



The Caves of Perigord

Martin Walker

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In a brilliant and ambitious thriller that combines elements of Jean Auel's *The Clan of the Cave Bear* and Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth* into a riveting, multifaceted tale of love, art, courage, and war, Martin Walker brings to life the creation of an extraordinary work of prehistoric cave art and the struggle to possess it in our own time.

Walker's richly interwoven novel opens with the arrival of a mysterious package for a young American woman working in a London auction house. Brought by a British officer, it contains a 17,000-year-old fragment of a cave painting left to him by his father, a former World War II hero.

The fragment, significant and stunning in itself, is also the key to the existence of an un-known cave that may be more important in the history of art and human creation than the world-famous one at Lascaux. It triggers a storm of publicity and commands the attention of the French authorities all the way up to the President of the Republic, who seems to know more about the painting's origins than anyone else...

As the young American woman, the British officer, and a French government art historian explore the ancient province of Périgord to determine the painting's origins, their search serves as backdrop for three compelling stories. There is the tale of the British officer's father who lands in Nazi-occupied France in 1944 to organize the Resistance, culminating in a series of battles to prevent the SS Das Reich Panzer Division from reaching the Normandy beaches in time to repel the D-Day invasion, which leads to an account of the subsequent discovery -- and cover-up -- of the lost cave and its paintings. And there is also the moving story of the young artist who painted them, the woman he loved, and the ancient culture that produced the first recognizable human art but required the sacrifice of its own creators.

Filled with vivid, historically accurate details and imaginative re-creations of prehistoric life, *The Caves of Périgord* blends a complex plot and richly diverse characters into a seamless narrative of romance, tragedy, and heroism from past to present.

The Caves of Perigord Details

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From Reader Review The Caves of Perigord for online ebook

Mary Black says

I love the premise of this book: following the fate of piece of rock art from prehistoric times when it was created through World War II to present day when it reappears. There is a chapter where the author describes actually going through the cave at Lascaux that gave me the shivers! Structuring a book like this with three vastly different time periods, and therefore different characters, is inherently difficult. The author solved this problem by alternating between the three periods in a consistent fashion. The problem with that is that there is no forward movement from chapter to chapter. I almost think it might have worked better as distinct parts all revolving around the singular piece of rock art. Nonetheless this was an interesting book with a fascinating look at the Perigord region of France.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

My good friend Tammy recommended this novel, and I thank her for doing so.

This is a magnificent, rich novel involving human triumph at its best (through love, leadership and enduring art) and its worst (through war and the struggle for exclusive possession).

The novel cycles through the viewpoints of prehistory (15000 BC), the French Resistance (in 1944) and the present. Each of these timeframes has its own triumphs, tragedies and mysteries. There is at least one common thread throughout these different stories, and a sense that some aspects of humanity are timeless. This is a beautifully written novel: one to be savoured.

Suzanne says

When the book opens, Lydia Dean, received a rare walk-in client to the London auction house in which she works. Major Phillip Manners presents a piece of rock with a painting of a bull on it, they both understand this work is likely 12,000 years old and from the Lascaux region of France. Dean lets Major Manners know that the work will have to go back to France, but once authenticated, it is possible a "thank you" in the form of a monetary gift might come from a grateful country to him. Overnight, however, the rock is stolen, and now there are two mysteries to solve: 1) is this rock from the Caves of Perigord in Lascaux and 2) who stole the rock and how do they get it back.

What follows is a fascinating thriller told in three separate time narratives. The first is the present day, with Lydia Dean and Major Manners playing detective in France. The second takes us all the way back to the prehistoric man, when we find out how the painting came to be. Lastly, we are transported to France during World War II, where Major Manners' father works with the French Resistance to defeat the Germans, and where he originally finds and pockets and rock.

It was an interesting story, but the World War II sections seemed to be pretty dry. I'm not sure why they seemed the least interesting to me, because I greatly enjoy World War II narratives, but there it is. So I'm knocking off a half star for that. 3 1/2 stars.

Kathleen says

Tough to pick shelves for this book: it has several timelines/plot lines, and so a protagonist for each; the times are current, WW2, and pre-history all dealing with the same area of France. There is a mystery - several really - but the main focus to the book is the art.

I have always wanted to see the parietal art of southern France. This book deals with that area and the caves, brings in thoughts of yet-unknown art from un (re) discovered caves. The story begins in current times, when the son of a WW2 vet asks for an assessment of a piece of art, obviously cave art, possessing such is now a crime, so many questions needed answering.

This leads to asking experts, a visit to the Dordogne region, and introduces the pre-stories. One is 15,000 years BCE, when the art was created, the other during 1943-44, when UK & American governments assisted the French Resistance fighters.

I enjoyed it (again, a fan of the art), and would recommend it to those looking for a slightly different, non-formulaic novel.

