

racy” is a bad reading of history. India’s independence was assured in 1935, that of the Dominions by the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Churchill was fighting to preserve institutions like The West, Inc., which allows people like Mr. Kirsch the freedom to wring their hands over the dreadful things we inflicted on Hitler’s Germans.

Finally, presumably in a gesture toward equal time, Mr. Kirsch considers Michael Burleigh’s *Moral Combat*: “Burleigh fulminates, ‘Wars are not con-

ducted according to the desiccated deliberations of a philosophy seminar full of purse-lipped old maids.’ This is crude and bad-tempered, but Burleigh’s defensive impulse is understandable.”

I’m so pleased that Mr. Kirsch finds Mr. Burleigh’s views understandable that I will offer him another, my favorite on the whole subject, from Lady Soames: “My father would have done anything to win the war, and I daresay he had to do some pretty rough things. But they didn’t unman him.” 🐾

As in the previous tale, Cockran and McGary are helped along by two colorful personages: “The Chief,” publisher William Randolph Hearst; and “Wild Bill” Donovan, soldier, intelligence officer, and future founder of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the CIA.

Cochran also recruits serious muscle in the form of former members of “The Apostles,” the one-time IRA assassins hired and trained by “the Big Fella,” Michael Collins. Hitler and Himmler both make appearances as they prepare to seize control of Germany and seek to make the sword a talisman of the SS.

An interesting and seldom-encountered aspect of Hitler cast by the authors is the Führer’s advanced cultural tastes, which we see evidenced in a flash-back interview of Hitler by Mattie McGary around the time of the Nazis’ failed Beer Hall Putsch in Munich in 1923. Evidencing the father and son authors’ considerable research, we see Hitler as a devotee of the arts, particularly music, with eclectic tastes for an Aryan supremacist, extending even to Jewish composers. A reader knowing little of the Nazi chief could come away from this character sketch thinking Hitler might have been fun to share a beer and schnitzel with. But later on, the authors show Hitler to be just a “squalid caucus boss and butcher,” as described by Churchill.

As in *The De Valera Deception*, the body count is high, the violence graphic, the sexual energy intense, and the motion fast, because all the good guys move around in autogiros. It’s a thriller full of page-turning action with dialogue that echoes Dashiell Hammett.

Although Churchill is suitably isolated from the novel’s lurid passages, the old war horse eschews watching from the sidelines and manages to propel himself into directing and participating in the story’s dramatic climax. This too is characteristic.

Like the later Prime Minister, who insisted on going to France days after the D-Day landings, the Churchill of this novel is anything but sedentary, making his own preemptive strike at the Nazis in cloak and dagger operations of the utmost peril. 🐾

## Fiction: Hitler’s Holy Grail

DAVID FREEMAN



*The Parsifal Pursuit*, by Michael & Patrick McMenamin. Enigma Books, 442 pp., \$23.95, Kindle edition \$9.99, member price \$19.15.

**T**he Spear of Destiny: According to legend it is the lance used by a Roman guard to pierce the side of Jesus and so end Christ’s suffering upon the cross. The story goes back to the Gospel of St. John, written near the end of the first century A.D., but only several hundred years later did conflicting claims emerge from people said to be in possession of the very same weapon, which purportedly had taken on supernatural powers.

Of the various spears that appeared in the Middle Ages, the most famous is that associated with notable German leaders starting with Charlemagne. In the 19th century, Richard Wagner further expanded the relic’s association

with Teutonic culture by including the spear along with the Holy Grail in his operatic version of Parsifal’s Arthurian quest, a favorite of Hitler’s.

By the 20th century the spear was in Vienna under the control of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph. Firmly believing that the sacred artifact guaranteed victory for whomever possessed it, Kaiser Wilhelm II sought to obtain the spear shortly before the Great War. Despite his failure the Kaiser, in exile by 1931, never gave up his quest. Indeed, he believed that the spear could restore the fortunes of the Hohenzollern Dynasty in Germany. But a new German leader *also* sought the weapon: Adolf Hitler. Seeking to foil both aspirants is the once and future nemesis of Nazi Germany, Winston Churchill.

Such is the plot for the second and newest volume in Michael and Patrick McMenamin’s series of absorbing Winston Churchill Thrillers. This time, however, it must be said that Churchill plays only a peripheral role in the story. As in the previous book, *The De Valera Deception*, Churchill acts primarily as spymaster and father confessor to the two main protagonists: the Irish-American lawyer Bourke Cockran, Jr. (fictional son and namesake of Winston Churchill’s one-time mentor) and the Hearst photo-journalist Mattie McGary (fictional and beautiful goddaughter of Churchill himself). In the context of Ian Fleming, Churchill is “M” to Cockran’s James Bond.

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