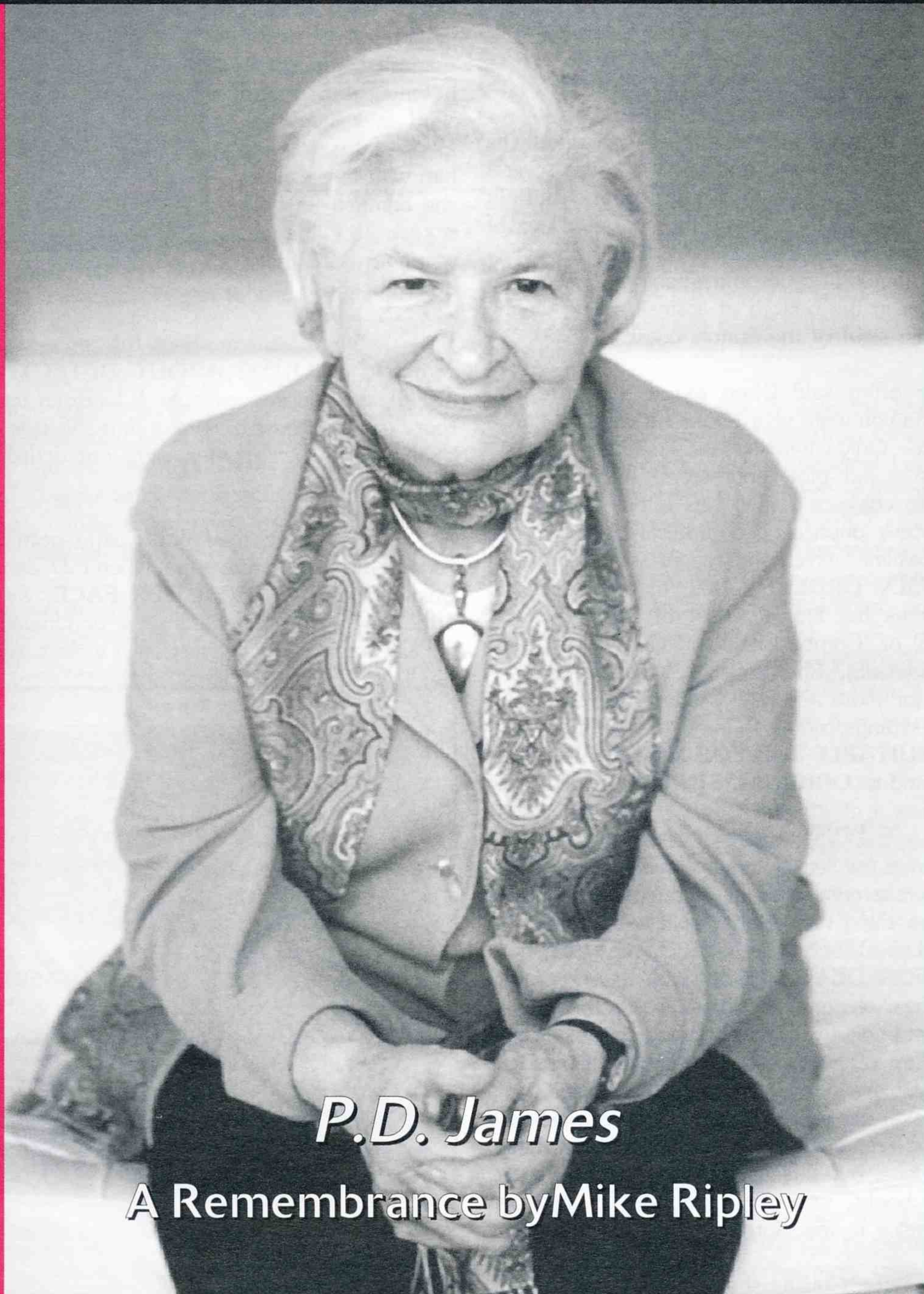


Deadly Pleasures *Mystery Magazine*



P.D. James

A Remembrance by Mike Ripley

A Greek Reading Binge by Steele Curry



It's the start of May and we're back at "Lizard in the Sun" on the Greek island of Skiathos in the Aegean Sea. My wife Judy and I have been coming here every summer for 36 years, staying for as long as three or four months.

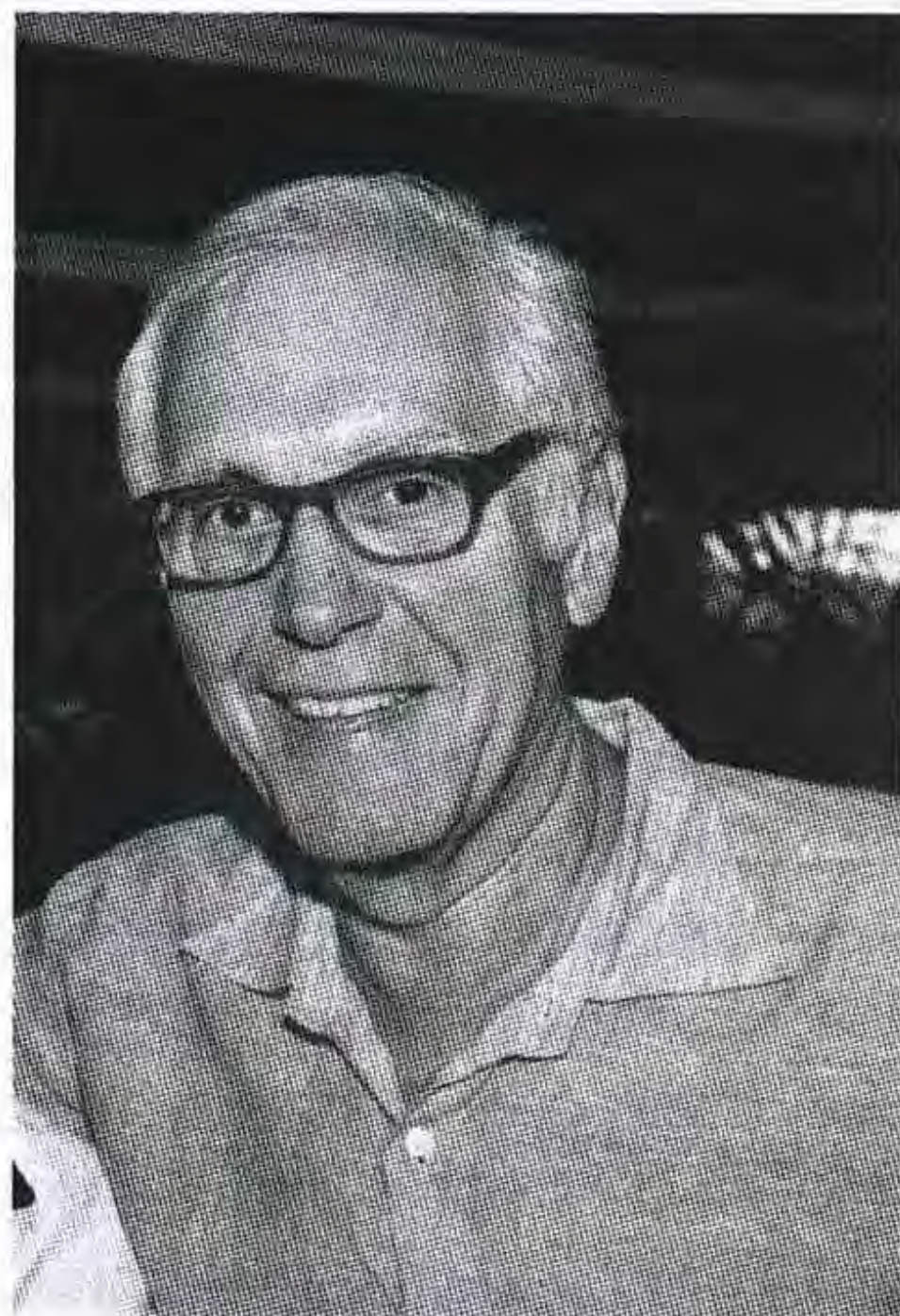
Skiathos is a beautiful island about eight miles long and four miles wide with some 40 beaches, a rustic village and many excellent tavernas and restaurants where you sit under the stars. The Greek people here are warm, friendly and helpful. And the weather is usually gorgeous from the beginning of May through at least the end of September.