Steven Peterson says

Imagine this! Three intertwined stories, one set 17,000 years ago, one set later on in World War 2, and one set in a more contemporary time. 17,000 years ago, we see the development of a young artist, working in a cave. Then, during World War 2, partisans seeking to disrupt German communications at the time leading up to D-Day,. Finally, contemporary. A fragment of the cave art comes to the attention of a young American woman working for an art business.

Involved: a young man with extraordinary artistic skills and a woman who, too, had such skills 17,000 years ago. The interaction of different characters, jealousies, competition for the young woman as a bride. Then, the work of a group of partisans--a French leader who became the French head of state, and Englishman, and an American, among others--strive to create problems for the German army, including disrupting the movement of the SS formation, the Das Reich division, to combat the Americans at Normandy. Finally, more currently, a set of characters, including the American woman, the head of state of France (the former partisan), and what happened to the fragment from the cave.

Somehow, these various pieces come together well. This is a compelling novel and well worth taking a look at.

Nancy Ellis says

Clever and very interesting story set in three different times: present day, 1944, and 15,000 BC. It begins with the arrival of a mysterious package to an American woman working in a London auction house. It is brought to her by an English officer who claims it is a 17,000 year old piece of a cave painting which he has inherited from his father. His father was an English soldier who became a hero fighting in the French Resistance, and he brought this piece home with him as a war souvenir, along with ties to several important French contacts. The painting is stolen from the auction house, and the search begins to find not only it but also the unknown cave it came from which is believed to be even older than the famous one at Lascaux. As they search together in France, with the help of the current French President (who happens to have been the

Englishman's ally in the war), the author takes us back in time to the creation of the cave painting with a story of the young artist. (It's a very nice, romantic story, although I know nothing about the accuracy of the social lives of people of that time, so it was easy to just read and enjoy.) Then there are chapters dealing with the actions (and consequences) of the Resistance....all of which leads us back to the present day and the blending of all the stories into the solution of the mystery.

This could have been rather confusing with all the time travel, but the author did such a clever job of blending the stories, everything flowed perfectly from one chapter to the next. I especially enjoyed the 1944 setting full of fascinating detail about the lives of the Resistance fighters and the numerous political factions involved.

Mackay says

Read this for the same reason I read Walker's Inspector Bruno mysteries: for the locale and the feel of local flavor he does very well. This book aspires to be more than it is: it is three connected but different tales: prehistory involving the painters of Lascaux, the Resistance in WW 2 in the same locale, and a case of art theft (of a fragment of a cave painting) set today. I've been to the area, to Lascaux II, to other painted caves, so the idea intrigued me. I found the prehistoric tale interesting but unconvincing as to anthropology (like Jean Auel, it's all too compressed, too pat, and too one-person dependent); I loved the Resistance story; the modern-day was okay. So, if you're like me, and love the area or whatever, read it. If not, don't.

Allison says

Started out gripping. Halfway through I had become bored with details of the 1944 thread. Still can't figure out why the author tells the story of the WW II strand first through the modern day research story and then recounts it again in the 1944 story. It would have been much more gripping to have it unfold through the characters of 1944 first. The end of the book was so abrupt and unsatisfying, I was quite disappointed. This had the potential, of being so much more.

Linda says

Major Phillip Manners has just buried his father, and his inheritance included a small piece of paleolithic wall art depicting a bull. He takes the painting to Lydia Dean, expert in the preclassical department of a London auction house, for valuation. Astounded by what she sees, she identifies the work as characteristic of the wall paintings found in the caves of the Dordogne, and warns Manners that it probably qualifies as a stolen artifact. Manners informs her that his father brought it home from France after WWII, when he was stationed there to assist the Resistance forces. Lydia, taking that as her jumping off point, stores the stone securely and agrees to research its provenance. The very next day, it's stolen yet again. A reward is posted, and Manners convinces Lydia to travel to the Perigord region with him, in hopes of locating the cave in which the painting was originally made.

The Caves of Perigord has a three-fold plot. Author Walker, an NPR commentator, relates Lydia's quest in the present time, and intersperses into her tale two back stories from this region, one from the Ice Age and the other from the second world war. In doing so, Walker show off his research, descriptive, and creative skills to good advantage, recreating the Ice Age and bringing to life humankind's earliest visual artists and

their milieu. The animals, customs, societal hierarchy, and painting techniques are all vividly portrayed, mainly through the experiences of Deer, a young artist in training. Taylor does an equally impressive job writing about the role of the Brits and Americans who trained and supplied the French Resistors in 1944, centering upon Manners' father, the Capitaine. These chapters are truly harrowing; the region is a minefield, literally and figuratively, militarily and politically, and Walker evokes the brutality of the struggle much as Leon Uris did in his war novels. He knows how to tell a gripping story and make his readers care about his characters, empathizing with their joys and struggles.

If the book has flaws, they are minor, and lie in the absence of a map, and some extraneous detail that interrupted the action. Some photos or diagrams of the cave art wouldn't have gone amiss either.

