

Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



Larry Gandle
Barry vs. Edgar
Awards

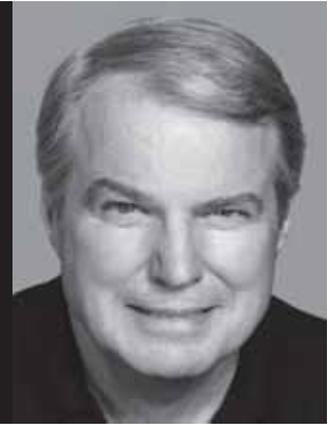
Best New
British-Irish
Crime Writers

SUSIE STEINER
A New Star

My Greek Reading Feast

2018

By *Steele Curry*



On May 31, my wife Judy and I arrived back in Skiathos, Greece to start our annual three-month summer holiday on this gorgeous island. We have been coming here for over 40 years but not always for this long. The swimming in the sea is divine, there are many beautiful beaches, and the local tavernas and restaurants have terrific food and Greek rosé wine. The majority of my time, however, at our Skiathos home (which we call *Lizard in the Sun*) is spent reading mysteries and thrillers on the terrace overlooking the Aegean Sea. Here are some of the books I enjoyed reading this summer:

AN AEGEAN APRIL by Jeffrey Siger (Poisoned Pen Press 2018 hardcover/trade paperback). To launch myself into a Greek frame of mind, I follow a practice of always starting my Skiathos summer reading binge with the newest novel by Jeffrey Siger in his impressive series featuring Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis in charge of the Greek Police's Special Crimes Unit responsible for cases of national concern and corruption. Each of the author's nine thrillers is set in a different region or location in Greece of historical and cultural significance.

AN AEGEAN APRIL is mainly set on the northeastern Aegean island of Lesbos. As a result of its close proximity to Turkey, this island receives the majority of the refugees seeking to pass through Greece in the hope of finding a better life in the more prosperous northern EU countries. Over the past five years, the enormous

number of refugees has swamped the efforts of the Greek government and other caretakers to provide them with adequate food, shelter and other basic services while they wait to be processed. This flood of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other impoverished countries is being fueled by human traffickers, smugglers and corrupt government officials.

A prominent Greek ship-owner, Mihalis Volandes, is determined to promote a plan for curtailing the lucrative refugee trafficking trade. When he is found gruesomely murdered with a sword, the police falsely arrest a local aid worker for the crime. The NGO employer of this individual convinces Kaldis to investigate this case and find the real assassin. To do so, Kaldis and his crew need the assistance of Turkish police officials, the head of the NGO refugee organization, and a local Greek police commander. Along the way, readers are exposed to the history, culture and physical beauty of this part of Greece, as well as the magnitude of the country's refugee crisis.

This author is amazingly knowledgeable about Greece and carefully researches the background for each of his novels to make them both entertaining and enlightening.

BESIDE THE SYRIAN SEA by James Wolff (Bitter Lemon Press 2018 hardcover/trade paperback U.K./U.S.). This is a remarkable debut thriller set in Beirut and northern Syria with a strong supporting cast that includes the British Secret Intel-

ligence Service, the CIA, ISIS, Hezbollah and a few heroic private citizens. Jonas, a young SIS intelligence analyst in London, learns that his father has been kidnapped in Syria by ISIS who is demanding a \$10 million payment for his release. As the British government has a strict no-ransom payment policy for dealing with such terrorist demands, Jonas decides to go to Beirut on his own to attempt to save his father. While Jonas has never been a field agent, he has assimilated enough about how the treacherous world of espionage operates to mount an audacious rescue attempt despite the opposition of the British and Americans as well as the challenges of negotiating with Hezbollah and ISIS.

Wolff is a superb writer. He offers a clear-eyed description of the foibles of the spy trade and the turmoil of the Middle East. I can't wait for his next novel.

THE DYING LIGHT by Henry Porter (Orion 2009 hardcover/2010 trade paperback London). A British Prime Minister and his inner cabinet become co-opted by a powerful American corporate chieftain into surreptitiously implementing a national super surveillance system at enormous cost without any public disclosure or the approval of Parliament. This system, code-named *Deep Truth*, watches over and records all aspects of the lives of the country's citizens without regard for their right to any privacy or civil liberties.

A former high level member of the British intelligence establishment,

David Eyam, decides to expose this unauthorized invasive security system, recognizing that the government of the day and its corporate backers will resort to any measures, including murder, to prevent this from happening. Fortunately, Eyam has created an extensive network of private individuals, known as the Bell Ringers, who share his concerns and are willing to take great risks in helping him bring down *Deep Truth*.