My annual Skiathos experience includes spending lots of time reading on our terrace overlooking the crystal blue Aegean Sea. Most summers, I read 30 to 40 books here, almost all of which are mysteries and thrillers, many by first-time authors. Below are some of the more notable books I read this year in Skiathos:

MYKONOS AFTER MIDNIGHT by Jeffrey Siger (Poisoned Pen Press 2013 hardcover). To get into a proper Greek frame of mind, for the last five years the first book I read upon arriving in Skiathos is the latest novel by Jeff Siger. He writes an excellent mystery series featuring Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis, head of Greece's Special Crimes Division. Kaldis and his elite team are tasked with investigating major crimes and high-level corruption throughout the country. Each of the author's novels highlights a different prominent Greek island as well as Athens.

Mykonos is the one part of Greece that continues to thrive regardless of the country's ruinous financial condition. Located 90 miles southeast of Athens, this island still acts as a powerful magnet for international tourists, the world's super-rich and numerous Mediterranean cruise ships. Plus, it's where the author lives for six months of every year.

In **MYKONOS AFTER MIDNIGHT**, Kaldis rushes to the island to rescue a kidnapped senior police official and uncovers an Eastern European crime cartel's plot to become a major force on Mykonos. The author combines elements of a thriller and a political "procedural"



Jeff Siger

(rather than a police one) while also conveying his appreciation of Greece's beauty and history. It's a highly enjoyable read but I'm in no rush to join the Mykonos summer mob scene.

WHEN THE DEAD AWAKEN by Steffen Jacobsen (Quercus trade paperback 2013 U.K.). How could I stumble across this book almost by accident when it's so exceptional? The first novel by this Danish author to be translated into English, **WHEN THE DEAD AWAKEN** is in the same league as **THE GODFATHER**. Assistant Public Prosecutor Sabrina D'Avalos asks to be assigned to investigate the murder of a mother and son whose remains were discovered in a shipping container in the Port of Naples. The perpetrators are assumed to be linked to the Camorra, the mafia organization that rules Naples, and possibly to the assassination of Sabrina's father, a General who headed up Italy's Special Forces as well as the Carabinieri's anti-terror unit. Apart from her family, Sabrina's only relationship is with Ismael, a young African boy who she regularly sees at his orphanage. Ultimately, Sabrina becomes the hunted as the Camorra's leading crime family decides to have her eliminated by its most talented assassin. This is a powerhouse of a thriller that grabs you by the throat and doesn't let go until the last page. Bravo to the translator for doing such a pitch perfect, seamless translation. Quercus is publishing a hardcover edition of this book in the U.S. next January.

7 GRAMS OF LEAD by Keith Thomson (Anchor Books 2014 paperback). You've undoubtedly heard of a flux compression generator. Right? No, I didn't think so. It's the ultimate e-bomb set to obliterate Washington, D.C. unless the two heroes of this book can thwart the perpetrators from triggering it. Journalist blogger Russ Thornton and billionaire political candidate Beryl Mallory are targeted for elimination by a shadowy intelligence agency, possibly one of the many operated by various branches of the U.S. government. Subjected to countless assassination attempts, torture and futuristic surveillance technology, these two characters give new meaning to the terms "indomitable" and "indestructible." This is an inventive, superbly written thriller with a breakneck pace that will leave you paranoid about ever again experiencing your own privacy and security. It's the author's third novel.

BLACK ROCK by John McFetridge (ECW Press 2014 trade paperback Toronto). Young Constable Eddie Dougherty is pursuing a serial killer in Montreal during the 1968-1970 FLQ terrorist crisis there. Bombings, kidnappings and riots are being instigated by radical activists who want the province of Quebec to separate from Canada. Long the bank robbery capital of North America, Montreal has become a much more dangerous city. Dougherty benefits from having a senior police official as his mentor but is forced to investigate the killer and rapist largely on his own while the rest of the Montreal police force is tied up chasing the FLQ. The author vividly describes the character of Montreal as the backdrop to this historical police procedural novel. All of the previous mysteries by McFetridge are set in Toronto.

CROCODILE TEARS by Mark O'Sullivan (Transworld Ireland 2014 trade paperback). When it comes to bleak and despair, nobody does it better than Irish writers. Detective Inspector Leo Woods is the dominant leading character in the author's first crime novel, set in Dublin. Woods, a former U.N. peacekeeper with a badly disfigured face as a result of Bell's palsy, is assigned first one and then two murders to investigate. Not sure how or if they're linked, Woods ends up with some five prime suspects, each of whom possessing motive and opportunity, plus of course the disaffected wife of one of the victims. Other officers assisting Woods include the newly promoted Detective Sergeant Helen Troy who has some problems of her own. This is not a happy time in Ireland and most of the characters in this book have badly suffered from the country's financial collapse. Following Woods and Troy as they investigate all of the possible perpetrators is similar to watching them peel the skins off five or more onions. The author manages to invest his characters with a plethora of sins, foibles and frailties. Let's hope his next book contains a sliver of hope or joy.

OF COPS & ROBBERS by Mike Nicol (Old Street Publishing 2013 trade paperback U.K.). A powerful novel about the underside of life in South Africa starting in 1977 when the so-called "Icing Units" of politically-sanctioned hit squads were still operating both inside the country and around the world. The diverse cast of characters is brilliantly rolled out and each of them seems to have something to hide. The story here is loosely based on real events that most everyone, especially South Africa's current political higher-ups, would like to see forgotten and deeply buried. It's hard to imagine that this novel is going to make Nicol popular in his home country of South Africa. This is the author's fifth novel and his writing style just gets better and better. Reminds me of Tom Wolfe. Seriously, it's that good.

THE MAN FROM BERLIN by Luke McCallin (Berkley 2013 trade paperback). Outstanding debut novel, introducing German military intelligence officer Captain Gregor Reinhardt as he pursues a double murder investigation in war-ravaged Yugoslavia. The first victim, a high profile, beautiful, local filmmaker and photographer, was famous for her reckless sexual escapades, especially with older German generals. The other, a German officer connected to an arm of internal military security, was somehow involved with the stabbed seductress. At that time, most of this region was engulfed in a savage maelstrom of local inter-ethnic conflicts with the German and Italian occupying forces struggling to impose order. By 1943, the Yugoslav Communists under Tito had success-

