

# *Deadly Pleasures* *Mystery Magazine*



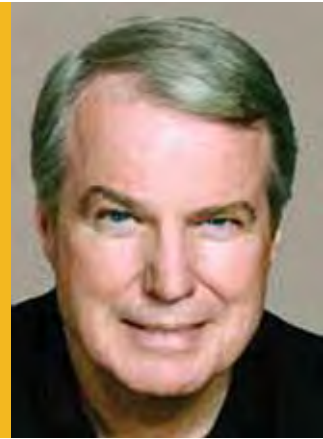
***MIA P. MANANSALA***  
***Arsenic and Adobo***

**Best First Mysteries**

# My Greek Reading Feast

## 2021

By Steele Curry



At long last, my wife Judy and I returned to Skiathos, Greece for our annual summer holiday here. We have been coming to this beautiful island for over 40 years but the pandemic ruled out doing so in 2020. Fortunately, the Greek government has made it easy for fully vaccinated travelers to now enter the country without having to quarantine.

Skiathos is blessed with many beautiful beaches, warm friendly locals, and lots of casual restaurants with terrific food and excellent Greek rosé wine. It's low key, the opposite of Mykonos. The majority of my time at our Skiathos summer home (which we call *Lizard in the Sun*) is spent reading mysteries and thrillers on the terrace overlooking the sparkling blue Aegean Sea. Here are some of the books I read this summer:

**A DEADLY TWIST** by Jeffrey Siger (Sourcebooks/Poisoned Pen Press 2021 hardcover/trade paperback).

To launch myself into a proper Greek frame of mind, I always start my Skiathos summer reading with the newest novel by Jeffrey Siger in his impressive Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis series. Kaldis is in charge of the Greek Police's Special Crimes Unit responsible for cases of national concern and corruption. While Kaldis is based in Athens, each of the author's eleven thrillers in this series is set in a different Greek region or location of historical and cultural significance.

**A DEADLY TWIST** takes place on the large island of Naxos where Kaldis and his usual cast of colorful associates, friends and family are engaged

in investigating the disappearance of a high-profile female journalist. Soon, several dead bodies complicate matters as tensions grow between the island's preservationists and those promoting large-scale tourist developments. Along the way, the author masterfully exposes his readers to the beauty, history and culture of Naxos.

Jeffrey Siger is a wonderful storyteller whose love of Greece is infectious.

**THE CELLIST** by Daniel Silva (Harper, New York 2021 hardcover).

I've been a big fan of this author's Gabriel Allon series but the latest one is quite a disappointment. Allon leads his Israeli intelligence team in a quest to undermine the financial empire of the Russian president and expose the massive long-standing money launder-

ing operations of "the world's dirtiest bank" (modeled after the Deutsche Bank). Set in recent current times, the plot also includes descriptions of the Trump presidency and the attempted coup to take down America's democracy. Unfortunately, it's all too predictable and a rehash of Allon's character and background.

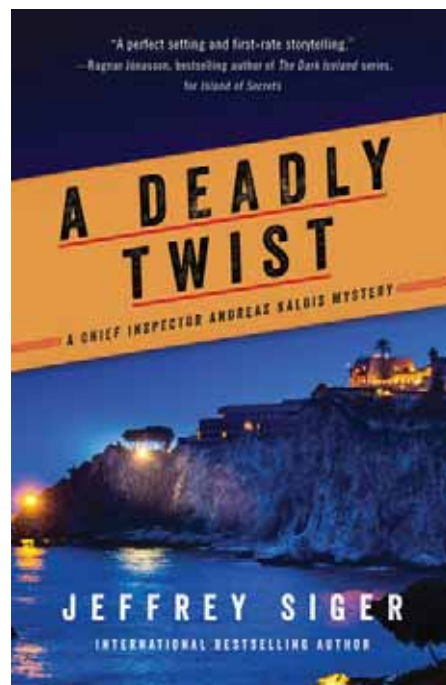
For his next novel, the author needs to take a break from writing about Allon and come up with some fresh new material.

**THE AEGEAN AFFAIR** by Walter Satterthwait (Dell 1982 paperback original).

Have been saving this book to read in Skiathos. Author's second novel, largely set on the fictional Greek island of Asporgos. Former US Army Special Forces soldier who deserted and started another life as a smuggler is coerced into disrupting a major crime lord's heroin operation. This is a hard-edged, compelling thriller with lots of femme fatales, killers and other irredeemable characters. Satterthwait bowed out in 2020. He'll be missed.

**DEAD NORTH** by Sandy Mccutcheon (Beacon Books, Oldham, U.K. 2021 trade paperback).

British Detective Inspector Nicole Parry begins an investigation that takes her from London to Helsinki to the wilds of Finland near its border with Russia. MI6 and the CIA are adamant that this case be buried. Regardless, Parry teams up with a Finnish Intelligence officer, has to decipher some of his country's mythology, and becomes immersed in the local culture in an



attempt to defuse a plot that will upend world politics. Who knew that Finland could be this exciting?