Another Eyam ally is former lover Kate Lockhart who has become a highly successful New York lawyer after serving as a U.K. intelligence officer. Lockhart returns to England to attend Eyam's funeral, discovering that she was named as his sole heir. Reluctantly, Lockhart decides to take up Eyam's mission, knowing that the odds of success are small.

This novel was published exactly 60 years after George Orwell's **NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR**. It is deeply disturbing that the *Deep Truth* type of security system described in **THE DYING LIGHT** is becoming a reality in Britain, the U.S. and elsewhere. Even more worrisome is that the power of such systems is now being steadily enhanced by the use of artificial intelligence. Orwell doubts that this will result in a happy ending.

Henry Porter is an extremely talented author of five espionage-related novels, including **BRANDENBURG** which received the CWA Ian Fleming Steel Dagger for Best Thriller Award. His next novel, **FIREFLY**, was published by Quercus in June.

SHE RIDES SHOTGUN by Jordan Harper (Ecco 2017 hardcover/2018 trade paperback). An impressive debut novel about Nate, an ex-con, who takes his 11-year-old daughter Polly on a wild, scary road trip to avoid the two of them being captured by the police or killed by the powerful Aryan Steel prison gang who has issued a death warrant for ending their lives. A few days earlier the gang succeeded in having Nate's ex-wife and her boyfriend murdered under the same warrant. While Nate and Polly had spent little time together previously, Polly quickly needs to gain many

of her father's hard skills of fighting, shooting and stealing or they'll have no chance of surviving. Fortunately, Nate is a compelling mentor for the innocent Polly. This is a tale of a father/daughter relationship like no other. Get on board.

EAST OF HOUNSLOW by Khurram Rahman (HQ 2017 trade paperback London). A brilliant, insightful debut novel, introducing Jay Qasim, a young British-born Muslim man living with his mother in West London. Jay goes to his mosque every Friday but otherwise pretty well ignores everything else that being a practicing Muslim requires. He enjoys life and earns enough to buy a used BMW by low level drug dealing. When his mosque is vandalized, Jay joins a small group of hotheads who want to retaliate by attacking some Kafirs, a.k.a. white Londoners. This sets up Jay to be coerced by MI5 into becoming an undercover spy in its quest to locate and capture The Teacher, MI5's highest priority target and the leader of the terrorist group Ghurfat-al-Mudarris thought to be responsible for many attacks against the West.

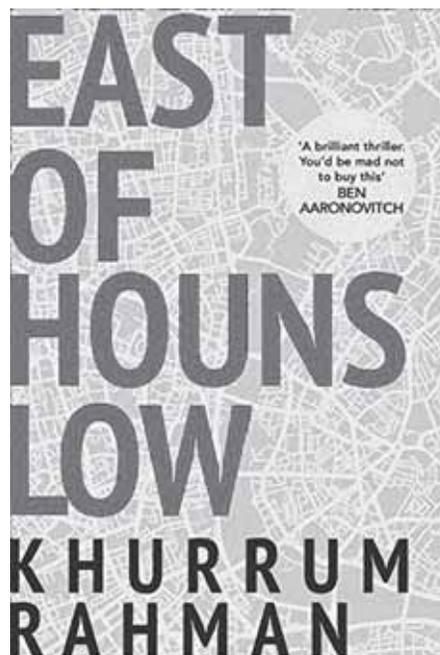
The strength of this novel is its depiction of a young Muslim man struggling to find his place in the world amid the lure of finding meaning in life through becoming a jihadi terrorist in the face of so much antagonistic anti-Muslim "noise" propagated by the

media, politicians and other Western influence makers. Readers follow Jay as he undergoes the recruitment process led by a radicalized Imam's teachings, attends a terrorist training camp in Pakistan, has a startling meeting with The Teacher, and tries to foil the execution of a London mass-shooting attack by his jihadi cohorts. A backdrop to the novel illustrates how the way in which the West is waging its war against jihadi terrorism is counter-productive and creates a circle of violence that only begets more violence.

Apparently, the author intends to write a series of thrillers featuring Jay Qasim with the second book, **HOME-GROWN HERO**, scheduled to be published in November 2018.

