someone is go-

ing to try to enter the camp. He intends to determine who and why. Meanwhile, Mendl knows he is dying and becomes close friends with another prisoner, Leo, a teenage chess prodigy with a photographic memory.

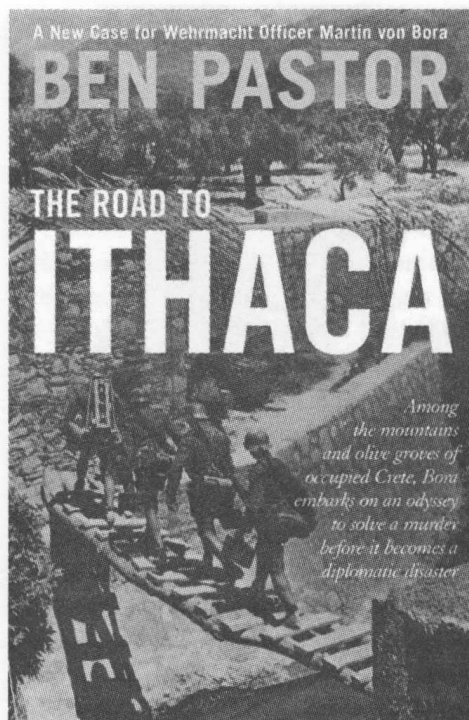
In addition to the suicidal mission itself, this impressive novel illustrates the barbarity of the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany, the scientific complexity of the Manhattan Project, and the way that the finest of qualities can overcome the worst of qualities in the direst of times.

THE WRONG SIDE OF GOODBYE by Michael Connelly (Little Brown, \$29.00, 2016). The author's 23rd Harry Bosch novel has a dual track plot. An 85-year old billionaire Whitney Vance hires Bosch to find out if he has an heir from the Mexican girl he abandoned when she became pregnant and he was a university student. Powerful interests will do anything to prevent Bosch from succeeding. Bosch is also working on a non-paying basis as a part-time detective at the small San Fernando Police Department after being forced to leave the LAPD. Bosch's main assignment there is to work on unsolved major crimes, including the Screen Cutter serial rapist case.

Bosch's search for Vance's possible heir takes him back to the Vietnam War, evoking memories of his own time spent there as a tunnel rat. When Vance dies suddenly, Bosch retains his half-brother Mickey Haller to handle some of the resulting legal problems. Meanwhile, the Screen Cutter rapist abducts one of Bosch's close associates and he feels responsible for letting it happen.

THE WRONG SIDE OF GOODBYE demonstrates why Connelly continues to be regarded as one of the premier American crime writers of his generation.

THE ROAD TO ITHACA by Ben Pastor (Bitter Lemon Press, \$14.95, 2017). This is the fifth book in the author's series featuring Major Martin von Bora, an aristocratic counter-intelligence officer in the German Army. It takes place in Crete in the spring of 1941 shortly after it had been occupied by the Germans following fierce resistance by the British Army and Greek partisans. Bora was originally



sent there to procure 60 bottles of Crete Dafni and Mandilaria wine to bring back to Moscow as a present for NKVD chief Lavrenti Beria. Bora is aware, however, that Hitler's invasion of Russia is planned to commence in three weeks.

Upon arriving at the Greek island, Bora is also assigned to investigating a possible war crime that may have been committed by German paratroopers. A Swiss national with ties to Himmler and his household staff had been found shot to death in their villa and a British prisoner of war had turned over incriminating photos taken at the scene of the murders.

A police chief constable from the Crete town of Iraklion offers to assist Bora in his investigation. The Germans coerce a female American archaeologist familiar with the interior of the island into serving as Bora's guide as he seeks to contact various parties who may have first-hand knowledge of what happened.

The pace of this novel suffers from an excessive amount of detail regarding the history, topography and archaeology of Crete as well as Bora's youth growing up on an aristocratic estate in East Prussia. This is partly redeemed by its impressive ending.

THE TURNCOAT by Alan Murray (Freight Books, £9.99, 2016 trade paperback Glasgow).

Australian author's second novel, mainly set in Glasgow and the west of Scotland in 1941. Two nights of devastating pinpoint bombing of the Scottish industrial center of Clydebank by the Luftwaffe indicate that German informants in the area directed the targeted assault. Major George Maclean and Sergeant Danny Inglis of British Military Intelligence are directed to find those responsible. Under the cover of being a journalist, Captain Finola Fraser joins their team. After a prime suspect is found murdered, it appears that someone high up on the inside may be assisting the Germans.

Shortly afterwards, Rudolf Hess, Hitler's Deputy, lands his plane in a field in Scotland and demands to be taken to Whitehall so he can meet with some English individuals "in the highest places" who he believes will back Britain and the Third Reich joining together to fight the Communists. It is obvious that he is mentally unsound. Maclean, Fraser and Inglis are asked to help guard Hess when he is taken to be held in custody at a remote Scottish country estate. Meanwhile, the local German agents involved in the Clydebank bombing are ordered by their masters in Berlin to eliminate Hess. Someone on the British side discloses to them where Hess can be found.