McCutcheon is an Australian author, playwright, actor, journalist and broadcaster. His novels include four terrific thrillers featuring Savva Golitsyn, a retired KGB spy living in Australia. His writing reflects a special sensitivity to worldwide cultural nuances.

**BORDERLANDS** by Brian Mcgilloway (Macmillan, U.K. 2007 hardcover; Constable 2021 trade paperback).

Yes, I'm late to the party. **BORDERLANDS** is the first of five novels in the author's impressive series featuring Garda Inspector Benedict Devlin. Post the Troubles in Ireland, Devlin starts out investigating the murder of a teen-aged girl and then the death of another teenager. He senses there is a connection to these killings and the disappearance 25 years ago of a woman linked to one of his senior colleagues. More murders follow. Devlin's virtue is tested. Neighbors commit arson, possibly as a result of Devlin's dog killing their sheep. Fortunately, Devlin is assisted by the capable Sergeant Caroline Williams. A sixth novel in this series, **BLOOD TIES**, is scheduled for publication in September 2021.

**THE DEVIL** by Nadia Dalbuono (Scribe Publications, London 2020 paperback).

The fifth novel in the author's superb series featuring Rome Detective Leone Scamarcio, the son of a former leading Mafioso. This time, Scamarcio is tasked with investigating the death of a young troubled man undergoing treatment by the Vatican's chief exorcist. Soon afterwards, a close friend of the first victim is found murdered. Scamarcio's investigation encounters high-level government corruption, a history of long-standing drug company payoffs, threats from a senior Mafioso and Vatican intransigence. Meanwhile his girlfriend is on the verge of giving birth to their child. In the midst of all this, when Scamarcio's former lover returns from Calabria, can he resist temptation?

**A DEATH IN MAYFAIR** by Mark Ellis (Headline Accent, London 2019 trade paperback).



This is the author's fourth historical novel in his series featuring Scotland Yard detective Frank Merlin set just before or during WW II. The first three novels had a strong espionage element to them. **A DEATH IN MAYFAIR** has Merlin and his team investigating serious crimes committed in London involving a suicide, movie stars, underage prostitutes, Satanists, drug dealers and big-time gangsters. While this time Merlin doesn't have to contend with any spies, it's December 1941 and the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor.

**BORROWED LIGHT** by Graham Hurley (Orion, London 2010 hardcover; Orion, London 2011 trade paperback) and **HAPPY DAYS** by Graham Hurley (Orion, London 2012 hardcover/trade paperback).

About four years ago, I started reading this author's 12-book series featuring DI Joe Faraday and DC Paul Winter in order of publication. It soon became apparent to me that this was an exceptional series, the equal or better of any British crime series I had ever read. Faraday in particular is a compelling character of depth and poignancy. In 2019, I ordered the last two books in the series to be sent to our place in Greece so I could read them there during the summer of 2020. Then COVID happened and I had to wait until now to

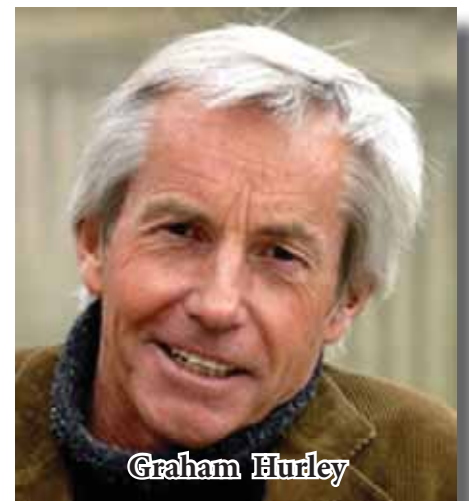
read them.

**BORROWED LIGHT** describes the end game for Faraday. Both Faraday and his French girlfriend Gabrielle are in a serious car crash in Egypt. Then, Gabrielle becomes totally consumed with looking after a badly burned little Palestinian girl from Gaza. Faraday returns to Portsmouth and is placed in charge of a complex case involving four murdered victims who were found in a farmhouse destroyed by fire.

Meanwhile, Winter is realizing that he needs to extricate himself from his relationship with former drug lord Bazza Mackenzie before it's too late to save himself. Bazza has decided to run for political office despite his financial empire crumbling. He wants Winter to recover a large stash of cocaine that he thinks another former drug king stole from him.

It's difficult to disclose many details about **HAPPY DAYS** without giving too much away about the storyline. It's basically the dénouement of the series, tying everything together. At the beginning, it is understandably quite sad. Perhaps Bazza's demise was a touch prolonged as he strives to get elected to Parliament. Winter will be lucky if he can survive Bazza's vengeance.

Graham Hurley is a truly outstanding storyteller but some of his staunchest fans have not forgiven him for the ending to **BORROWED LIGHT**. The depth of character development and the intensity of the plots in this series are definitely impressive.