THE WITNESS by Simon Kernick (Century 2016 hardcover/Arrow Books 2016 paperback London). Detective Inspector Ray Mason of the London Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command is called to a crime scene where a long-standing MI5 informant and his wife have been brutally murdered in their bedroom. Complicating things is the fact that a female witness, Jane Kinnear, was hiding under the bed when it happened. Shortly afterwards, two police were shot in their vehicle escorting Kinnear to the hospital. Then, three men attempted to ambush Mason just outside of his apartment, resulting in Mason killing two of them and capturing the third assailant. Meanwhile, MI5 receives reliable intelligence that a major London terrorist attack by the Islamic State is imminent and a notorious international assassin called The Wraith is somehow involved.

Mason concludes that all of these events are related. While MI5 believes it knows the identity of the London-based mastermind of the planned terrorist attack, there is insufficient evidence to hold him under arrest. Can Mason thwart this planned attack? Can he prevent The Wraith from eliminating the key witness Kinnear? Can she be trusted? Will Mason be terminated from the London police force for using seri-



ously underhanded methods to get results?

THE WITNESS is one of the author's best thrillers.

PAST CRIMES by Glen Erik Hamilton (William Morrow 2015 hardcover/Faber & Faber 2015 trade paperback/William Morrow 2016 paperback). Author's debut novel, introducing Van Shaw. An Army Ranger and former thief, Van Shaw returns to his hometown of Seattle and finds his grandfather Dono lying on the floor of his house near dead from a gunshot to his head. The police regard Van Shaw as the prime suspect, especially as dead bodies start to show up almost wherever Van Shaw goes. Parts of the book flash back to when Van Shaw was growing up under the mentorship of his grandfather after his mother died. Dono is a master thief who may have made a serious mistake in trying to pull off one last heist.

PAST CRIMES won the Anthony, Macavity and Strand Magazine Critics Awards for Best First Novel and was nominated for a Barry Award. The second book in the Van Shaw series is **HARD COLD WINTER** published in 2016 and the third is **EVERY DAY ABOVE GROUND** published in 2017. The fourth book in the series, **A FAST FULL DARK**, is scheduled to be published in January 2019.

CAUSE OF DEATH by Peter Ritchie (Black & White Publishing 2017 trade paperback Edinburgh). Author's first Detective Chief Inspector Grace Macallan novel set first in Belfast and then in Edinburgh where Macallan is attempting to rebuild her career as the second-in-charge of a newly formed Major Crimes Team. TCT's first investigation concerns a double-murder burglary which may be connected to a large number of similar robberies and then its second investigation is of a brutal serial killer of prostitutes. Macallan is a formidable character, the plot is gripping, yes gripping, and the villains are dastardly.

The second book of this excellent series, **EVIDENCE OF DEATH**, and the third, **SHORES OF DEATH**, were both published in 2018.

BABY BLUE by Pol Koutsakis (Bitter Lemon Press 2018 trade paperback).



The author's second novel featuring the Greek hitman (he prefers to be thought of as a "caretaker") Stratos Gazis and his three closest Athenian friends – a homicide cop called Drag, a transgender sex worker and a long-standing girlfriend of both Stratos and the cop. The setting is Athens circa 2015 when Greece is in the midst of a crippling depression in every possible respect.

A blind 14-year-old street orphan hires Stratos to find the killer of her adoptive father, a former investigative journalist who was murdered and robbed three years earlier in Athens. Shortly afterwards, Stratos has to take out three hired thugs who shot one of his prime informants in an attempt to abduct his new client. Meanwhile, Drag is pursuing a case involving the serial killing of paedophiles which somehow may be connected to the murder of the journalist. Stratos calls on the resources of his friends and underworld contacts in pursuing his assignment but at the same time has to deal with his own personal problems.

Koutsakis is a talented author. I hope that this series continues.

THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING by Bill Clinton and James Patterson (Little Brown & Knopf 2018 hard-

cover). Generally, I'm not a fan of co-authored books, including those of James Patterson. At first, I resisted but caved to all the hype and decided to read this book. Glad I did. Despite some preachy parts, this turned out to be a terrific thriller. The clever characterizations, the swift moving plot, the realistic machinations of the White House and the description of the over-whelming threat facing the U.S. all made **THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING** a compelling read. The president depicted gives new meaning to the term "calm under pressure". He couldn't be more removed from the current president.