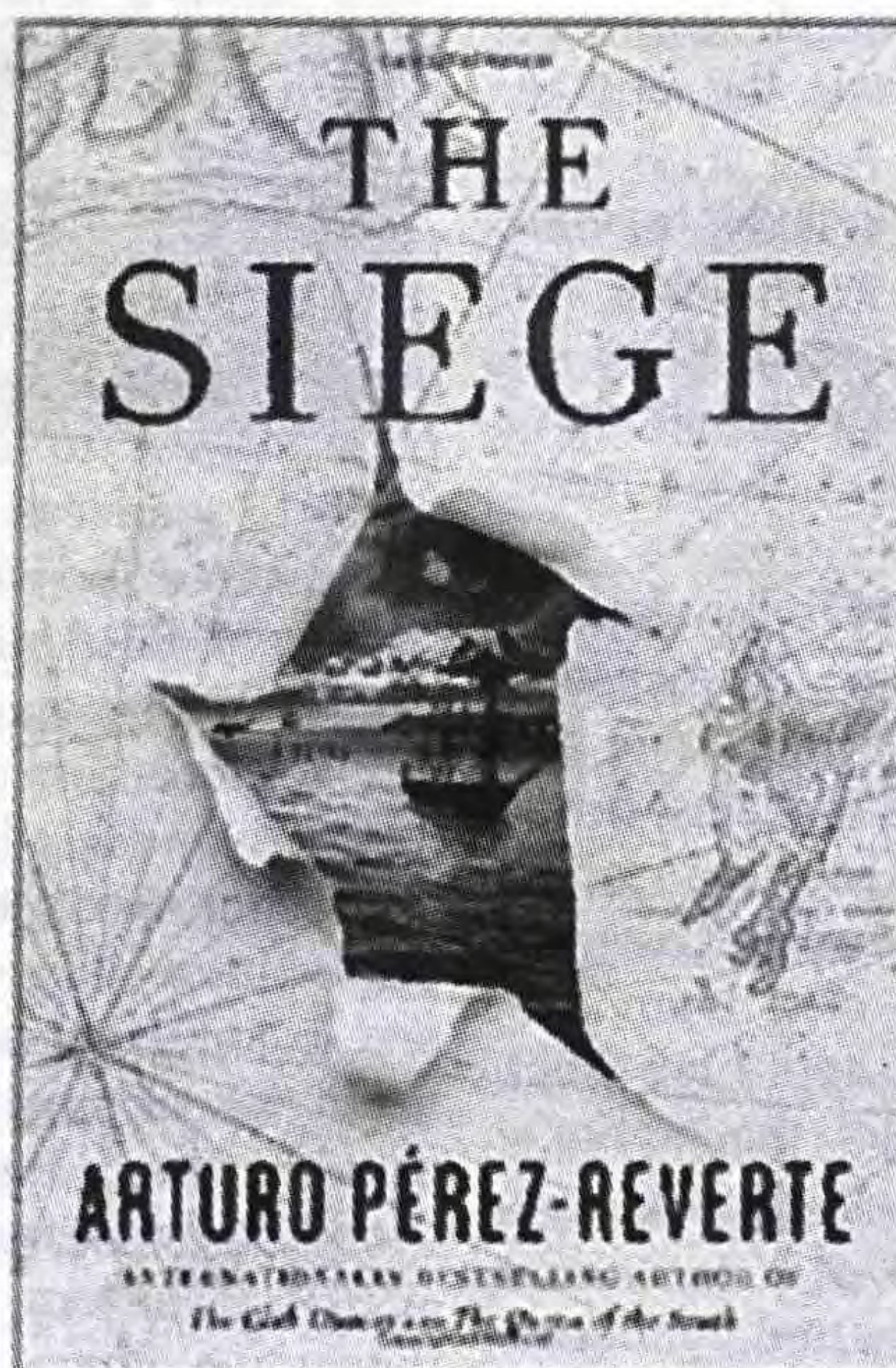
fully organized a strong multiethnic resistance group, known as the Partisans, that became the dominant force battling the Germans, Italians, Croatians, Ustaöe and Èetniks. The Germans themselves had their own set of intense political, military and personal rivalries that further complicated Reinhardt's job of finding the killer or killers and placed him in constant danger. This novel is brilliantly written and reminds me of H.H. Kist's **THE NIGHT OF THE GENERALS**. McCallin's second Reinhardt novel, **THE PALE HOUSE**, was published in July 2014.

THE SIEGE by Arturo Perez-Reverte (Weidenfeld 2013 trade paperback London). Long one of my favorite authors, Perez-Reverte specializes in superbly written historical mysteries with plots within plots and an engaging cast of colorful characters. **THE SIEGE** chronicles the Spanish city of Cadiz in 1811 when it was surrounded and being constantly bombarded by French forces. The ruth-

less police chief there is obsessively hunting a serial killer who brutally murders young women close to the same time and place where a French bomb falls. A French artillery tactician is working hard to extend the range of his shells into the center of Cadiz. The aristocratic female head of a large Spanish shipping and trading company becomes partners with a hard-bitten corsair captain. A Cadiz taxidermist is spying for the French. You might say that Perez-Reverte is the Hilary Mantel of mystery fiction. There is perhaps a bit more information about artillery than one needs to know but the book is still a terrific read.

BLACK STAR NAIROBI by Mukoma Wa Ngugi (Melville House 2013 trade paperback Brooklyn - also published as **KILLING SAHARA** by Kwela Books 2013 South Africa).

This is the author's second terrific novel about Ishmael Fofona and O, two private detectives who opened their Black Star Agency in Nairobi three years earlier. Ishmael is an experienced black American policeman who moved to Kenya and lives with his girlfriend, Muddy, a war refugee from Rwanda. O is a part-time local policeman with a fearsome reputation. The day before a massive bombing of a prominent Nairobi hotel, Ishmael and O are asked by the Kenyan police to investigate the murder of a man found in the Ngong Forest. The American local CIA and Consular officials are convinced the bombing was carried out by Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab or Somali terrorists targeting U.S. citizens. Ishmael and O disagree with the Americans and believe there is a connection between the man found in the Ngong Forest and the bombers. They decide to pursue their own investigation with Muddy which takes the three of them to Mexico and California before they return to a Kenya on the precipice of chaos stemming from corrupt presidential election results and ethnic violence. The bodies pile up as Ishmael,



O and Muddy have to shoot their way past each turn in their investigation. I implore the author to continue this fine series. For great pace, characterization and setting, both **NAIROBI HEAT** and **BLACK STAR NAIROBI** are winners.

THE DEFECTOR by Daniel Silva (Putnam 2009 hardcover). Every summer, I treat myself to one of this author's prior books. To say that they give me great reading pleasure would be a considerable understatement. I take my time reading them, savoring each chapter as I would each course in a five-star gourmet dinner. **THE DEFECTOR**, Silva's twelfth novel, starts with Gabriel Allon in Italy and then takes him to London, Washington, Geneva, Tel Aviv and Russia. A Russian oligarch and international arms dealer has vowed to kill Allon as revenge for taking his ex-wife and two children from him. The oligarch arranges for a Russian defector living in London to be forcibly returned to Russia, knowing Allon would feel compelled to rescue his old friend. The Israeli secret service, the CIA and Britain's MI5 back Allon's attempt to do so but there are some daunting obstacles to overcome. Silva refers to his novels as "entertainment" and this one succeeds brilliantly.

A DARK SONG OF BLOOD by Ben Pastor (Bitter Lemon Press 2014 trade paperback London/New York). The third book in the author's excellent series featuring Major Martin Bora, an aristocratic officer in the German Army, takes place in German-occupied Rome from January 8 to June 4, 1944, the date of the withdrawal of German forces from the city. Bora is tasked with investigating three high-profile murders together with Roman police Inspector Sandro Guidi who had also worked with Bora in the prior novel, **LIAR MOON**. Bora becomes caught up in the power struggle between the German Army, the SS and the Gestapo while Guidi has to contend with competing factions within the Roman police as well as the Partisans and resistance. The Vatican also exerts its own power and influence over events. The author masterfully describes the complexity of life in occupied Rome as well as the personal and opposing tensions experienced by Bora and Guidi as they struggle to solve the crimes. This is mystery fiction, a war story and a historical novel tightly woven together by a superb storyteller.