**INDIGO SLAM** by Robert Crais (Hyperion, New York 1997 hardcover; Hyperion, New York 2014 trade paperback).

Sometimes I ask myself why am I chasing around trying to discover new authors and being often disappointed when I have lots of books by tried and true, terrific authors available to re-read. Recently, I hugely enjoyed re-reading all of Michael Connolly's Bosch novels. After reading **INDIGO SLAM**, I plan on doing the same thing with all of Robert Crais' Elvis Cole and Joe Pike novels. This is vintage Crais writing in top gear, revealing that, despite all of his tough guy persona, Elvis has a soft heart. When three children retain him to find their missing father for a grand fee of \$200, off he goes on the case with Joe Pike in tow. Of course, nothing is quite as it seems and soon they are duking it out with Russian gangsters, U.S. Treasury agents and Vietnamese nationalists. I loved it.

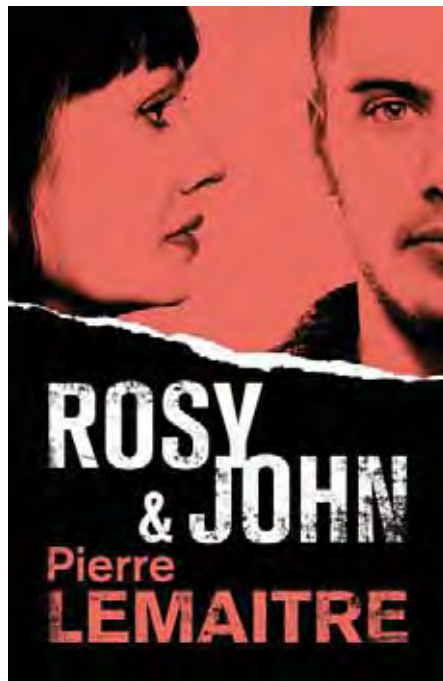
**THE SEARCHER** by Tana French (Viking, New York 2020 hardcover/trade paperback)

It's going to be tough to top this novel for sheer reading pleasure. After 25 years in the Chicago police force and a sudden divorce, Cal Hooper decides to start an entirely new life for himself and buys a small rundown dwelling and property in a remote village in Ireland. There's a local pub, an assortment of odd characters and a matchmaker trying to fix Cal up with her widowed sister. Everything is laid back and peaceful until a young local kid interrupts Cal's renovations with a request that he find this person's missing older brother. Against his better judgment, Cal gets drawn into pursuing this quest and discovers that this part of Ireland could bring him more troubles than Chicago ever did.

Tana French is a lyrical and brilliant storyteller, living in Dublin. Every facet of *The Searcher* is masterfully written.

**ROSY & JOHN** by Pierre Lemaître (MacLehose Press, London 2021 paperback).

Whew, the tension in this novella zips along as Commandant Camille Verhoeven is confronted with a young man who admits to having planted sev-



en lethal bombs throughout Paris with one set to explode every 24 hours. His demands are simple – release his imprisoned mother and himself, give them 5 million Euros and put them on a plane to Australia. Verhoeven doubts that even the heavy-handed Counterterrorism brigade will be successful in causing this individual to reveal the location of his bombs.

This is a follow-up to the author's prize-winning *Brigade Criminelle* trilogy featuring Camille Verhoeven. It's impossible to put it down. A hardcover edition may have been published in 2017.

**WHEN YOU ARE MINE** by Michael Robotham (Sphere, London 2021 hardcover/trade paperback).

Philomena McCarthy is early in her career as a London Metropolitan Police officer when she intervenes in a domestic assault incident involving a decorated police detective and his girlfriend. He happens to be married with two young children. Phil happens to be the daughter of a former crime lord. She gets drawn into other related assault cases, the murder of a London journalist and a precarious relationship. The consequences are severe.

**WHEN YOU ARE MINE** is a compelling tale of obsession, police corruption and domestic abuse. The plot has

momentum, the characterization is deft, and the dialogue is crisp and clever. One has to wonder, however, about Phil's poor judgment and somewhat reckless behavior.

**LIVING PROOF** by John Harvey (William Heinemann, London 1995 hardcover; Arrow Books, London 2005 paperback)

This is the seventh novel in John Harvey's 12-book classic series featuring Detective-Inspector Charlie Resnick. First, Resnick is put in charge of investigating a series of vicious attacks on the clients of prostitutes in Nottingham. Then, he is also assigned to provide protection for a brassy best-selling American female author at a local book convention. Not sure whether the author resists the opportunity to give readers a parody of what happens at book conventions but he includes Ian Rankin and Sarah Dunant in cameo roles at this one. In between his exotic sandwiches and rapt admiration of jazz, Resnick once again displays his intuitive style of investigation.

**THE NIGHT BEFORE MORNING** by Alistair Moffat (Birlinn, Edinburgh 2021 trade paperback)

An alternative history thriller. In the closing days of WW II, Germany drops an atomic bomb on London and coerces the Allies into capitulating by the threat of wiping out New York and Leningrad with similar atomic bombs unless they do so. England is now occupied by the German Nazis but a small group of resisters based in the Borders region of Scotland decides to fight back. Could Germany be bluffing about having more atomic bombs?

A Scottish author, this is Moffat's debut novel.