THE SENTRY by Robert Crais (Putnam 2011 hardcover/Putnam 2012 paperback). It's hard to imagine Joe Pike being led astray but it does happen. Of course, there's a good chance that Pike will rectify things but usually he needs the help of his friend Elvis Cole to do that. The Bolivian drug cartel wants revenge for being ripped off for \$12 million. A psychopath hitman has tracked the culprits to Los Angeles. The Mexican Mafia known as *La Eme* would like to carve out a big piece of the lost money. Two FBI agents are watching the action unfold. Pike is playing Sir Galahad. There's going to be some casualties.

This is a perfect time for me to catch up on reading some Robert Crais novels that I missed reading in the past. He is such a fabulous author.

DARK ECHOES OF THE PAST by Ramón Díaz Eterovic (Amazon Crossing 2017 trade paperback). Chilean author's first novel to be translated into English. Private investigator Heredia is retained by the sister of a former prisoner of the Pinochet regime to look into his killing in what appeared to be a botched robbery. Heredia's investigation takes him back into the history of the 17 years of Pinochet's dictatorship when the secret police assassinated and tortured those who wanted Chile to return to democracy. The ones who lead this brutal repression were primarily in the Intelligence Directorate

of the military aided by a then complicit judiciary and other branches of the government. Surprisingly few of the perpetrators of this dark period in Chile's past have been brought to justice.

Heredia persists in peeling back the onion to uncover those responsible for the murder of his client's brother. It turns out that this individual had been conducting a long-standing personal investigation into those who had tortured him and other victims in that past dark era. Heredia is assisted in his search for the truth by a number of allies, including his cat Simenon.

It is apparent that the author of **DARK ECHOES OF THE PAST** was heavily influenced by Dashiell Hammett. He also demonstrates a deep affection for his hometown of Santiago.

DEATH NOTICE by Zhou Haohui (Doubleday 2018 hardcover/trade paperback). One of the most hyped thrillers of this summer. In Chengdu, China, the capital of the Sichuan Province, an elite task force of police detectives and specialists is formed to catch a vigilante by the name of Eumenides who murders individuals who have committed serious crimes but have successfully evaded justice for doing so. The task force finds that there is a link between the actions of Eumenides and an 18 year-old unsolved murder case that had involved some of the task force members. Meanwhile, Eumenides continues to commit a series of killings which the task force seems unable to prevent despite receiving advance notice of the name, date and time whenever a victim is targeted.

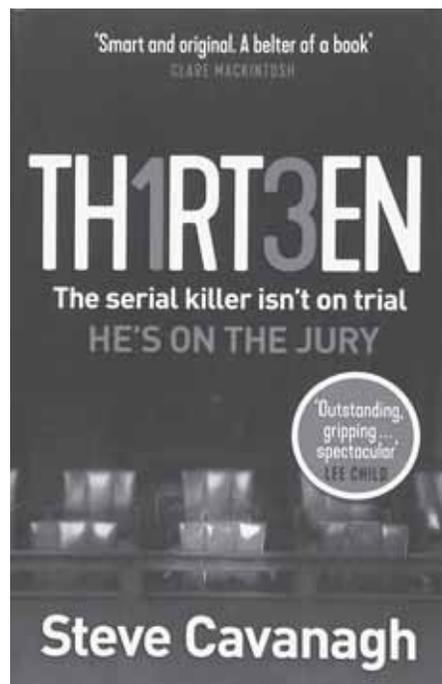
DEATH NOTICE is the first in a trilogy by this Chinese author. The online series of the *Death Notice Trilogy* apparently has received over 2.4 billion views in China. For me, **DEATH NOTICE** was a so-so read.

TURNSTONE by Graham Hurley (Orion 2000 hardcover/2001 paperback London). Author's first Detective Inspector Joe Faraday novel in this 12-book series set in Portsmouth, England. **TURNSTONE**

has Faraday investigating the disappearance of a man who he believes was murdered but has no evidence to support his instincts. Somehow a racing yacht destroyed in a storm was likely involved. Faraday's squad of detectives includes the incorrigible Detective Sergeant Paul Winter, an old-school policeman whose morality and methods are the total opposite of what Faraday believes in. Throughout the investigation Faraday is struggling with his own set of personal demons.

TURNSTONE is a police procedural packed with lots of depth, texture and solid characterizations. Hurley is an accomplished author of 31 mystery and thriller novels and four non-fiction books. His last three novels are superb espionage thrillers set during or just before WW II.

THIRTEEN by Steve Cavanagh (Orion 2018 trade paperback London). Author's fourth Eddie Flynn novel. Flynn, an ex-con artist turned lawyer, backs into becoming the lead lawyer in defending a young Hollywood star accused of killing his wife and his chief of security. The two murder victims were found lying nude together on a bed in the star's New York apartment. Most of the evidence indicates that the star committed the crime.