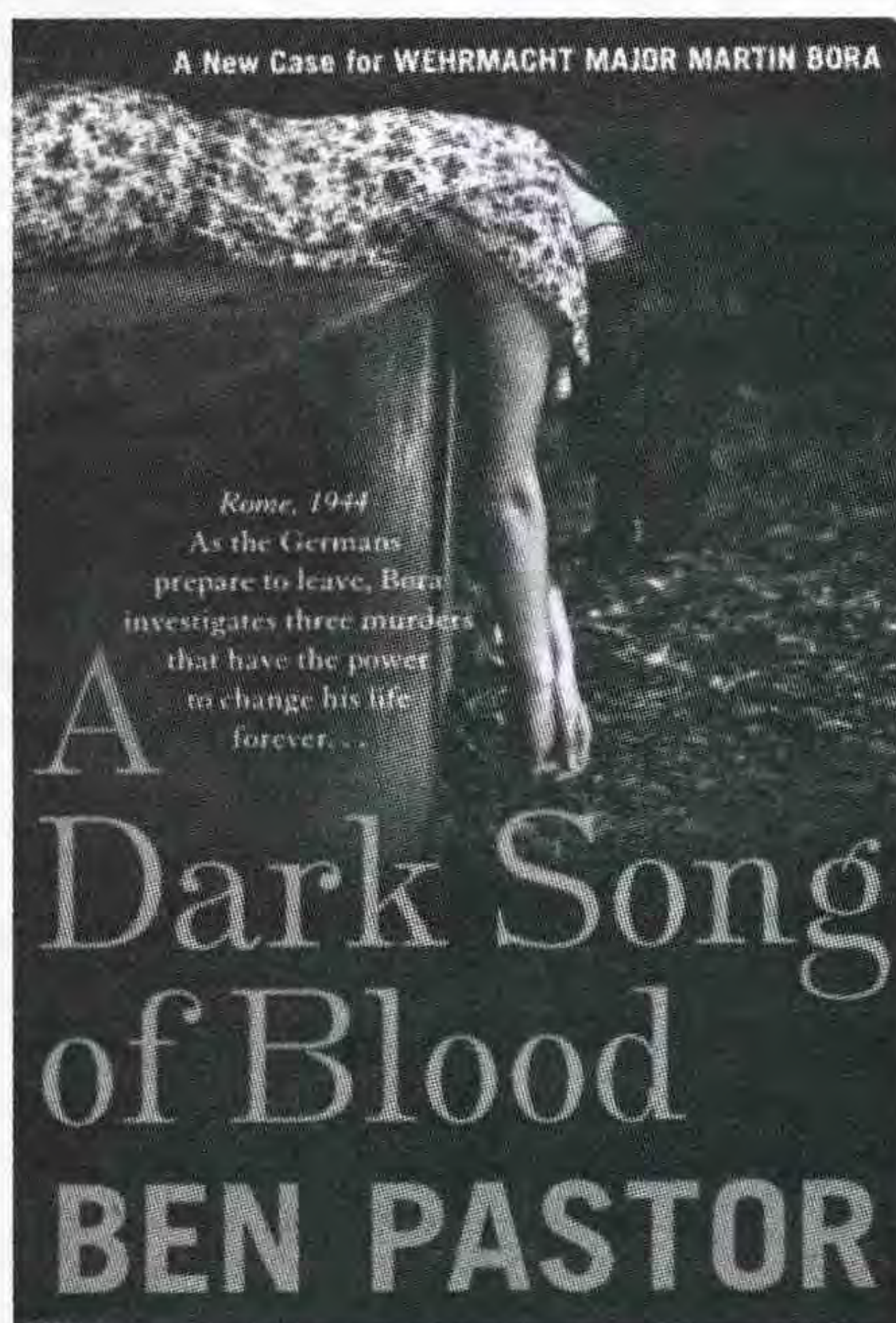
BAGHDAD CENTRAL by Elliott Colla (Bitter Lemon Press 2014 trade paperback London/New York). This impressive debut novel by an American author provides a searing ground-floor perspective of the attempt by American and other Coalition Forces to bring some type of order to Iraq in 2003 as seen through the eyes of a former Iraqi mid-level policeman, Inspector Muhsin al-

Khafaji. The country is in a state of total collapse and violent inter-sectarian chaos. Khafaji is pressured into assisting the Americans in trying to resurrect the Iraqi National Police Service while also investigating the disappearance of numerous female translators working for the occupation forces. Treachery, all-pervasive corruption, towering incompetence, cultural ignorance on a grand scale, and a total absence of any stabilizing local institutions make the revival of a functioning Iraq a historic classic case of Mission Impossible. Nevertheless, Khafaji tries his best to make some sense of it all. In the end, Khafaji's passion for poetry and love for his invalid daughter prove to be critical to his survival.

THE CITY OF STRANGERS by Michael Russell (Harper Collins 2013 trade paperback London). This is the author's second novel featuring Garda Sergeant Stefan Gillespie of Irish and German descent, now policing in a small Irish community where he lives with his parents and son. It starts in March 1939 when Europe is on the brink of war and Gillespie is assigned to take one of the first Clipper flights to New York to bring a murder suspect back to Ireland for questioning. Once in New York, Gillespie is befriended by an undercover senior official in the Irish secret military police who causes him to become involved with a large cast of colorful characters. This includes high-power New York IRA supporters, a senior mobster, a wife on the run, American isolationists, corrupt policemen and a member of the German Abwehr. Along the way, there are lots of murders, bombings, shootings, beatings and political intrigues. Russell is a masterful storyteller who leaves the reader wanting to read more about Gillespie's escapades.

THE BOYFRIEND by Thomas Perry (The Mysterious Press 2013 hardcover). It's hard not to become paranoid reading one of this author's mysteries. The villains are so plausible yet thoroughly psychopathic. Their evil acts are committed with finesse and honed skills. They could easily be your next-door neighbor or the man casually walking past you this very moment. The central villain in **THE BOYFRIEND** appears to be a serial killer but maybe not. His pursuer is a former cop turned private investigator hired by the parents of one of the victims who all are attractive young women. This is an excellent stand-alone novel by Perry but I confess to preferring his Butcher Boy and Jane Whitefield novels.

AGENCY RULES: NEVER AN EASY DAY AT THE OFFICE by Khalid Muhammad (Self-Published 2014 trade paperback U.S.) This is the first book in a planned series that features Kamal Khan, a young battle-hardened, clandestine officer in the Pakistan Army, com-



mitted to eliminating the terrorists who are fighting to destroy his country and its government. While **BAGDAD CENTRAL** gives a bottom-up view of the tensions, conflicts and power struggles afflicting Iraq, **AGENCY RULES: NEVER AN EASY DAY AT THE OFFICE** provides an equally telling perspective of current day Pakistan and the complex workings of the Pakistan military, its Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) arm, the various competing political factions, the provincial governments and the country's rampant fundamental Islamic terrorists. Outside parties, such as the CIA, are not portrayed as playing a constructive role. Khan uncovers a remote terrorist fortress whose ringleaders may have directed the recent assassination of Pakistan's Prime Minister. Together with another military officer, Khan is tasked with mounting an operation to destroy this terrorist sanctuary and capture its key players for interrogation. The author is both highly knowledgeable about the inner workings of Pakistan and a talented storyteller.

NORWEGIAN BY NIGHT

by Derek B. Miller (Houghton Mifflin 2013 hardcover). A poignant debut thriller set in Norway about a widowed elderly New Yorker, Sheldon Horowitz, whose granddaughter convinces him to move to Oslo to be with her and her Norwegian husband. Sheldon, a former Marine sniper who served in the Korean War and lost his only son in the Vietnam War, is forced to go on the run with a young boy whose mother, a neighbor, was fatally attacked by a Balkan war criminal. A female Norwegian Police Chief Inspector is in charge of finding Sheldon and the boy before the killer and his violent Kosovar associates do so. Along the way, we learn about the scars of war, some failures of fatherhood, the continued fallout from the ethnic violence of the Balkan wars, and the vulnerabilities of liberal societies such as Norway, all seen with perhaps greater clarity through the perspective of Sheldon's Jewish background. Miller is obviously a bright and wise author unafraid of posing difficult questions like "the very real question now haunting all of Western civilization – namely, How tolerant should we be of intolerance?" This is a thriller with lots of soul, wit and compassion.

