

The fog of war

Global conflicts and ordinary people

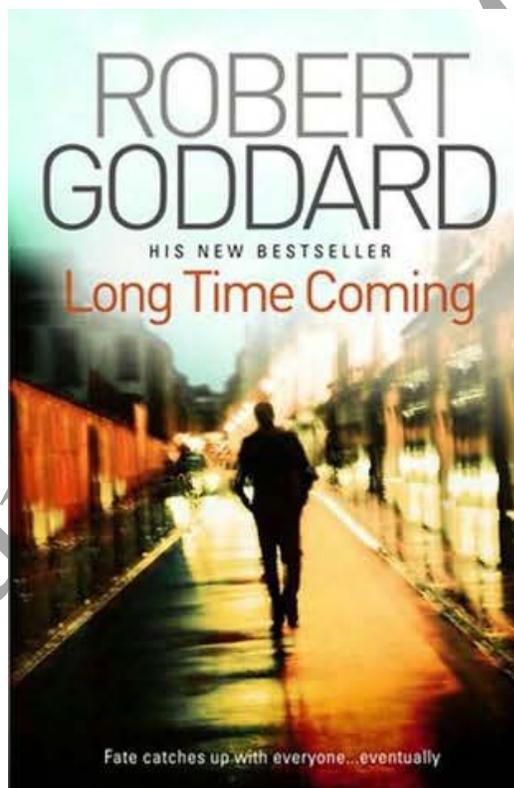
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

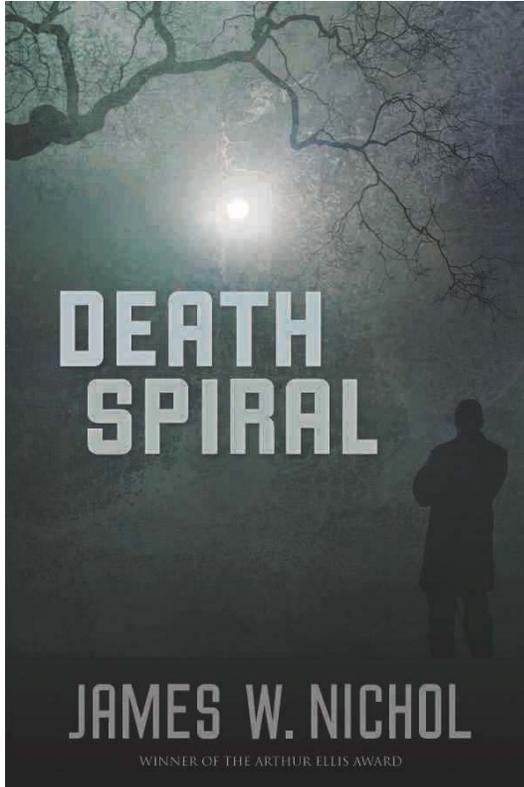
War is a great obscurer. The chaos of war can serve to mask crimes unrelated to larger conflicts, and, like all forms of adversity, war brings out the best in some people and the worst in others. Not always easy, then, to tell victims from villains; fertile soil for a compelling read. This week's picks deal with ordinary people caught up in the chaos of the Second World War. Few are heroes, at least in the conventional sense; not all are even admirable. But they each have their story to tell, and as well as being cracking good tales, each sheds light on what it means to be caught up in the maelstrom of war.

Robert Goddard
Long Time Coming
(Bantam, 2010)

In 1976, on returning to his mother's guest home in the small English seaside resort of Paignton, Stephen Swan is understandably surprised to find his uncle, Eldritch Swan: he's always been told that the man had died in the Blitz. He's just emerged after thirty-six years behind bars, and apart from insisting that he was innocent of any crime, won't say why he was imprisoned, claiming his silence was a condition of his release. Stephen is understandably skeptical, and at first wants nothing to do with the man; but when an Irish journalist shows up at his door asking for the elderly man, Stephen unaccountably stonewalls her.