The author reveals early on that the actual perpetrator is a long-time serial killer whose MO is killing individuals, framing someone for their murders and then finding a way to insert himself on to the jury in the subsequent trial of the wrongly accused persons to help insure they receive a guilty verdict.

As was the case with the earlier Flynn novels, **THIRTEEN's** plot zips along, the dialogue is masterful, the court scenes are brilliant and Flynn continues to be an irresistible character. Cavanagh is a wonderful author. I hope that this series has a long run.

FIREFLY by Henry Porter (Quercus 2018 hardcover/Mysterious Press 2018 hardcover). Young refugee boy flees Syria, makes his way across Turkey, arrives in Greece and then crosses into the Balkans while being pursued by Islamic State terrorists. His goal is to obtain permission for his family to leave Syria and settle together in Germany. Britain's Secret Intelligence Service hires Paul Samson, an international specialist in finding missing persons, to locate the boy as it is believed he has knowledge of a major terrorist attack being planned for somewhere in Europe. This is a daunting tale of courage, the deplorable challenges facing refugees seeking entry into Europe, and the barbarities of the members of the Islamic State. **FIREFLY** is the hero's code-name.

The author has written five previous thrillers and one young adult novel. He is a strong storyteller.

RECONCILIATION FOR THE DEAD by Paul E. Hardisty (Orenda Books 2017 trade paperback U.K.). This time, Lee Child's blurb on the front cover is an understatement – "A solid, meaty thriller – Hardisty is a fine writer and Straker is a great lead character." **RECONCILIATION FOR THE DEAD** is a blistering thriller set in South Africa and neighboring countries mainly in the early 1980s at the height of the Cold War. Claymore Straker, a young South African Army paratrooper, becomes aware of the extreme lengths his government and its Secret Police are prepared to go to preserve the white apartheid regime. This causes him to

change his allegiance and support the underground opposition to apartheid. Fifteen years later, Straker returns to South Africa to testify before the newly established Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the war crimes he witnessed and even unwillingly participated in.

Hardisty is an impressive storyteller in every possible respect. Straker is also the central character in the author's prior two thrillers – **THE ABRUPT PHYSICS OF DYING** and **THE EVOLUTION OF FEAR**.

THE CYPHER BUREAU by Eilidh McGinness (The Book Guild 2018 trade paperback U.K.). A novel based on the leading role that a Polish mathematician and a handful of his compatriots played at the Polish Cypher Bureau in cracking the code for the German Enigma machines just prior to the start of WW II. British, French and Spanish individuals later joined in the work of the Cypher Bureau when it was relocated to first one and then another secret location in Vichy France. Ultimately, all of the Enigma decoding work was transferred to Bletchley Park in the U.K.

Without the initial involvement of the Polish team, it is likely that the Enigma code would have remained unbroken and the course of WW II would have much different for the worse. All arms of the German military and intelligence services used Enigma machines for most of their communications, especially of a strategic and tactical nature. Remarkably, the fact that the codes for them had been broken remained a secret right up to and beyond the end of WW II.

CAMINO ISLAND by John Grisham (Doubleday 2017 hardcover/Bantam 2018 trade paperback). The manuscripts of F. Scott Fitzgerald's only five novels are stolen from Princeton University. Valued and insured at \$25,000,000, they have disappeared into the black market of rare books. The original thieves hastily disposed of the manuscripts through an intermediary for a rock bottom price and subsequently become determined to repossess them. The FBI's Rare Asset Recovery Unit is on the case. In addition, the insurance company

has retained an independent security and investigations firm to recover the manuscripts using whatever means are necessary. For a number of reasons, this firm concludes that the manuscripts are likely in the hands of a highly successful book dealer, Bruce Cable, whose bookshop is located on Camino Island, Florida. A young female author, Mercer Mann, is persuaded to surreptitiously befriend Cable to obtain information on where he may have hidden the manuscripts if he indeed has them.

CAMINO ISLAND is a fun romp through the book business, including the challenges and tribulations facing authors. Grisham doesn't miss the opportunity of having Cable expound on his "Top Ten Rules for Writing Fiction" for Mann's benefit. Grisham, the storyteller, continues to be at the top of his game.