THE TURNCOAT is an engaging authentic wartime thriller. Hopefully, the trio of Maclean, Fraser and Inglis will be featured in a sequel.

CODENAME APHRODITE by Charles S. Faddis (Orion Strategic Services, \$14.95, 2011 trade paperback Edgewater, Maryland).

In 2001, former CIA operations officer Bill Boyle returns to Athens to take down the long-standing Greek terrorist group "17 November" responsible for killing his wife. Previously, 17 November had assassinated the CIA's station chief in 1975. Boyle recruits some of his former local assets to join him in terminating the leaders of 17 November. One of these assets goes by the name of Aphrodite. It is apparent that certain members of the Greek establishment have sanctioned the continued existence of 17 November despite its periodic assassinations of Greek politicians,

policemen and media figures as well as certain non-Greek individuals. The CIA is totally opposed to Boyle's operation as he is regarded as an out-of-control cowboy.

The author spins a realistic fictional tale of the workings of the Greek terrorist group *17 November* and Boyle's attempt to seek revenge for its killing of his wife. Faddis capably captures the laid-back mentality of Greeks, the current mood of the country and the corrupt character of many of Greece's politicians. He is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and has written two non-fiction books that are highly critical of the CIA and the American intelligence community – *Beyond Repair: The Decline and Fall of the CIA* (2009) and *Willful Neglect: The Dangerous Illusion of Homeland Security* (2010). In addition to self-publishing *CODENAME APHRODITE*, Faddis has published two sequels featuring Boyle and Aphrodite, *BARBAROSSA* (2011) and *CAFFA* (2013).

TIME HEALS NO WOUNDS by Hendrik Falkenberg (AmazonCrossing, \$14.95, 2016). German author's first Baltic Sea crime novel to be published in English. Rookie detective Johannes "Hannes" Niehaus is paired with old-timer detective Fritz Janssen to investigate the suspicious drowning of the female CEO of a major German drug company. The investigation soon involves her brother and a missing young woman as well as the victim's father who has become a mute reclusive painter. It turns out the predecessor company had close incriminating links to the Third Reich which have been covered up.

The second book in this promising series, *THE NORTHERN CROSS*, was published in English later in 2016. It also features detective "Hannes" Niehaus.

COME BARBARIANS by Todd Babiak (Harper Collins, \$8.00, 2013 trade paperback Toronto). Author's first novel featuring Christopher Kruse, part owner of a Toronto-based security company. Kruse moves to the south of France with his wife Evelyn and almost four-year-old daughter Lily to attempt to start a new life together. Evelyn becomes heavily involved in working as

a consultant for a senior Front National politician. Shortly after that individual kills Lily in a DUI accident following a rally, he and his wife are found murdered and Evelyn being the chief suspect disappears. Kruse realizes that parts of the French political establishment, various levels of the police and a Corsican crime family are prepared to do anything to obstruct his search for Evelyn.

COME BARBARIANS is an exceptionally well-written thriller as is the sequel, *SON OF FRANCE*, published in 2016. The descriptions of the French, Paris and other parts of France are superb.

DARK WATER by Parker Bilal (Bloomsbury, \$28.00, 2017). This is the author's sixth novel featuring the former Sudanese policeman Makana, now living in Cairo as a private investigator. While the first five were set in Cairo, this one is mainly set in Istanbul where Makana was sent by a British Secret Intelligence Service agent to bring an Iraqi biochemical scientist out of Turkey into British custody. The scientist is hiding somewhere in Istanbul, insists that he will only deal with Makana, and claims he has knowledge of the whereabouts of Makana's daughter Nasra who was supposedly killed together with his wife Muna in a car accident while fleeing Sudan 15 years ago. Various other undercover parties are

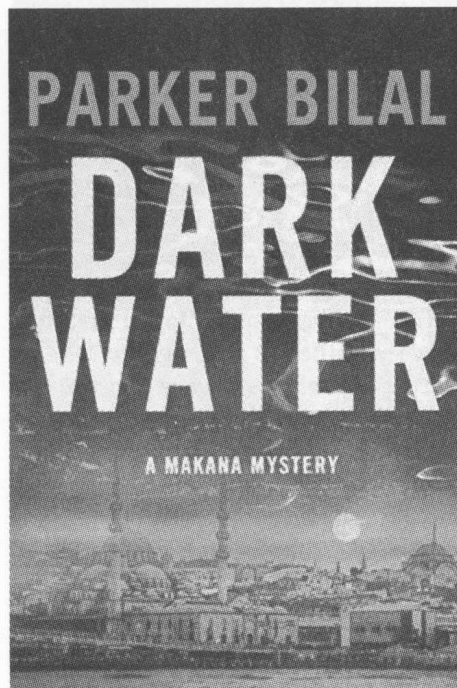
also hunting for the scientist, including the Mossad. It doesn't help matters that Makana becomes the chief suspect in two separate murders in Istanbul after his arrival there.

DARK WATER is a superb mystery novel in every respect, including the textured way that Bilal captures the complexity and essence of Istanbul. Nevertheless, I think it's high time the author 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.