LONELY HEARTS by John Harvey (Viking 1989 hardcover London, paperback copies are still in print in the U.K.). Every summer, I like to re-read some of the classic mysteries by the "Old Masters" to remind myself just how great they were. **LONELY HEARTS** was the first in Harvey's 12-novel series to feature the indomitable Detective-Inspector Charlie Resnick. What a fabulous character and what a fabulous series! Harvey excels at describing personal relationships, portraying compelling characters (both good and bad), and building plots that

tightly hold the reader's attention. In **LONELY HEARTS**, Resnick and his team are investigating the separate gruesome murders of two attractive women. Resnick knows that the most obvious suspects are rarely guilty despite all appearances indicating otherwise. Nottingham can be a dangerous place, especially for those individuals closest to Resnick. The author decided to end his Resnick series with the publication of **DARKNESS, DARKNESS** this past May.

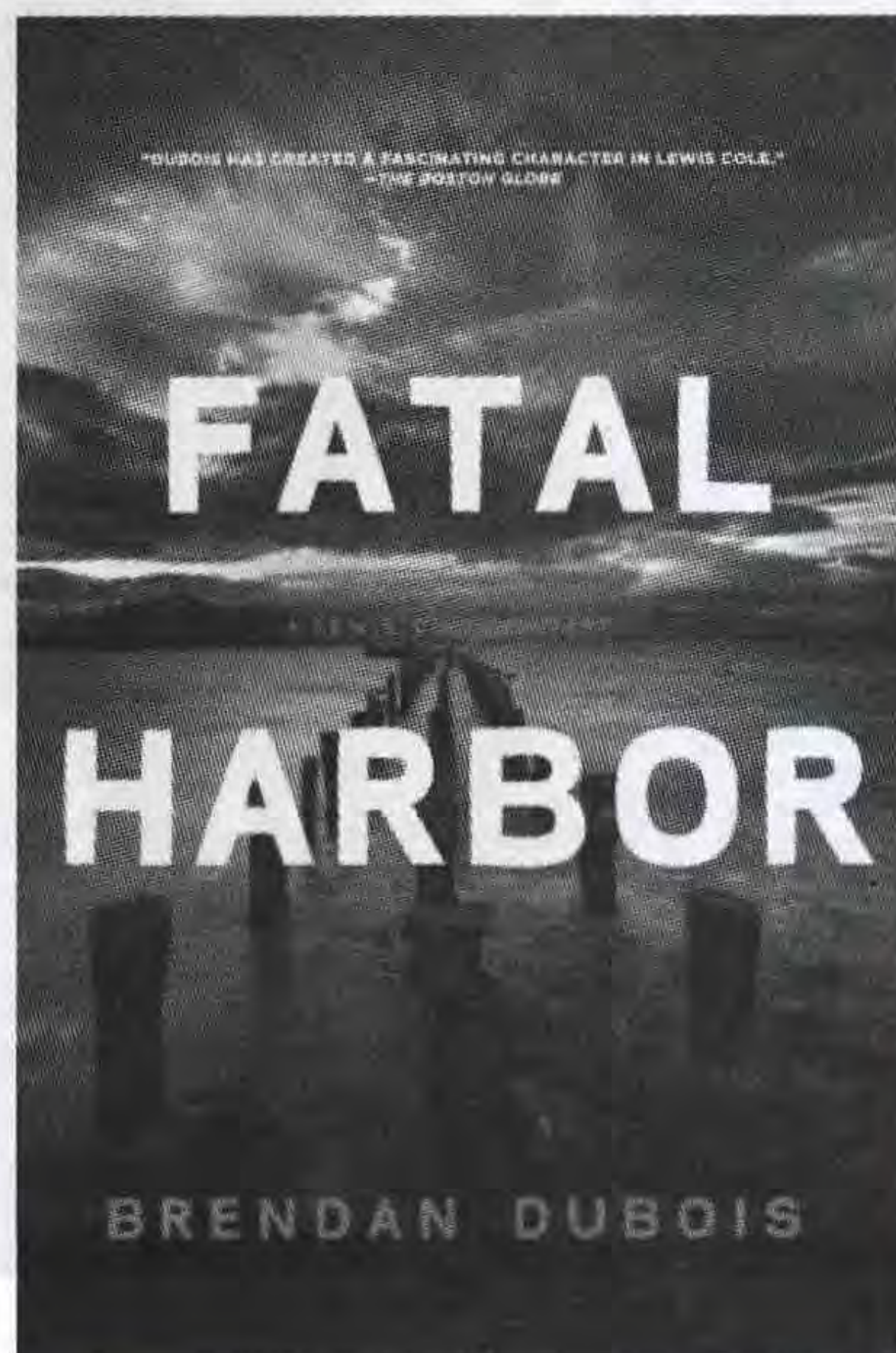
MIDNIGHT IN EUROPE by Alan Furst (Random House 2014 hardcover). All of Furst's historical espionage novels have given me great reading pleasure. **MIDNIGHT IN EUROPE**, set primarily in Paris and New York, brilliantly conveys the dark apprehensive mood descending on all of Europe and England in 1938 as it becomes obvious to almost everyone that war with Nazi Germany is unavoidable. A Spanish émigré, serving as a partner in the Paris office of a prestigious American international law firm, becomes involved in smuggling

arms to the Spanish Republic battling for survival against Franco's Nationalist Army. In the process, he encounters a succession of shady arms dealers, Odessa gangsters, an aristocratic seductress, a French spymaster, members of the feared NKVD and Nazi thugs. This individual, like most of the leading characters in Furst's novels, faces his challenges with lots of courage, panache and a certain fatalism. This is a desperate time for those who value freedom, democracy and human rights.

FATAL HARBOR by Brendan DuBois (Pegasus Books 2014 hardcover). I admire an author who can tell a terrific story in under 250 pages. This is the eighth novel by DuBois to feature magazine columnist and former Department of Defense research analyst Lewis Cole. After witnessing the brutal

beating of his closest friend at an anti-nuclear protest, Cole vows to exact his own brand of justice on the person responsible. Fortunately, Cole can count on Felix Tinios, a security consultant from Boston's North End, to back him up as it becomes apparent that a shadowy powerful organization was behind the attack. Cole receives a number of warnings to drop his quest for vengeance or those closest to him will suffer badly. Followed, harassed, outgunned, Cole gets some unexpected help as he attempts to locate his target, in the process giving new meaning to the term "fearlessly tenacious."

THE DIRECTOR by David Ignatius (Norton 2014 hardcover). This author writes superb novels with an espionage theme, many of them set in the Middle East. With each of his novels, Ignatius usually highlights a particular topical theme or issue. His last novel, **BLOODMONEY**, focused on the unintended conse-



quences of America's drone warfare. The principal theme of **THE DIRECTOR** concerns the extent to which today's espionage activities are becoming overtaken by computer hacking, covert electronic surveillance and cyberwar. The U.S. has appointed a new director of the CIA who intends to rejuvenate the agency after its former head was charged with money laundering. Soon after, the director senses that a high-level mole or rogue player within the CIA or one of the other American intelligence organizations is about to launch a major cyber attack. How can he uncover the perpetrators when he doesn't even trust the head of the CIA's own Information Operations Center? Is Israel, Russia, China or the British involved in backing this threat? Who is the target? It becomes evident that there is no such thing in this new age as a database or computer file anywhere that is unhackable. Are you paranoid yet? – maybe you should be.