ESTOCADA by Graham Hurley (Head of Zeus 2018 hardcover London). Author's third novel in his brilliant Wars Within series features two strong characters – Dieter Merz, Germany's most celebrated fighter ace, and Tam Moncrieff, a Scotsman and ex-British Marine. Merz was a pilot in the infamous Condor Legion during Spain's civil war who returned to Germany after a near fatal flying accident and a diplomatic stint in Japan. Merz is

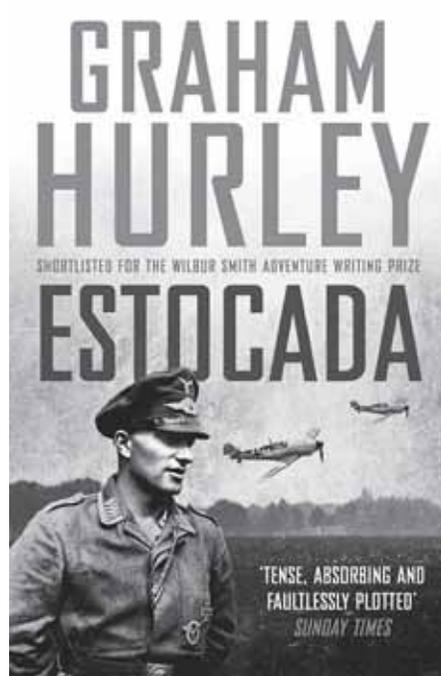
now dazzling crowds at Nazi rallies and other events with his daring flying exhibitions but he's definitely no fan of the Nazis. Moncrieff was recruited by an unnamed arm of British intelligence to go to Czechoslovakia to inspect the readiness of the Czecks to defend their country and then to Germany to stiffen the resistance to Hitler's eminent plan to invade Czechoslovakia. The two men meet and become friends surrounded by the growing evil of Hitler and Germany's other Nazi rulers.

Hurley does a superb job of capturing the desperate mood of England, Germany and the rest of Europe in 1937-38 and the doomed relationships experienced by his two leading characters. The book's title is taken from the Spanish term for a matador's killing strike – *la estocada* – that Merz applied to shooting down enemy planes.

THE DEVIL SHE KNOWS by Bill Loehfelm (FSG 2011 hardcover/Picador 2012 trade paperback). This is the author's first novel in his excellent five-book Maureen Coughlin series. Having read and enjoyed the latter four novels where Maureen is a member of the New Orleans Police Department, I thought I should try the first one in which Maureen is a bar waitress struggling in Staten Island, New York where she grew up. After a co-worker is murdered, Maureen has to go on the run from a powerful predator ex-cop politician. Then, a second co-worker is found drowned and Maureen knows it wasn't an accident. Fortunately, Maureen is befriended by a veteran homicide detective who has bad history with her stalker.

With **THE DEVIL SHE KNOWS**, Loehfelm does a convincing job of developing Maureen's character and setting the stage for her transition to becoming a police officer and joining the New Orleans Police Department. The author is a pro at hardboiled storytelling and getting inside the head of his indomitable heroine. I hope he continues this series.

THE TAKE by Graham Hurley (Orion 2001 hardcover/Orion 2002 paperback London). Author's second novel in his compelling DI Joe Faraday series set in Portsmouth, one of En-



gland's most economically depressed areas where endemic crime threatens to overwhelm the local police force. Faraday's assistant is killed in a car accident, a flasher in a Donald Duck mask is assaulting women, a father claims his young daughter is being abused by her teacher, a disgraced gynaecologist goes missing and may have been murdered – there's lots going on for Faraday and his team to investigate. Fortunately, the renegade cop, DC Paul Winter, again demonstrates that foul means justify the ends.

I have to admit that I've become hooked on the series and intend to intersperse the remaining ten Joe Faraday novels into my future reading regimen.

THE MIDNIGHT LINE by Lee Child (Delacorte Press 2017 hardcover/Bantam Press 2018 trade paperback/Dell 2018 paperback). What's a summer without reading at least one Lee Child novel? The thriller master consistently delivers a compelling Jack Reacher tale book after book with his signature chop-chop pace, smart dialogue, vivid bad actors and good actors, periodic terse violent scenes, and the ultimate triumph of Reacher's rock solid values.

In **THE MIDNIGHT LINE**, Reacher sees a woman's West Point class ring in a pawnshop and buys it. Being a West Point graduate himself, he naturally now needs to know why she gave it up and is she OK. The trail takes Reacher to a big-time oxycodone and fentanyl illegal wholesaler in South Dakota who gives him some misinformation about the source of the ring being in Wyoming. Meanwhile, Reacher teams up with an ex-FBI agent turned PI who has been hired to find a missing woman, probably the same one as Reacher is looking for. The opiate wholesaler orders one of his dealers to kill Reacher when he arrives in Wyoming. Not to give the plot away but Reacher doesn't cooperate.