And when her visit is followed by a London solicitor asking the same questions—this time offering money for answers—Stephen decides the issue won't go away. He decides to discover the truth about his uncle. It is a journey that will take him back to the early days of the war, and before it is over he will reach into Belgium, London, and Dublin for answers. A compelling and layered tale about the many intersections between personal greed and political intrigue, from the pen of a master storyteller.



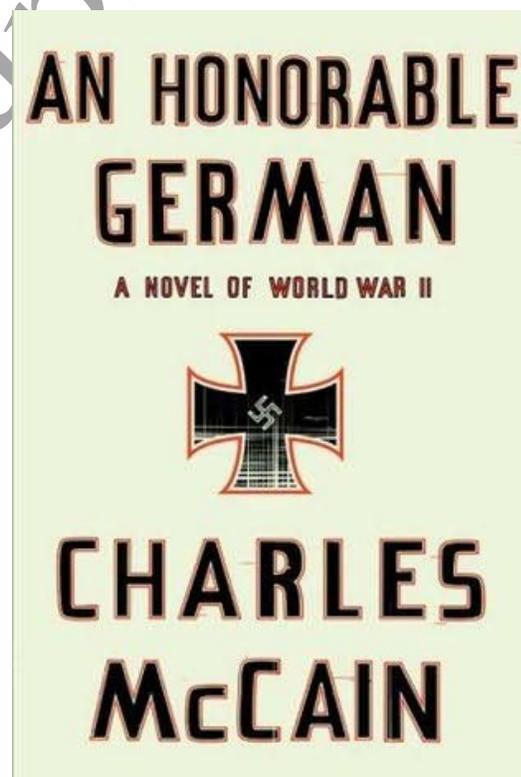
James W. Nichol
Death Spiral
(McArthur & Co., 2009)

Award-winning author James W. Nichol serves up a captivating chronicle of a troubled ex-fighter pilot returning home to Ontario at the end of the war. After being severely burned, Wilf McLauchlin's transition to civilian life is difficult, not helped by the fact that in his home town he is greeted as a hero. But Wilf's return to civilian life will not be easy: struggling with disfigurement, an impaired body, constant pain and nightmares, Wilf rejoins his father in their small-town law practice and attempts to restore some small measure of normalcy to his life. Calling on a client at home Wilf finds the man dead, apparently the victim of a bathtub accident. It is the first of several deaths that will dog the wounded veteran, and cause him at times to question his own sanity. Love is in the air as well, but

Wilf's struggle with pain and self-doubt jeopardizes his hopes. Nichols has served up a fast-paced yet nuanced story that explores the cost of war on those who fight it, and demonstrates that the postwar home front was not without its own terrors.

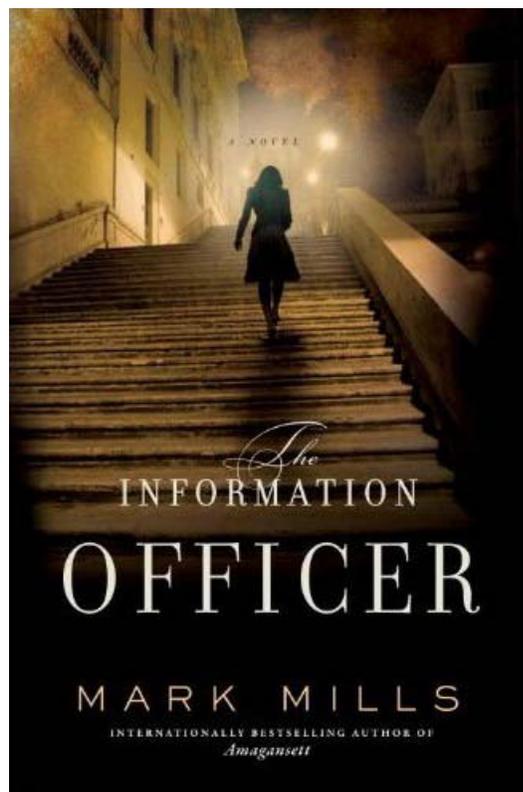
Charles McCain
An Honorable German
(Grand Central Publishing, 2009)

Max Breckendorf is a proud young German U-boat officer, eager to go to war for the glory of his country. He and his fiancée Mareth trust in the rightness of their nation's cause and share a hope for the future that a victorious Germany will offer them. But as the war progresses and their hopes begin to fail, Max begins to question the actions of his country and his comrades, and ultimately he is forced to confront his own values.