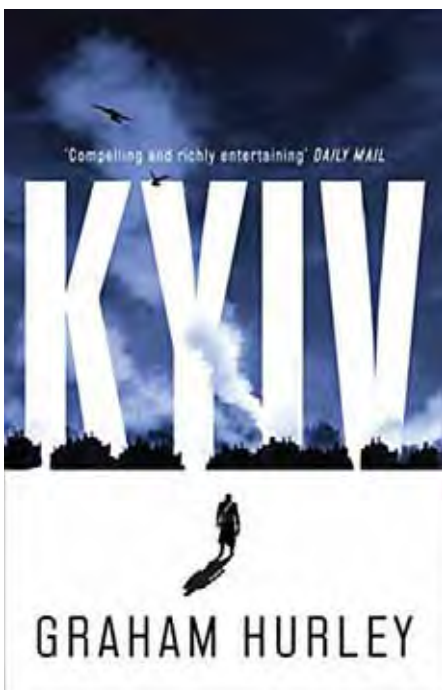
**THE LIST** by Barry Gilder (Jacana Media, South Africa 2018 trade paperback).

Wow, this book came to me like a rocket out of left field. I can't even remember who recommended it. **THE LIST** is absolutely one of the all-time finest espionage novels I've ever come across – right up there with the very best of Graham Greene, John le Carré, Robert Littell, Charles McCarry and Daniel Silva.

It covers activities by South Africa's apartheid and anti-apartheid forces in their contest for power and influence from 1979 through to an imagined 2020. Shortly after Mandela became president in 1994, it was rumored that he received a secret list from former apartheid intelligence officials of their agents who had been infiltrated into the upper levels of the ANC during the struggle years. Mandela apparently ignored this information. Some years later, a new president authorizes a small secret task force to investigate the identity of the agents on this list and to determine if any of them are subverting the goals of his government.

I find it amazing that this novel received so little attention outside of South Africa. This is fictionalized history close to the bone at a watershed time for South Africa. Gilder has had a long-standing involvement in South African intelligence and secret service circles at a senior level working both against the apartheid government and afterwards for the new government. Prior to that, Gilder did stints as a protest musician, political activist, revolutionary soldier and spy for ANC's military arm. He now serves as South Africa's Ambassador to Syria and Lebanon.

**KYIV** by Graham Hurley (Head of Zeus, London 2021 hardcover).



A searing account of German and Russian brutality in their 1941 battle for control and the occupation of Kyiv, the largest city in the Ukraine, including the mass murder of thousands of its Jewish residents by the Nazi SS. Treachery abounds on all sides – in Kyiv, Moscow, Berlin and London. A valiant Scotsman seeks to unmask Kim Philby. Two courageous women find love in the midst of this maelstrom of war and betrayal. That **KYIV** is not for the faint-hearted reader is an understatement.

Graham Hurley is a brilliant storyteller. **KYIV** is the sixth novel in his excellent *Spoils of War* series. The others are **FINISTERRE**, **AURORE**, **ESTOCADA**, **LAST FLIGHT TO STALINGRAD** and **RAID 42** in that order.

**DARKNESS RISING** by A. A. Dhand (Corgi Books/Quick Reads, London 2020 trade paperback).

**DARKNESS RISING** is a prequel novella in A. A. Dhand's Detective Inspector Harry Virdee series. Harry wants to clear the case of two murdered minor drug dealers ASAP before a major drug gang-war breaks out on Bradford's streets. He knows the identity of the killer; he just needs to be able to stitch him up, to hell with the proper rules and procedures. Meanwhile, Harry's wife Saima is about to deliver their first child.

May I confess that I'm a big fan of this author's Harry Virdee series. The four prior books in the series were a delight to read. Harry is a terrific character and Dhand is a marvelous storyteller. In 2021, his stand-alone novel **THE BLOOD DIVIDE** was published by Bantam Press in London.

**THE NAMELESS ONES** by John Connolly (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2021 hardcover/trade paperback)

This is a muscular novel, written with great style and intensity. Five Serbian war criminals, headed up by the Vuksan brothers, butcher four individuals in an Amsterdam canal house. The killers were a product of the genocidal Balkan conflicts that occurred during the 1990s following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Two American assassins, Angel and Louis, decide to seek revenge for this act as the victims



were close friends of theirs. Charlie Parker's offer of help is declined. What follows is a manhunt across Europe with many casualties and the murky involvement of American Intelligence, the French police, the Serbian authorities, terrorist smugglers, a high-powered Austrian lawyer and a possible witch.

The nineteenth novel in the author's powerful Charlie Parker series, **THE NAMELESS ONES** is based on meticulous research and a deep understanding of the evil that humans can inflict on one another. It mainly features Angel and Louis as opposed to Charlie Parker and has only a minor supernatural element compared with many of the prior books in this series.

**THE REDBREAST** by Jo Nesbo (Harvill Secker, London 2006 hardcover; Vintage Books, London 2006 trade paperback)

From the start, I have enjoyed reading all of Nesbo's Harry Hole novels but some more than others. **THE REDBREAST** is in the latter camp. Harry Hole investigates multiple murders, tries to trace an extremely expensive rifle designed for assassinations that was illegally brought into the country, loses a close associate (doesn't this happen in most of the Hole novels?) and drinks a lot. The plot is a bit farfetched and overly long. That Harry Hole is such an

engaging character is why I continue to look forward to reading each book in this series. In particular, I thought the most recent Harry Hole novel, **KNIFE**, was outstanding.