CARNIVAL by J. Robert Janes (Mysteriouspress.com/Open Road 2014 trade paperback). This is the author's fifteenth book in his engrossing series featuring Jean-Louis St-Cyr of the French Sûreté Nationale and his wartime partner Hermann Kohler of the Gestapo. Forced to work together to solve everyday crimes during the occupation of France, this pair is summoned to a POW camp in Alsace to investigate the apparent suicide of two of the prisoners while avoiding embarrassing the camp's jailers. As is usual with this series, nothing is quite as it seems to be and the two policemen encounter strong opposition in their search for truth and justice. The author again immerses the reader in the conflicted atmosphere and gritty texture of life in France during the occupation. Thanks to his careful research, Janes always gets it right. Like the author's prior book, **THE HUNTING GROUND**, his next book, **BETRAYAL**, is a stand-alone thriller scheduled to be published in November.

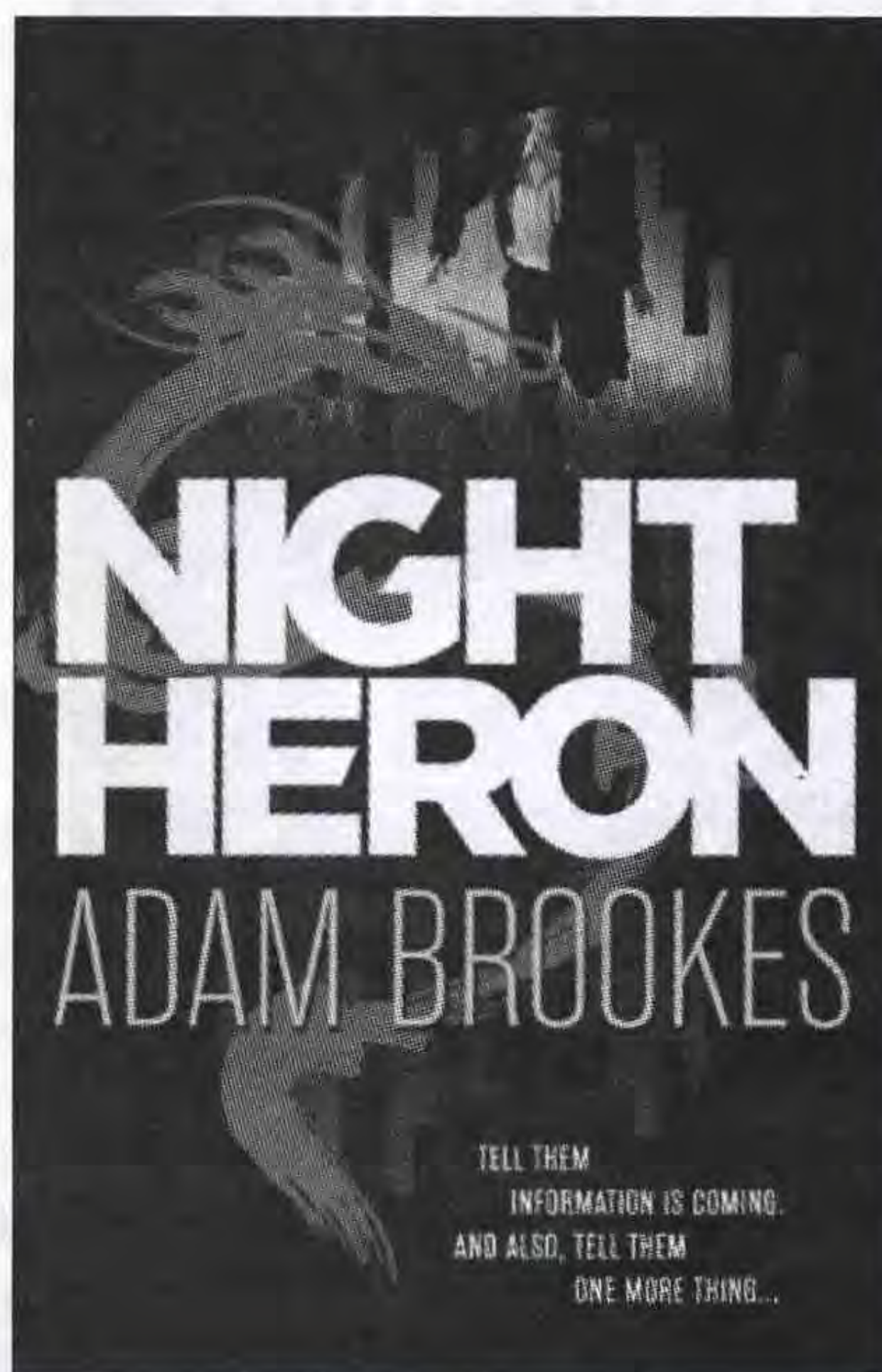
I AM PILGRIM by Terry Hayes (Emily Bestler Books/Atria 2014 hardcover). I have to admit that, when I saw that this book was 613 pages long, I thought here's another example of a writer who is missing a good editor. Subsequent rave reviews, however, caused me to relent and start reading it. From the first page I quickly realized that word for word this was a polished diamond of a thriller – maybe the best I've read in the last 20 years. An American spy of singular talents is brought back from retirement to save his country from an apocalyptic fate. Moving swiftly from New York to London to Geneva to Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan to Washington to Turkey, this debut novel is a brilliant depiction of the current world of international espionage and terrorism. If one were paranoid it would be easy to think that the author was giving

terrorists a blueprint for bringing the U.S. to its knees. Prior to authoring this novel, Hayes has enjoyed a highly successful career as a screenwriter and producer of movies and TV shows. The quality of his writing is exceptional. It's no surprise to hear that MGM has just purchased the movie rights to this book.

IRÈNE by Pierre Lemaitre (MacLehose Press 2014 hardcover London). I hesitate to include this book as it features a major element that I find repellent – extremely violent sexual murders of females described in considerable detail. Last year, in my list of notable books read in Greece, based on the quality of the writing I included this French author's first book translated into English, **ALEX**, whose central character also was Paris Police Commandant Camille Verhoeven. **ALEX** had the same defect but not to the same extent. In **IRÈNE**, the villain meticulously recreates macabre murders taken from the pages of highly regarded crime novels. Unfortunately, readers are able to identify the killer early in the book which removes much of the suspense. All in all, I regard **IRÈNE** as another example of French noir fiction which commonly goes to the extreme in describing perverted gruesome crimes, often of a sexual nature.

NIGHT HERON by Adam Brookes (Sphere 2014 hardcover London). A fabulous debut novel set mainly in current-day China that vividly describes the amoral character of the espionage establishment (no news flash there). A Chinese spy, nicknamed Peanut, escapes from prison and connects with a struggling English journalist to try to hand over Chinese state secrets to the British Secret Service in return for a new life outside of China. Soon the two men are on the run, hunted by both Chinese counter-intelligence agents and another unknown powerful group that desperately wants the information they possess.