Following twenty one other Jack Reacher novels, **THE MIDNIGHT LINE** demonstrates that Lee Child is still going strong. Next summer, I'll be ready for #23.

THE RUIN by Dervla Mctiernan (Penguin 2018 trade paperback New York). Terrific debut novel by an author



originally from Ireland now living in Australia.

Detective Cormac Reilly has just transferred from an elite police unit in Dublin to being posted as a Garda detective in Galway. Shortly afterward, Reilly is assigned a cold case involving the death of a mother, the same case where he'd been the first officer on the scene twenty years ago. This woman's son has been found drowned in a river in Galway, a death the Garda quickly declared was a suicide. At that same time, the sister of a local Garda has gone missing. Reilly senses that some of the Garda members are covering something up that may account for why he is being snubbed and undermined by them. Betrayals, corruption, endemic abuse abound as this is Ireland.

McTiernan's next book is also going to feature Cormac Reilly. Sign me up for a copy.

THE SWEDE by Robert Karjel (Harper Collins 2015 hardcover/Harper 2016 paperback). Swedish author's first novel translated into English. Also published as **MY NAME IS M**. Swedish security officer Ernst Grip is sent to New York and then the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean at the request of female senior FBI agent Shauna Friedman. A terrorist suspect being detained in Garcia is thought to be Swedish. Four years earlier, this indi-

vidual, three other men and a woman, all tourists, were brought together after surviving a tsunami in Thailand. A year later, the same group pulls off an art heist in New York followed by a bank robbery in Topeka, Kansas. In both cases, there were fatalities. Friedman has a big stake in unraveling these possibly inter-related cases, hopefully with Grip's assistance.

Yes, the plot is a bit convoluted, similar to the movie *The Usual Suspects*, but it works and captured my interest. The author's next Ernst Grip thriller, titled **AFTER THE MONSOON**, is being published this summer by Harper Collins. These novels provide a Swedish perspective to the world of thrillers and are not for the faint of heart. I want to read more about Grip.

TAKEN by Robert Crais (Putnam 2012 hardcover/Putnam 2012 trade paperback). Elvis Cole is hired to find a woman's missing daughter. Cole discovers she was abducted with her boyfriend by a gang of human smugglers who intercept shipments of people being illegally brought into the U.S. from Mexico, squeeze them for ransom money and kill them after their ransom payments dry up. Cole tracks down the location where the missing couple is being held and ends up being abducted himself. Now it's up to Joe Pike and Jon Stone, a mercenary friend of Cole and Pike's, to come to the rescue. While the outcome is predictable, it's still a reasonably good story.

TAKEN also describes the horrific experience that illegal immigrants undergo trying to enter the U.S. from Mexico as well as the barbarity of the various parties engaged in this human trafficking on both sides of the border. To allow this extreme violation of human rights to continue to occur should be a gross embarrassment for both countries.

EVIDENCE OF DEATH by Peter Ritchie (Black & White Publishing 2018 trade paperback Edinburgh). Author's second Grace Macallan novel. Macallan, newly appointed superintendent of the Scotland Police Service's Crime & Counter Terrorism Directorate, investigates the murders and violence caused by a hard-case Belfast gang that recently

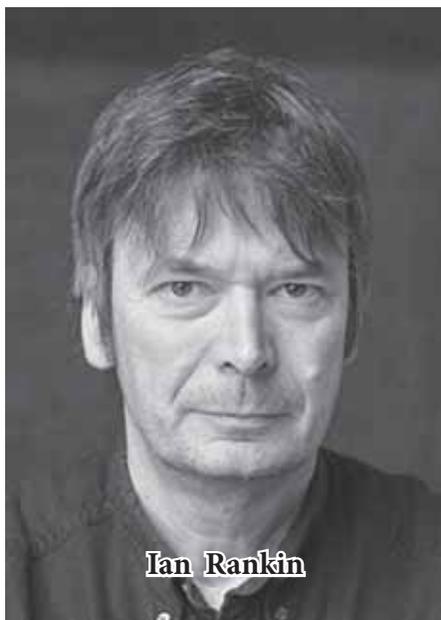
took over Edinburgh's drug trade. A local crime family is plotting a comeback with the backing of its Glasgow drug supplier. The intelligence services want to preserve their network of informants. Grace has to sort it all out before her venal boss finds cause to sack her.