**NIGHT RUNNERS** by Richard Crompton (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 2018 hardcover/trade paperback)

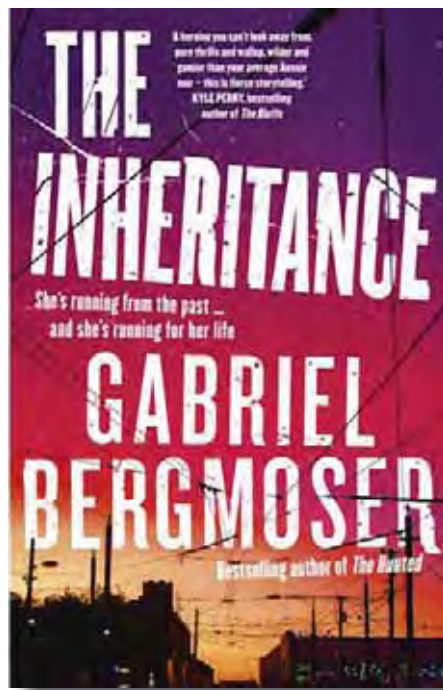
This is the third and final book in the author's superb series featuring Detective Mollel of the Nairobi Police Force. Coming from the Maasai tribe and being intolerant of corruption, Mollel is an outsider to other city police. In addition to Mollel, the second main character of this series is Nairobi, Kenya's burgeoning capital city with a metropolitan population of over 9 million.

**NIGHT RUNNERS** has Mollel investigating the disappearance of a girl who may have been murdered. Such disappearances are occurring frequently in Nairobi. A large part of the city is under the control of a powerful crime lord who is obstructing Mollel's inquiries. The colorful cast also includes a young charismatic senior police official gunning for the position of police chief or higher, a faded but still glamorous female TV star, a crackpot witch doctor of a psychiatrist with a surprisingly extensive clientele, Mollel's steadfast police partner Kiunga, and his hip son Adam who disconcertedly may want to follow in his father's police footsteps. As this is a society where corruption is rampant at all levels, it's extremely difficult for Mollel to know whom he can trust.

The first two books in this series are **THE HONEY GUIDE** and **HELL'S GATE**.

**THE INHERITANCE** by Gabriel Bergmoser (Harper Collins, Sydney, Australia 2021 trade paperback)

The author's second novel featuring Maggie, about the toughest female you'll ever encounter. Pursued by drug dealers, a biker gang and the Melbourne police, Maggie has to stab, bash, cut, shoot and burn in order to stay on her quest to find her mother who abandoned her in the care of an abusive father. With no friends or allies other than a bent cop, Maggie leaves behind a string of damaged adversaries and dead bodies



everywhere she goes. For sheer sustained momentum and mayhem, **THE INHERITANCE** has few peers. It's hard to imagine what Maggie could do for an encore but I'm sure Bergmoser is working on it.

**BLOOD COUNTS** by Martin O'Brien (Preface Publishing, London 2010 trade paperback); **THE DYING MINUTES** by Martin O'Brien (Preface Publishing, London 2012 trade paperback); and **KNIFE GUN POISON BOMB** by Martin O'Brien (Mobuk Press 2015 trade paperback)

**BLOOD COUNTS** is the sixth book in the author's series featuring Chief Inspector Daniel Jacquot, mainly set in or around Marseilles. It's been a while since I read and enjoyed the earlier books but **BLOOD COUNTS** may be the best so far in the series. Jacquot is on the trail of two assassins who have already murdered six persons. Each of the victims is the nearest and dearest to one of the policemen and a magistrate that were connected to a shootout one year earlier which took the lives of two bodyguards from Corsica. Jacquot has a good idea of the identity of the individual master-mining these acts of vengeance with the two assassins but is unable to prove it. He comes to realize that his beloved girlfriend Claudine and her daughter are the next targets of the

killers as he himself was also involved in the original shootout. The singer George Benson has a cameo role to play. It's not much of a spoiler to disclose that the ending is close-run and bloody.

**THE DYING MINUTES**, the seventh in the series, starts off in 1978 with the attempted heist of three truckloads of gold bullion that goes wrong. Someone had tipped off the police and in the ensuing gun battle four of the robbers and one bent cop were killed. During the melee, one of the trucks carrying 75 gold bars disappears. Twenty years later, two competing major crime lords each launch a massive hunt for this missing gold and begin murdering everyone even remotely connected with the original robbery to obtain information leading to the missing gold.

Jacquot is now stationed in Cavailon, Provence where he is currently on sick leave recuperating from injuries incurred previously on the job. To his surprise, a book-collecting fisherman unexpectedly bequeaths his motor launch to Jacquot. With time on his hands, Jacquot decides to undertake his own unofficial investigation into the background of this fisherman to understand how he came to own such an expensive motorboat. Could he have somehow been involved with the missing gold? The Chief Inspector of the Marseilles police responsible for investigating the slew of new murders just happens to be a former girlfriend of Jacquot's. Can he remain faithful to his pregnant partner?