BLOOD GAME by David Lyons (Emily Bestler Books/Atria 2013 trade paperback). Cajun Federal Judge Jock Boucher has a proclivity for getting in trouble in his beloved city of New Orleans. Removed from his judicial duties and assigned to low-level administrative tasks, Boucher wants to resign but the President refuses to let him do so. Aided by his close friend Detective Fitch of the New Orleans Police Department, Boucher uncovers an arms smuggling ring connected to Mexican drug cartels. At the same time, the richest man in Louisiana tries to involve Boucher in a plot to gain vengeance on those responsible for murdering his only son in Mexico. Powerful American forces are prepared to act on their own to change history in the lawless regions of Northern Mexico. Boucher is not

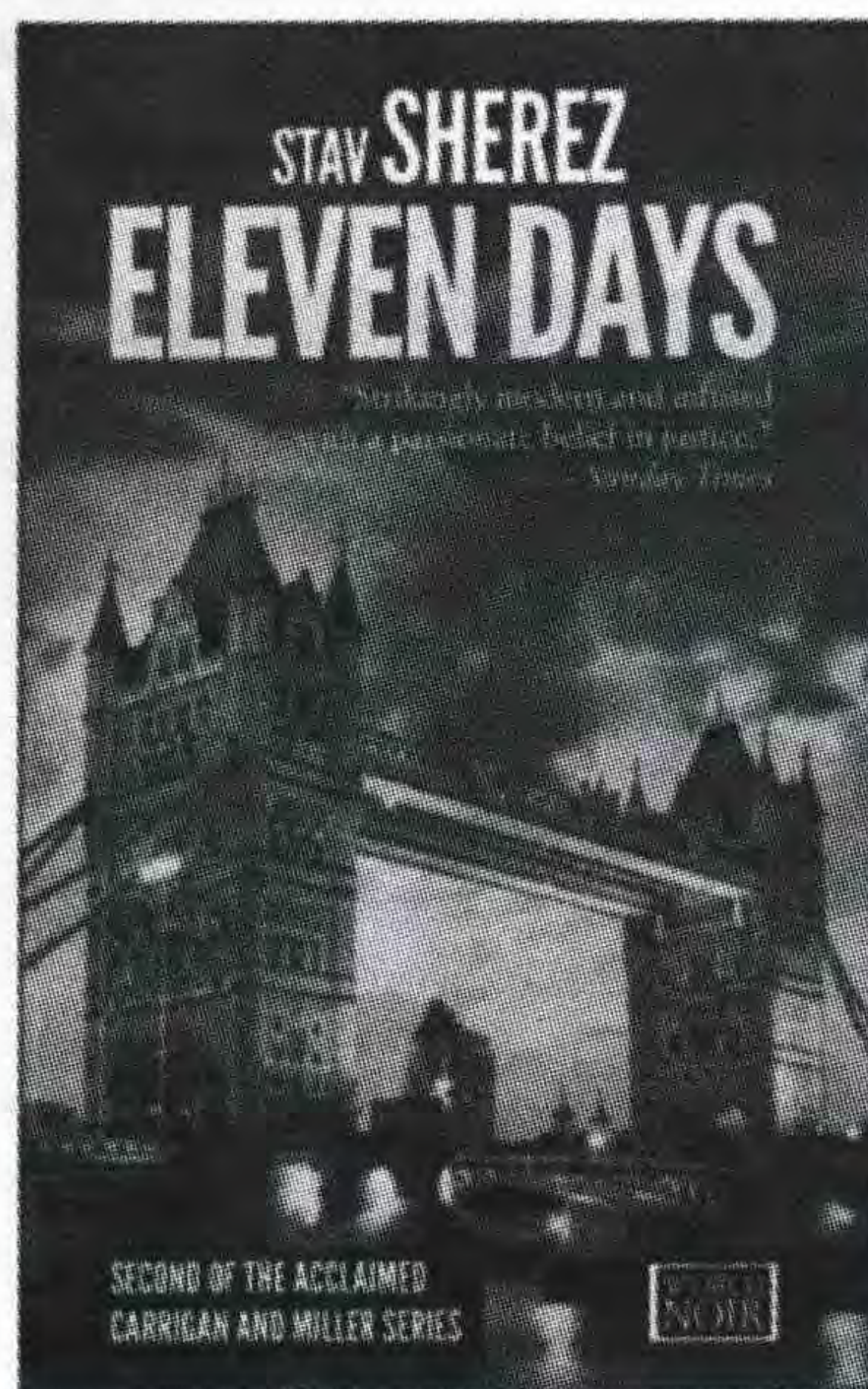


sure this is a good idea. All of this makes for entertaining reading but the ending is a bit of a stretch.

AN OFFICER AND A SPY by Robert Harris (Hutchinson 2013 hardcover/Arrow Books trade paperback 2014). While many non-fiction books have chronicled the Dreyfus Affair, Robert Harris superbly retells this period of sordid French history through the eyes of one of the main characters in the form of a novel. Spanning the years 1895 to 1906, **AN OFFICER AND A SPY** depicts the stunning depth of moral decrepitude that characterized senior levels of the French Army and political leadership during that period. The French Minister of War and half a dozen generals were complicit in knowingly having an innocent officer convicted and exiled to Devil's Island. Fortunately for Captain Dreyfus, a handful of steadfast prominent individuals continued to champion his cause despite overwhelmingly negative public and political pressure.

ELEVEN DAYS by Stav Sherez (Faber 2013 trade paperback U.K.). This is the second book in the author's excellent series featuring Detective Inspector Jack Carrigan and his partner Detective Sergeant Geneva Miller of the London Police's Homicide Squad. This time they are investigating a fire at a London convent that claimed the lives of ten nuns and an unknown eleventh victim. The evidence appears to indicate that the cause of the fire was arson. The investigation reveals that the nuns have upset a number of powerful forces including the hierarchy of the Catholic Church as well as an Albanian crime boss. The case takes Carrigan and Miller in many dark directions, including the nuns' involvement in the upsurge of violence that tore apart Peru starting back in the early 1970s. In Carrigan, the author has created a worthy successor to John Harvey's Resnick and Ian Rankin's Rebus.

THE GHOST RUNNER by Parker Bilal (Bloomsbury 2014 trade paperback U.K./hc U.S.). The third book in an impressive series featuring Makana, a private investigator in Cairo who was forced to flee his native Sudan where he was a senior police officer. Makana agrees to take a case involving a young woman who perished in a suspicious fire. The Cairo police regard this death as an accident but Makana has his doubts. The investigation takes Makana to Siwa, an oasis town on the edge of the Sahara desert. Shortly after Makana arrives, two gruesome murders are committed and more follow. Predictably, Siwa's residents include a good number of colorful, nefarious characters but Egyptian State Security officers, American intelligence agents and desert arms smugglers also make an appearance. Parker Bilal is the pseudonym of Jamal Mahjoub, the author of seven acclaimed literary novels.



DEAD LIONS by Mick Herron (Soho Press 2013 hardcover and trade paperback). OK, so I'm slow to get on the bandwagon. Finally got around to reading this gem of a thriller and discovered it really did deserve to receive the CWA Gold Dagger Award for Best Crime Novel. London's Slough House is a dumping ground for MI5's screw-ups. Nicknamed the "slow horses," this assembly of colorful characters serves under the misdirection of Jackson Lamb, one of the most outrageous spymasters ever invented in the history of espionage fiction. Can Lamb and his motley band unravel a collection of Cold War secrets and ghosts that threatens to inflict serious harm on London before it's too late? The author's snappy, clever dialogue rates an award all on its own. Can't wait to read **SLOW HORSES** which preceded **DEAD LIONS**.

PRINCES GATE by Mark Ellis (Matador 2011 hc and trade paperback U.K.). Author's first novel, introducing Detective Chief Inspector Frank Merlin who is assigned two murder investigations with both victims being employees at the U.S. Embassy in London. Are the murders related? Is Ambassador Joseph Kennedy somehow involved? What is the connection between a high-level American aide to Ambassador Kennedy and a London crime boss. It's January 1940 and everyone is expecting the Nazi bombing of London to commence soon. Ellis is an excellent storyteller.

WHO IS CONRAD HIRST? by Kevin Wignall (Simon & Schuster 2007 trade paperback). British international hit man Conrad Hirst decides to quit "the business," but discovers that everything he based his life on was wrong, including the identity of his employers. Hirst had embarked on his career as a hired killer after being traumatized by his experience as a mercenary in Yugoslavia and losing his girlfriend there in a bombing. After nine years of one deadly assignment after another, Hirst realizes that the only way to find himself is to start an entirely new life and that necessitates the elimination of the four individuals who know who he is and what he has done. If only the world of espionage were that simple. The author is a talented, lean storyteller. This is his fourth novel.