EVIDENCE OF DEATH demonstrates the strength of Ritchie's storytelling talent. I'm looking forward to learning more about Macallan in the third book of this series, **SHORES OF DEATH**, also published in 2018.

MERLIN AT WAR by Mark Ellis (London Wall Publishing 2017 hardcover/paperback). Author's third Detective Chief Inspector Frank Merlin novel set in London 1941. Merlin and his team at Scotland Yard investigate four different murders that lead them to uncover a businessman's shady dealings and a network of Free French officers leaking SOE information to the Germans in France. Ellis skillfully conveys the atmosphere and tensions in wartime London as he weaves the story of Merlin working with MI5 to solve these murders and track down the source of the betrayal of SOE agents landing in France. This is a well-written series.

HARD COLD WINTER by Glen Erik Hamilton (William Morrow 2016 hardcover/Faber & Faber 2016 trade paperback/William Morrow 2017 paperback). Hamilton's second Van Shaw novel. Former Army Ranger Van Shaw is asked to check on a childhood friend and comes up against big-time gambler loan sharks, Russian mobsters, a large amount of missing explosives and a wealthy family cover-up. In the midst of this, a fellow Ranger from Afghanistan appears on his Seattle doorstep, desperate for assistance. Van Shaw finds it impossible to avoid getting entangled in dangerous situations even if doing so risks his relationship with a loved one.

BLACK AND BLUE by Ian Rankin (Orion 1997 hardcover London/Minotaur 1997 hardcover/Minotaur 2009 trade paperback New York). Every summer, I like to re-read several of my all-time favorite books. It is impossible to exaggerate the quality of writing in Rankin's breakout novel, **BLACK AND BLUE**. It is an exceptional novel captur-



Ian Rankin

ing the multi-faceted character of Detective Inspector John Rebus – tenacious, cynical, fearless, instinctive, indestructible, world weary and bound by his own old-fashioned code of honor.

In **BLACK AND BLUE**, Rebus is investigating two serial killers, Bible John and his copycat Johnny Bible. In doing so, he faces crooked cops, gangsters, rapacious businessmen and a wide assortment of other villains including the oil industry in the North Sea. This novel received the CWA Gold Dagger Award for Best Crime Fiction and the Palle Rosenkrantz Prize for the best foreign crime novel published in Denmark. Rankin is unquestionably one of the grand masters of mystery fiction.

THE TOURIST by Olen Steinhauer (Minotaur 2009 hardcover/trade paperback). On the front cover of my U.K. trade paperback edition, Stephen King blurbs, "The best spy novel I've ever read that wasn't written by John le Carré." Hmm, that may be a slight exaggeration but it's definitely a contender. This is the author's first of three Milo Weaver novels. Milo works for the section of the CIA that does its dirty work whose agents are known as Tourists. For a number of years, Milo has been tracking the international hitman known as the *Tiger*. When the *Tiger* surprisingly surrenders, everything starts to go wrong and Milo himself becomes the hunted. **THE TOURIST** immerses

readers in the world of espionage across Europe and parts of the U.S. Along the way, Steinhauer adroitly peels back the onion to reveal that nothing is quite as it seems.

THE LOCK ARTIST by Steve Hamilton (Minotaur 2010 hardcover/2011 trade paperback). Hamilton's award-winning thriller about the survivor of a tragedy that left him mute at the age of eight and an orphan. Adopted by his uncle, he discovers he has a talent for opening locks. This leads to him getting arrested and placed on parole at the age of 17. In order to protect his girlfriend, he agrees to work for the mob, undergoing an extensive tutelage at the hands of The Ghost in the art of safecracking. Soon he is in demand for a number of jobs by the mob requiring his expertise. Some of them go better than others. Will love triumph?

--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 in the Meet Steele Section of his youth mentoring Web site at www.COTWguides.com.

Reading Ahead to 2019

I'm receiving arcs of 2019 books already and have read three that are outstanding. Reviews to follow in future *DP* issues (publishers want reviews printing near time of publication).

TRIGGER by David Swinson, the 3rd in the excellent Frank Marr series **SAVE ME FROM DANGEROUS MEN** by S. A. Lelchuk, a debut novel with an exciting female protagonist. **HOUSE ARREST** by Mike Lawson, in which Joe DeMarco is falsely imprisoned and he must rely on friends to prove his innocence. G. Easter