**KNIFE GUN POISON BOMB**, the eighth in the series, starts off in 1999 with Jacquot investigating the knife stabbing killings of a steadily increasing number of men in various towns and villages throughout Provence. The perpetrator has been nick-named "The Silent Blade". Meanwhile, a rogue Russian arms dealer arrives in Marseilles on his way to assuming a new life somewhere in the South Pacific. He is being hunted by Ivory Coast rebels, an Afghanistan warlord and the CIA who all want him dead. Somehow, he ends up also becoming a target of the Silent Blade. In the midst of this, Jacquot's girlfriend Claudine is about to give birth to twins.

O'Brien is a marvelous storyteller, skillfully weaving the sights, sounds, smells and food of the Marseilles region of France into the texture of his Jacquot novels. An added bonus to these novels is the author's deft characterization of Jacquot, especially his relationship with Claudine. Overall, this is crime fiction writing at its best.

**BILLY SUMMERS** by Stephen King (Scribner, New York 2021 hardcover; Hodder & Stoughton, London 2021 trade paperback)

Can't remember the last time I cried at the end of a novel but this did it for me. Stephen King's virtuosity as a writer is in full force with **BILLY SUMMERS**. An American sniper vet turns hitman, turns author, turns big-hearted. This is a fast moving thriller, a war memoir, a love story, and a tutorial on becoming a writer. And King seamlessly pulls it all together.

One last contract and Billy can retire. Unfortunately, his clients underestimate Billy and think they can get away with double-crossing him. Now, if only he hadn't rescued that 21-year old girl who had just been gang-raped. But, when you have to crisscross the country and keep below the radar of the bad guys who have put a \$6 million bounty on your head, maybe Billy is lucky to have her along. As road trips go, this is a tough ride.

**BILLY SUMMERS** shows that Stephen King is that rare author who excels at any genre he puts his mind to.

**RAZORBLADE TEARS** by S. A. COSBY (Flatiron Books, New York 2012 hardcover; Headline Publishing, London 2021 trade paperback)

For an encore to **BLACKTOP WASTELAND**, **RAZORBLADE TEARS** sure came up aces. The plot has such a high torque on it, you have to stop reading every few chapters to catch your breath. A powerful unknown man coerces a biker gang into murdering a gay couple and then orders the bikers to find and kill a young woman in hiding to prevent her from revealing his identity. This is a bad decision – the fathers of the two gay men are two of the toughest, hardest ex-convicts in all of Virginia and they are determined to

exact retribution for the shooting deaths of their two sons, regardless of the many obstacles they encounter.

While these two protagonists are in some ways polar opposites, one being a family-oriented Black business owner and the other being in his own words "a hell-raising, whiskey-drinking, hard-loving redneck son of a bitch". The first, Ike, stayed on the straight after prison and built up a successful lawn maintenance company. The second, Buddy Lee, lived a subsistence existence as an alcoholic in a trailer park. They do, however, have certain things in common. Both fathers are carrying a great deal of guilt over vehemently refusing to accept that their sons were gay, both have volcanic tempers, and both are no strangers to using violence to accomplish their ends.

**RAZORBLADE TEARS** is a story about the growing relationship between Ike and Buddy Lee, their violent quest to redeem themselves over how badly they treated their sons, the tribulations of coming out and being a member of the LGBTQ community, and what it means to be Black, especially in a southern state such as Virginia. The plot is a runaway bullet train, the characterization is brilliant, the dialogue is pitch perfect and the setting is totally authentic. No question about it, S. A. Cosby is an au-

thor at the top of his craft.

**A GOOD DEATH** by **ELIZABETH IRONSIDE** (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2000 hardcover; Felony & Mayhem Press, New York 2008 trade paperback)

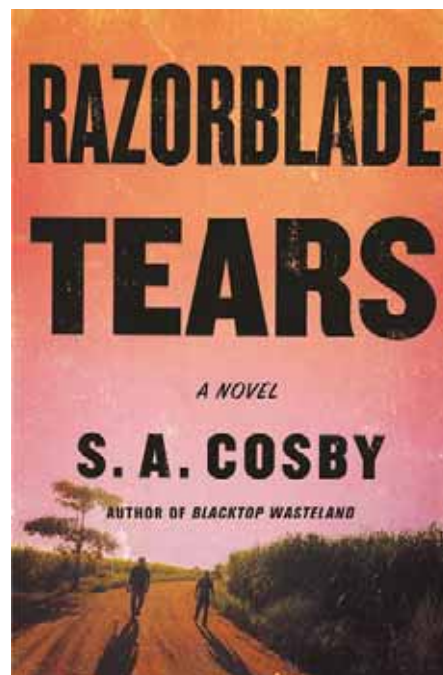
**A GOOD DEATH** takes place in 1944-1945 during the end of the German Occupation in France and just after its liberation. It highlights the murkiness of knowing exactly what was taking place as the various factions of the Resistance were competing for power and playing the lead role in dispensing summary justice to those accused of collaborating with the enemy. Prior to the liberation of France, the communist Resistance groups were more interested in having the Germans wipe out the other Resistance groups than in fighting the Germans themselves.