McCain has delivered a meticulously-researched, evocative look at loyalty and

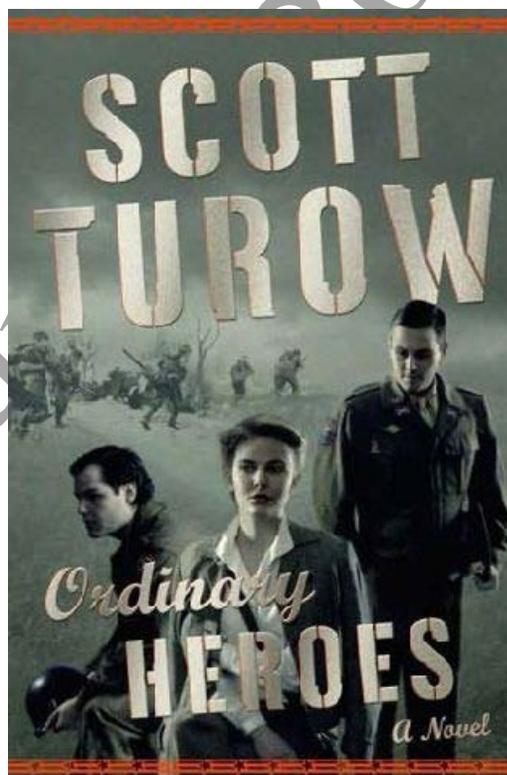
betrayal, honour and redemption reminiscent of Irwin Shaw's 1949's antiwar classic, *The Young Lions*. It reminds us (if such reminders are needed) that there were citizens of Germany who put both their lives and their honour on the line resisting the tyranny of the Third Reich.



Mark Mills
The Information Officer
(Random House, 2009)

Occupying a strategic point in the Mediterranean, the tiny island of Malta served as a crucial base for maintaining Allied shipping at the choke point between Axis-controlled Sicily and Tunisia, and for harassing the Germans in their efforts to sustain Rommel's feared Afrika Korps. But they paid a horrific price: the people of Malta experienced a far more intensive bombing by the Axis forces than did Londoners during the Blitz. Award-

winning author Mark Mills has penned an engrossing tale about Max Chadwick, a British officer confronted with the murder of a Maltese woman in which evidence points to a fellow British officer. Even more alarming, it seems this is only the most recent of a series of such killings. Realising the impact this could have on island morale, and with an upcoming German invasion on the horizon, Chadwick races against time to determine who was responsible for the women's deaths. A taut thriller set in an under-reported theatre of the war.



Scott Turow
Ordinary Heroes
(HarperCollins, 2005)

The acclaimed author of courtroom thrillers, Scott Turow serves up a change of pace with a tale of postwar intrigue. When American Stewart Dubinsky discovers a packet of wartime letters written by his father to his fiancée, he learns that he had been court-martialed

and imprisoned. Stewart plunges into the past, determined to understand the taciturn man who had always refused to discuss the war. His quest will lead him to Robert Martin, an enigmatic OSS officer who had been working with the French Resistance. Ordered to arrest Martin, Dubinsky had been forced by the events of war to abandon his search for the man and his elusive female companion. Before Stewart's own journey is over he will gain a new appreciation for his father, and a deeper understanding of the ironies of war itself.

Widely divergent in both style and subject, these novels invite us to contemplate a dark period in human history. They also remind us that to understand history is, ultimately, to better understand ourselves.

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