Carolyn says

I thought this was one of the books in the series Bruno, Chief of Police, but it isn't. It's related, though. It's about two periods in the history of Bruno's region, plus an exploration of them in the present. The first of these covers the adventures of a cave painter and his wife, ca. 15,000 BC, who made magnificent paintings on a cave wall similar to those of Lascaux. The second is a largely historical account of the conflict in the region between a fierce Nazi division and the French Resistance, joined in this region by an American and a British soldier, who hid bazookas, rifles, and other war materiel in the cave depicted in the earlier part of the book. The Brit (the father) had picked up and kept a piece of the painted wall that had fallen from its position. It was a magnificent piece of art, which his son inherited upon his father's death. The son sought information about its provenance from archaeologists and anthropologists, two of whom excitedly joined the search. The three stories (prehistoric, WWII, and present) are interwoven throughout the book, but there is no problem keeping them straight. I give it 4.5 stars because I found the long and complex events of WWII sometimes tedious, but if you follow the Bruno series, this makes a relevant and enriching addition to those stories.

Scilla says

I enjoyed this book. There are three related stories - modern times, 1944, and about 15000 BC. All mostly take place in the Perigord. The book begins in London. Major Manners arrives at the auction house with a painting of a bull on a rock he had inherited from his father. Lydia, asked to check it out, quickly realizes it might be 17,000 years old from the caves in France or Spain. She photographs it, and calls in some experts, but it is stolen before the experts arrive. Manners suggests that he pay for Lydia to accompany him to France and try to find where his father might have found the rock.

The second chapter introduces the story of the cave painters in the Vezere Valley in approximately 15,000 BC. It talks about the cave painting and introduces a young painter who falls in love with the beautiful daughter of the Keeper of the Horses. Unfortunately, the widowed Keeper of the Bulls wants her and they have to run away. They find a new cave and paint together.

The third story is the story of Major Manners' father, Jack, who was sent to France to help train the resistance before the allied invasion in 1944. He works with the Francois Malrand (who is the fictional president of France in the current epoch of the story, and who plays an important part in that story) and an American as a team of specialists. You read about the German atrocities, blowing up bridges, and life in the resistance. Manners calls in parachute drops of weapons and medicines, and these drops are often hidden in the caves. Near the end of the book you discover how he found the rock painting.

Algernon says

a shorter review than the book probably deserves, but honestly I was underwhelmed by this Martin Walker historical thriller. I'm not exactly sure what turned me off, because the three interlocking stories that form the novel aren't exactly bad and I was actually traveling through the region, sampling foie-gras and confit de canard as I was reading, visiting Lascaux and most of the other villages mentioned in the story. Maybe it was the heavy political slant of the middle section, the one dealing with the Nazis but focusing mostly on the BAD Communist maquis. Maybe it was the cardboard characters and the wooden dialogue in the modern section, the one investigating a 'lost' cave with prehistoric murals. The result was that I actually looked forward only to one third of the book, the one actually describing the lifestyle of the cavemen 20000 years ago and speculating what made them do grandiose animal frescoes nobody could see clearly.

Having grumbled away at what the novel failed to deliver on my expectations, I would mention that I am still interested in what Walker has done with his police procedural series ("Bruno, Chief of Police") because he clearly is interested in the Perigord region and has a keen eye for detail.

Monica says

Another excellent Martin Walker novel with good history. The book moves backwards and forwards in time. The three time periods are 17,000 years ago in France, and World War II France, and today. A good mystery ties it all together.

Deale Hutton says

The story takes place in three different times: 17000 years ago, WWII in 1944 and contemporary. I loved the archaeological elements, and the 'mystery' was good. There were political elements that were exciting to research and verify. The transitions between eras worked well. So, I liked the plot.

I was afraid that the prehistorical romance would be like Jean Auel, but that romance was relatively genuine. The romance in 1944 war-torn France was also well done. However, the contemporary romance was pretty schmaltzy; suffering from a sugar coma! Do women really behave like this? The behavior of the characters, unlike Bruno and Isabelle, was just dumb, imo. So, since I had to plod through that romance, I can only give it 3 1/2 stars.

Sharon Enright says

I LOVED this book. It is historical fiction that takes place during three different periods of time. And since I had just been in the part of France where the three stories take place--and seen a few of the most famous cave paintings--I was totally entranced.

It begins with the delivery of a package to a young American woman working in a London auction house. It

is brought in by a British military officer, and he had inherited it from his father. The package contains a fragment of a 17,000 year old cave painting. The young woman, the officer and a French art historian begin the search for the provenance of the painting fragment. But this serves to open the door to two other time periods. The first focuses on the officer's father who as a member of the British military during WWII fought with the French resistance and hid arms in a cave that had never been discovered. . .and then covered it up. And there is the story of the artist and the woman he loved who created the paintings 17,000 years ago.

This was a GREAT read in part because Martin Walker knows his history, so while this is a work of fiction, it is filled with very accurate historical details. I highly recommend it.