As soon as hostilities ceased in France, Major Theo Cazalle, the member of General de Gaulle's inner circle responsible for mediating between him and the Resistance, returns to his home deep in the French countryside. There he finds his wife with her hair shorn for being a collaborator, some of his closest friends in the local Resistance killed by the Germans, and a senior SS Officer murdered and left nude on the front steps of his house. **A GOOD DEATH** is the story of Cazalle's attempt to uncover the facts behind these events. Treachery, duplicity, venality abound. After all, this is France.

This is the fifth mystery novel by Elizabeth Ironside, the pseudonym for Lady Catherine Manning, the wife of a former British Ambassador to the U.S.

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 website at [www.COTWguides.com](http://www.COTWguides.com).



## Editor's Message



**In the Mood.** One of the wonderful things about being a fan of mystery, crime and thriller fiction is its diversity due to its many, many sub-genre's.. I am blessed beyond measure to own a large library of mystery novels (over 12,000) so when I'm in the mood to read a female private eye novel I can go to my shelves and take a Linda Barnes (my favorite of the 1990s era) off the shelf. The same goes for when I'm in the mood for an action thriller (Mark Greaney is the best writing today) or a intelligently written British police procedural (Reginald Hill is a master). The same goes for my current stack of books that have recently come from publishers and the fairly large number of advances I've downloaded to my Ipad.

I generally am reading anywhere from 6-10 books at the same time, just waiting for one of them to "catch fire" and when that happens I'll race to the end with just that one. It's not that I'm not enjoying the others in the pile because I most likely am liking reading them. Otherwise I stop reading and go on to something else. It's just that I guess I have a short attention span and if the book is easy to put down at the end of a chapter I usually do that and pick up one of the others I'm reading. This reading style may seem odd to many of you, but that is the way I've read for many years – especially since the days when mysteries were 190-200 pages long and could be read in a couple of sittings.

Sometimes I'll look at a book that I know I want to read, but I'm just not in the mood for that type of mystery or thriller. But a week or two later, I may be more amenable to that particular novel. I know that's pretty whimsical, but it is what it is and it has worked for me. I'm spoiled for choice.

**David Mark Has Been Busy.** One of my favorite police detective series is the DS Aector McAvoy series by David

Mark. Through 2019 there have been eight entries in this highly entertaining series set in Hull, England. It features a big, hulking Scottish detective with a heart of gold, married to a gypsy. McAvoy's boss Trish Pharaoh features heavily in each narrative. The surrounding cast is as interesting as the main protagonists. But over the last couple of years, I haven't seen a new McAvoy novel come out. I was despairing that David may have set the series aside to do other things. But it isn't like he has taken the Pandemic Era off. He published 3 novels in 2019, 5 in 2020 and 2 so far in 2021 and 2 scheduled for 2022 already. That equals 12 novels in 4 years! Yikes.



David Mark

Happily for me, two of those novels are McAvoy novels: **DARKNESS FALLS** (a McAvoy prequel) due out in either November, 2021 or February, 2022 (I've seen both dates) and **PAST LIFE** in either September or December, 2021 (I've seen both dates). If you haven't read this series, you should. Start with **DARK WINTER**, which is readily available in the U.S. The two new McAvoy's are published in the U.K. only so far... and that takes me to another topic I want to mention. See next paragraph.

**British Crime Novels Published in the U.S.** For many years I noticed that many excellent British crime novels weren't being published in the U.S., or

if they were, they were greatly delayed in publication. I wanted to make you *DP* readers aware of what was available, as I know that many of you are fans of British crime fiction. So, many such novels (published only in the U.K.) were reviewed in the pages of *Deadly Pleasures* and talked about in columns by Mat Coward and now Mike Ripley. We also came up with a Best British Barry Award and presented those for years. Then American publishers seemed to catch on and more and more British crime fiction was not only being published in the U.S., but timely published in the U.S. (Soon after or simultaneously with British publication). We did keep on highlighting British crime fiction in the magazine but pointed out that in most cases these books were readily available in the U.S. We also discontinued the Best British Barry Award as it seemed redundant and made the Barry Best Novel inclusive of British crime novels as well as any others published in English in the world.

But I have been noticing a reversal of that trend lately. More and more crime novels by British authors (and even prominent British writers) have not been appearing on our shores of late. The Pandemic has certainly wreaked havoc on British and American publishing timetables and so I hope this trend is temporary. Also the tidal wave of domestic/psychological suspense being published in the U.S. has eliminated a number of "slots" in a publisher's "line" that might otherwise be filled with what we consider more "traditional" mysteries (police detective, amateur detective, historical mystery, private eye, etc.). There simply may not be as much space to fit these British crime novels into American publishers' lines right now.

I cite the following examples of excellent crime novels (and series) published in the U.K.: but not in the U.S. Some of the authors were published in the U.S., but no longer. Others have never been published here.

M.W. Craven – superb Washington Poe/Tilly Bradshaw series

William Shaw – last book published here was **SALT LANE**. There have been three novels since then.



