

Merlin at War

Mark Ellis

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A historical thriller and clever mystery, Merlin at War is a compelling tale of crime fiction, as perceptive, instinctive, and engaging as DCI Merlin himself.

The summer of 1941 heralds an uncertain calm following the devastation of the Blitz in London, but for Detective Chief Inspector Frank Merlin, the trouble has just begun in *Merlin at War*, book three from Mark Ellis chronicling the mysterious cases of one steadfast Scotland Yard detective.

When a young woman is found dead in a hotel room, DCI Merlin and his team are called in to investigate. Meanwhile, the increasingly curious last request of a soldier dying on foreign soil unleashes a series of events with lethal, far-reaching repercussions while Charles de Gaulle's Free French Forces attempt to identify a possible spy in their midst. At the center of it all is Merlin, whose life is about to take an unexpected turn.

From Crete's war-torn shores to Cairo, New York, Buenos Aires and occupied France, the widespread, multifaceted plot creates one enigmatic scene after another, divulging clues and information circuitously in a sophisticated, politically charged atmosphere. Suspense is built slowly in a complex series of vignettes with alternating narrative points of view, often beginning and ending midscene or midconversation, adding to the mystery, tension, and heightened air of anticipation. In contrast, Merlin's thoughtful, methodical approach progresses unwaveringly as connections and sense are made of one "catastrophic mess" involving, among other things, an illegal gambling racket, murder in the bath, cryptology, an illicit affair, a missing last will and testament, and a traitor in the ranks.

Though the book is chock full of international intrigue, WWII-era London is at the heart of the action, brimming with authentic details—from dining habits and apparel to popular literature, music, and theater, as well as a noticeable rise in crime. Contemporary politicians, actors, and artists are mentioned or given voice, and accents and dialogues from British upper crust to cockney rhyming slang create a setting rich in history and culture with fascinating glimpses into the varied and often vehement attitudes, prejudices, and predilections of the day.

Multiple compelling characters evolve, with victims transforming into villains as motives are gradually uncovered and secrets revealed. All the while, Merlin's team, comprising new father Sergeant Bridges and the spirited Constable Robinson, is joined by newcomer NYPD Detective Bernard Goldberg, an American counterpart. Fans of the series will enjoy the personal insights into the lives of returning characters, including Merlin's half-Jewish, half-Catholic love interest, Polish immigrant Sonia Sieczko, but *Merlin at War* works well as a standalone.

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PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (August 30, 2017)

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