

AUTHOR REVISITS BISCAYNE BONFIRE

STUDY OF 1980 MIAMI
PARALLELS TODAY'S CRISES,
SERVES AS A WARNING

BY JEFF SCHULZE

THE FREE LANCE-STAR

THICK BLACK smoke wafting over a looted business district. Thousands venting their anger over the death of a Black man at the hands of a largely white police force. City residents stewing over a lingering immigration issue, financial woes and ineffective presidential leadership. And all the while, an invisible, mysterious scourge seemingly prowls the streets, striking the weak and leaving a trail of dead in its wake.

Minneapolis in late May? Portland, Ore., in July? Try Miami in 1980.

The parallels between what's been happening in U.S. municipalities this summer and the events in the South Florida metropolis of 40 years ago are uncanny. In reading "The Year of Dangerous Days," one would think author Nicholas Griffen has a touch of clairvoyance.

Where riots exploded this summer over George Floyd, in 1980 it was over Arthur McDuffie. Where harsh words were exchanged this year over the border wall, in 1980 it was over the Mariel boatlift. President Carter's mixed messages of 1980 mirror President Trump's of today. And Miami newspapers in 1980 kept track of the death toll from usage and trafficking of cocaine, much as today's journalists monitor fatality numbers from COVID-19.

Griffen's story, however, does not foreshadow this year's troubles. Nor does it appear he has a longtime fascination with dense population centers broiling in their own self-created pressure cookers. This is more of a look at how a city confronts its past sins while trying to climb out of its nadir and, in the process, cut deals with those same vices that put it in its predicament.

The book centers on a three key figures. Edna Buchanan, a crime beat writer for the Miami Herald, puts an early spotlight on the McDuffie case. Marshall Frank, the city homicide chief, is trying to halt a burgeoning murder rate, all the while knowing some detectives are on the take from traffickers. Maurice Ferre, Miami's mayor, believes Cuban refugees can help sell the city as a glittering business hub for all of Latin America, until he learns the exiles Miami is receiving aren't so coveted.

By sticking to a strict linear chronology and using an active present voice, Griffen's narrative comes across like a gripping crime drama rather than a staid retrospective. This is an excellent read for those wondering if the present-day dystopia has existed before—and how we can emerge from it.

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THE YEAR OF DANGEROUS DAYS

By Nicholas Griffen

(Simon & Schuster \$27, 326 pp.)

Published: July 14, 2020

FOR SOME, SEMPER FI HAS PRICE

AUTHOR SALUTES MARINES
WITH TALE OF UNIT LOVE
THAT SURVIVES POST-WAR

BY JEFF SCHULZE
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

SURVIVOR'S GUILT is a cruel legacy for veterans. Discharged servicemen seeking post-war peace of mind can't come to grips with understanding why they lived while their buddies died.

Some vets find solace in veterans' holidays, statues and memorials. Others use unit reunions and professional counseling to soothe their souls. And unloading the burden of memories in print apparently is therapeutic; library shelves are full of ex-warriors' autobiographies.

Mark Treanor's Vietnam War-era tale "A Quiet Cadence" is technically fiction. Upon finishing the novel, however, a reader will wonder if Treanor had other purposes in mind when he submitted his manuscript to the publisher.

The novel centers on Marty McClure, a bright student weighed down by guilt for attending U.Va. while other young men his age fight in Vietnam. He enlists in the Marines, stunning his working-class Maryland parents, and is rewarded with an assignment to the crack Bravo Company of the 15th Marine regiment.

Marty sought the grunt's life, and he quickly gets it. Along with the battalion, his First Platoon is tasked with searching "the valley" to locate a major North Vietnamese Army complex. Marty endures fruitless walks in the sun in blistering heat, miserable monsoons and ungrateful South Vietnamese villagers. Interspaced between hours of drudgery are minutes of sheer terror in repelling

NVA day ambushes and night assaults. And poised to strike like vipers at any second are the booby traps.

Marty's lucky: he's only modestly wounded and returns home whole. The same can't be said for many of the comrades he fought with, including a half-dozen he was particularly close to. And as readjusts to civilian life, he finds he can't ignore the memories of his dead friends. Their ghosts return to him in his dreams, marching in quiet cadence. He must find a way to make peace with his past.

Is Treanor telling his own story? It's possible. The book's sleeve says he's currently a lawyer and corporate trainer, but in his younger days served as a Marine rifle platoon leader in Vietnam. It's also possible Treanor's protagonist is a composite character assembled from many veterans he knew, including himself.

Whatever his motive, Treanor's first foray in novel writing succeeds in conveying to readers that veterans' ears don't stop ringing when the guns fall silent. We must care not only for ex-servicemen with broken bodies but also those with broken hearts.

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A QUIET CADENCE

By Mark Treanor
(Naval Institute Press \$30,
392 pp.) Published: June 15

COCAINE SEDUCES USERS, NATIONS

MUSE GIVES AN UP-CLOSE
LOOK HOW DRUG'S APPEAL
TORE APART COLOMBIA

BY JEFF SCHULZE

THE FREE LANCE-STAR

IT'S EASY TO pity the lone user struggling with cocaine addiction. Does anyone have empathy for the burdened souls where the white powder is made?

It's among the tough questions asked by journalist Toby Muse in his new book, "Kilo." The British-American writer and TV commentator has lived for 15 years in Colombia. He's seen what trafficking has wrought on the Colombian people.

In the U.S., the debate over the war on drugs generally focuses on how American consumption negatively impacts American communities. Muse's work shows the fallout is not exclusive to North America. The harvesting, processing and distribution of cocaine is causing its share of turmoil in nations near or below the equator.

Muse follows the drug through its manufacturing process: the gathering of coca leaves to mash into a workable paste; the meshing of paste with additives to bake into a solid brick; and the packaging, storage and shipping of the final product on its stealth journey to foreign markets.

Along the way, he illustrates how good Colombian people from all walks of life are seduced by cocaine's siren call. Self-respect, humanity and compassion trickle out like residue at the bottom of steel drums used to make cocaine alkaloid. The converted only see big money, affluence, sex and power—and accept that a short, fast life is part of this deal.

Only a fearless reporter who earned the trust of narco-traffickers over the years could have written this. Muse was granted up-close access to this entire process. The reader will be fascinated by traffickers' business acumen while grimacing over the human carnage.

Those seeking justification for expediting the drug war won't find it in these pages. Like the eyes of narco-traffickers and their lovers, Muse's narrative is cold. His illuminating writing, clever and nuanced throughout the book, offers no rays of hope. By endeavoring to upend a basic law of economics (supply and demand), he argues, those determined to eradicate cocaine only tighten its grip.

It's clear Muse favors legalization of cocaine and international regulation of its commerce. These policies would create their own issues and pitfalls, and he offers no answers to that. But in his view, it's a viable alternative to a world where murder and mayhem line a meandering, blood-soaked trail that ends up a customer's nose.

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KILO

By Toby Muse

(William Morrow, \$29,
303 pages)

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