Felix Francis – no American publication date as of yet for his latest. **ICED** was published in U.K. in September, 2021.

Robert Goddard – his last **THE FINE ART OF INVISIBLE DETECTION** has not yet been published in the U.S.

Other writers who should be published here are:

A. A. Dhand

Dominic Nolan

Peter Hanington

Stephen Leather

Stuart MacBride

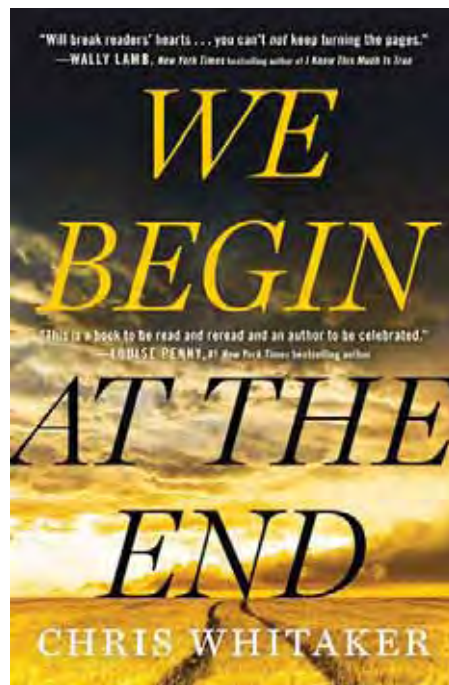
Jack Grimwood

Simon Kernick

Vaseem Khan (new series)

A head-scratcher is the case of Thomas Mullen, the American writer of **DARKTOWN** and **LIGHTNING MEN** set in post-WWII Atlanta, both published to acclaim here in the U.S. The third in the series, **MIDNIGHT ATLANTA**, was published in the U.K. last year to rave reviews (and is available from amazon.com), but to my knowledge has no American publisher.

**My Strange Path to Reading One of the Best Books of the Year.** In the Spring of 2021, I started hearing a lot of buzz about **WE BEGIN AT THE END** by Chris Whitaker. I was unfamiliar with the author but was impressed by the fact that the crime novel had garnered two starred reviews in the library journals. I got a hold of a copy and for some reason got quickly mired down in my initial attempt to read the book. Larry Gandle came to the rescue and read it instead and gave it an A- rating, which is a very high grade for Larry. I dismissed **WE BEGIN AT THE END** as most probably a very good book – just not my kind of book. Then as the year progressed and the CWA Awards came out, lo and behold, **WE BEGIN AT THE END** won the prestigious CWA Gold Dagger for Best Crime Novel of the Year. A short time later what I consider the second most prestigious crime fiction award in the U.K, the Theakston Old Peculier Awards gave **WE BEGIN AT THE END** the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Award. Again,



that caused me to sit up and take notice.

The past couple of years I've been trying to read more and more of the novels that by year's end will most likely show up on lists of the year's best mysteries, crime novels and thrillers. One reason for this is so that my reading aligns with our Barry Award nominating process. Another is the compilation of the **DP List** (of the best books) for each issue of *Deadly Pleasures*.

Even though I had given **WE BEGIN AT THE END** a shot, I wasn't sure I had given it a fair shot, so I resolved to read the book no matter what. With renewed determination, I started again and found it slow going, but I persevered, reading 5-10 pages a day, putting it down and going on to other books that I was more enthusiastic about reading. Then an amazing thing (to me) happened long about page 110 or so. It was like looking at one of Magic Eye pictures that don't make a lot of sense until to make you eyes go in and out of focus. Suddenly you see a three dimensional picture that wasn't apparent when you first look at it.

From that point I finished the 367-page novel in a couple of days. It is definitely a WOW book for me. There were so many startling surprises in the last 50 pages or so, that my emotions were sent on a roller-coaster. I came very close

to tears (something I never do) by the book's end.

**WE BEGIN AT THE END** turned out to be not only an outstanding example of crime fiction but also a remarkable piece of fine literature. While other books will fade from my memory, this one will stay fixed. It is that memorable. **Rating: A**

**Missing DP Columns?** You may notice that there is no Marv Lachman column in this issue. Nor is there a full L. J. Roberts review column. Both have experienced some health issues recently and have promised to resume their columns in the next issue. I miss having their valued input and wish them a complete and speedy recovery.

**Best Mysteries of the Year.** Now is the time of year when experts, publications and websites start publishing their lists of the best mysteries, crime novels and thrillers of the year. Last year Larry and I were able to locate 50 such lists and collate them to find consensus as to which are the best books of the year.

Many of the early lists will be posted on our website, [www.deadlypleasures.com](http://www.deadlypleasures.com). Please check in regularly if you are interested. In the next issue of *DP* I will publish all of the "Best" lists and my compilation, as I did last year. You won't find this anywhere else.

There are always good books that I find during this process that I would not otherwise have noticed.

Two of the novels that appeared at the top of last year's list compilation, **BLACKTOP WASTELAND** by S. A. Cosby and **WINTER COUNTS** by David Heska Wanbli Weiden, went on to win a number of awards, including the two major Barry Awards.



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