TERMINAL by Andrew Vachss (Pantheon 2007 hardcover/Vintage Crime/Black Lizard 2008 trade paperback). One of the author's best novels in his Burke series. A dying ex-con comes to Burke for help in putting the squeeze on three extremely wealthy businessmen who raped and murdered a 13-year-old girl over 30 years ago but were never linked to the crime. Burke agrees to do so with the support of his indomitable crew of Clarence, Gigi, Michelle, Mama, Max, the Mole, the Prof, Gateman and others. The ask is for a lot of money that the targets are not going to hand over easily.

In telling the story, Vachss skewers the hypocrisy of a wide range of subjects, including zoos, and describes many of the failings of the U.S. justice and prison system. Burke's subterranean world is dark but not without a certain amount of redemption. What's a summer without reading at least one gritty Vachss novel. Plus, if you're expecting to spend some time in prison, this would be an excellent primer for doing so.

ZERO AT THE BONE by David Whish-wilson (Viking/Penguin 2013 trade paperback Melbourne). Author's second Frank Swann novel following *LINE OF SIGHT* (2010), set largely in Perth, Australia during the days of the mining boom in 1979. Ex-detective Swann is hired by a beautiful widow to probe the suicide of her geologist husband. Doing so, places Swann in the crosshairs of bent cops, corrupt politicians, mobsters and crooked casino/racetrack operators as they all attempt to cash in on a new gold exploration play. Nevertheless, Swann proves to be a hard man to stop despite many close



calls that place his family, friends and himself in jeopardy.

ZERO AT THE BONE is a dynamite thriller. It's all there – high stakes greed, power, revenge, wide-spread corruption, murder and a head-snapping ending. The third Frank Swann novel **OLD SCORES** was published as a trade paperback in the U.K. in late 2016. The author David Whish-Wilson is a terrific storyteller who deserves much greater recognition.

HERETICS by Leonardo Padura (Bitter Lemon Press, \$17.50, 2017). An epic novel that opens in 1939 with the ship *MS Saint Louis* carrying 937 Jewish refugees being turned away by Cuba, the U.S. and Canada and forced to return to Europe and the Nazis. Somehow a small portrait by Rembrandt left the ship in the Havana harbor and ended up in the hands of one of the officials who had sold fraudulent visas for the entry of these refugees into Cuba. Some 68 years later, Mario Conde investigates the trail of this painting in Cuba, the murder of the Cuban who had possessed it, and the subsequent disappearance of a young emo girl. But this is just the overlay to the novel. The main subjects concern Jewish culture, history and persecutions; Rembrandt's life as a painter in Amsterdam; and the disheartening and grinding experience of living in "revolutionary Cuba" as ex-

emplified by Conde and his small band of lifelong Havana friends and family.

Weighing in at 528 pages, this is definitely not a typical Mario Conde mystery story. At times, it seems that Hilary Mantel had taken over the writing of the historical content of the novel (which may be a compliment). Perhaps, Padura didn't want to omit a single detail of his research. But overall, my favorite part was the author's characterization of the formidable genius Rembrandt.

BLOWBACK by Peter May (Poisoned Pen, \$24.95, 2011 hardcover/Quercus 2015 paperback London).

The 5th novel in the author's wonderful Enzo Files series set in France. Enzo Macleod is continuing to investigate French cold cases, this time one that involves the murder seven years earlier of France's most famous chef, Marc Frayssé. The body was found nearby the Auberge Frayssé, the family's three-star Michelin restaurant and small hotel located in the French countryside, a four-hour drive from Paris. It turns out that nothing is as it seems regarding Marc's relationship with his brother, wife, and colleagues. At the same time, Enzo is experiencing his own family problems.

Early in the investigation, Enzo invites an attractive young Gendarme to join him for dinner at the fabled Auberge Frayssé. The description of the cuisine, course by course, and the accompanying fine wines represents about the best meal ever consumed in mystery fiction. In addition to being a marvelous storyteller, it's clear that May is a full-fledged gourmet and wine connoisseur. The sixth and apparently final Enzo Files novel, **CAST IRON**, was published in 2017.

Confession – the books included in my Greek reading roundup are usually just those books that I enjoyed reading. Books that failed to hold my interest or didn't appeal to me were omitted, admittedly something that is highly subjective.

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.

The Shamus Award Winners 2017

Best PI Hardcover WHERE IT HURTS

by Reed Farrel Coleman - Winner

The Graveyard of the Hesperides
by Lindsey Davis

Fields Where They Lay

by Timothy Hallinan

With 6 You Get Wally

by Al Lamanda

The Stardom Affair

by Robert S. Levinson

Best First PI Novel IQ by Joe Ide - Winner

Fever City by Tim Baker

Deep Six by D. P. Lyle

The Second Girl by David Swinson

Soho Sins by Richard Vine

Best Original PI Paperback

THE PERPLEXING THEFT OF THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

by Vaseem Khan - Winner

The Detective and the Chinese

High-Fin by Michael Craven

Hold Me, Babe by O'Neil De Noux

The Knife Slipped

by Erle Stanley Gardner

My Bad by Manuel Ramos

The Eye Lifetime Achievement Award

Jerry Kennealy