DEAD EYE by Mark Greaney (Berkley Books 2013 trade paperback). The fourth Gray Man novel roars along at a fast pace from Washington, D.C. to Russia to various locales in the rest of Europe. Betrayed by his former employers at the CIA, Court Gentry, aka the Gray Man, is hunted by a private U.S. covert contractor, an Israeli assassination squad and a rogue fellow agent code-named Dead Eye – all with the intent of terminating Gentry. Bodies pile up everywhere as Gentry fights to survive one deadly threat after another. Predictably, we all know how it ends.

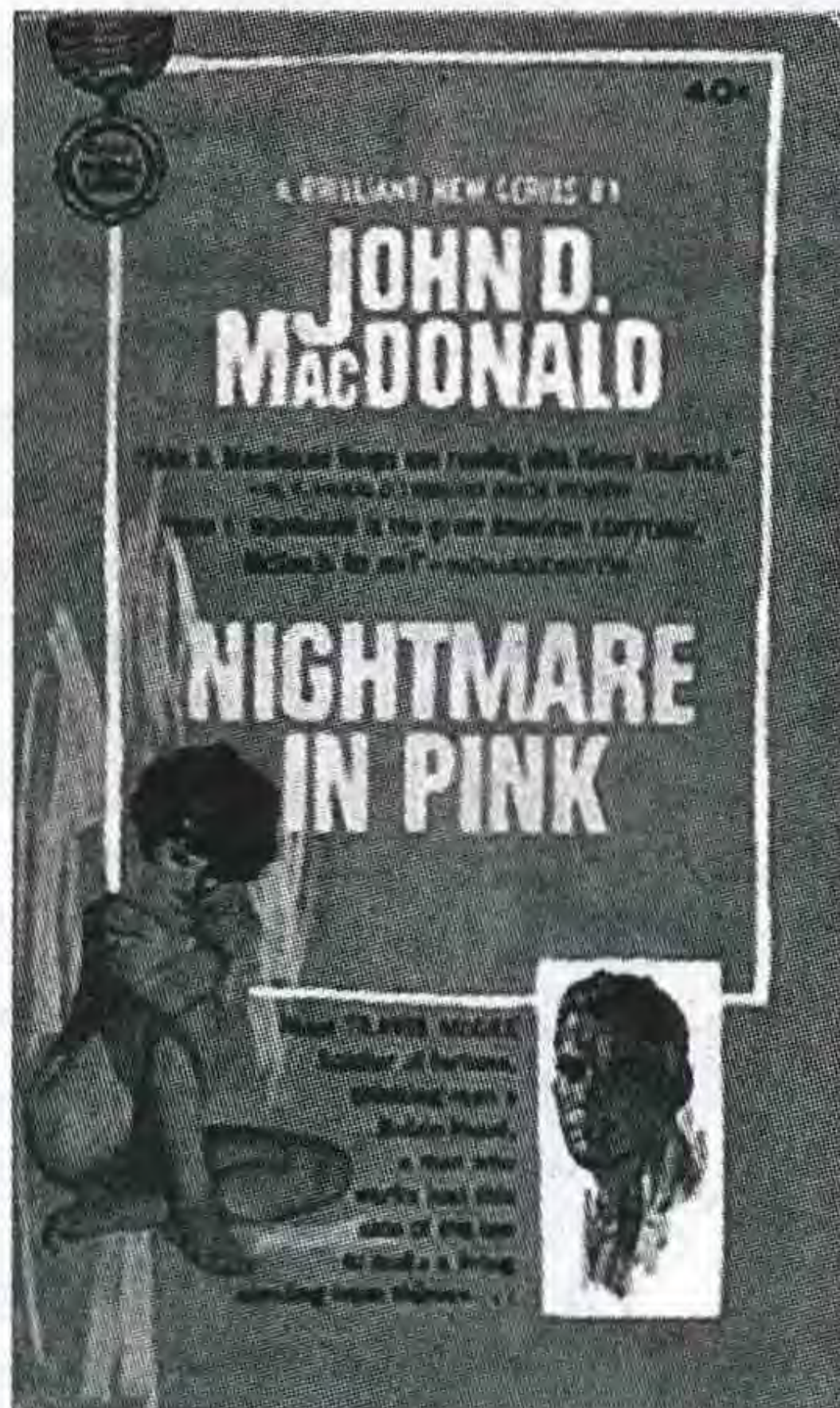
PIETR THE LATVIAN by **GEORGES SIMENON** (Penguin paperback 2013 U.K.; also published as **The Strange Case of Peter the Lett**, **The Case of Peter the Lett**, and **Maigret and the Enigmatic Lett**). Simenon's first Inspector Maigret novel originally published in serial form in 1930. Maigret investigates an international fraudster which leads to a number of murders being committed in Paris. In this novel, Simenon quickly establishes many of Maigret's trademark traits, including his pipe smoking, laconic nature, indomitable presence and relationship with Madame Maigret. **PIETR THE LATVIAN** also exhibits a cadence to Simenon's writing style that characterizes most of his Maigret novels. Penguin is in the process of republishing all of the 75 Maigret novels. The atmosphere of 1930s Paris seeps off each page.

EURO NOIR by Barry Forshaw (Pocket Essentials 2014 trade paperback U.K.). Subtitled "The Pocket Essential Guide to European Crime Fiction, Film and TV," this is an excellent survey of the best Western European crime fiction books, movies and television series, starting with some of the earliest authors. In the case of crime fiction, Forshaw mainly covers those books that have been translated into English but also mentions some notable books that strongly merit English translations. The countries surveyed are Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Greece, The Netherlands, Poland and Romania. In addition, **EURO NOIR** includes a chapter updating Forsaw's earlier work, **NORDIC NOIR** (also published by Pocket Essentials), and contains an interesting commentary on the challenges of publishing translated crime fiction.

NIGHTMARE IN PINK by John D. Macdonald (Random House 2013 trade paperback, originally published in 1964). The second Travis McGee novel demonstrates the virtuosity of the author's writing. Part mystery, part love story, this novel is as fresh today as it was 50 years ago. McGee is tough, tender and fearless in defending damsels in distress but always remains true to himself.

NIGHTMARE IN PINK sees Travis in extreme jeopardy as he tries to unravel a murderous conspiracy. Part of the action occurs in New York, not McGee's favorite locale. Wow, this is certainly mystery writing at its best.

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



SHAMUS AWARD WINNERS

Best Hardcover P.I. Novel

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W IS FOR WASTED by Sue Grafton
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THE HONKY TONK BIG HOSS BOOGIE by Robert J. Randisi

Best P.I. Short Story

"So Long, Chief" by Max Allan Collins and Mickey Spillane in *The Strand Magazine* – Winner

Best Indie P.I. Novel

DON'T DARE A DAME by M. Ruth Myers – Winner



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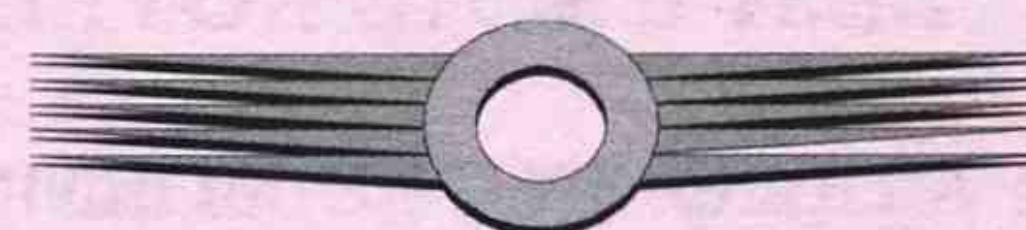
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