

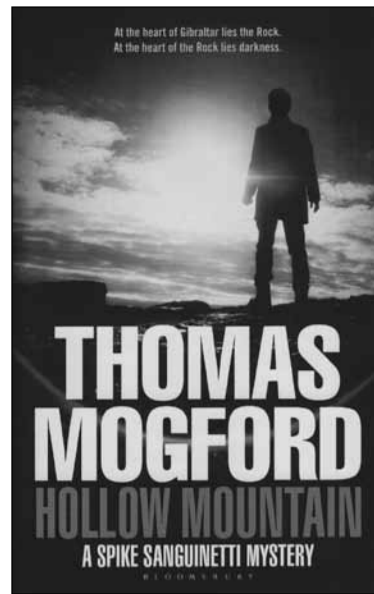
Hollow Mountain finds a new adventure for Spike Sanguinetti

by Alice Mascarenhas

Thomas Mogford has always had a fascination with the Rock which began after a chance visit with a friend. "My friend (now a lawyer, ominously) had booked himself onto a language course in Granada, in advance of a holiday to Brazil. He was so embarrassed that he hadn't been aware that Brazilians spoke Portuguese, that he fled the course, and sent out an email asking if anyone was free to go on a driving trip through southern Spain with him. I was, so I flew out to Malaga to meet him, and we literally picked familiar names off the map to visit -- Torremolinos, Cadiz... Gibraltar." Gibraltar, he says, was so different to what he had imagined, especially in terms of the residents. "My undergraduate course was Modern Languages, specifically French and Italian. I couldn't understand why so many people had Italian-sounding surnames -- Spanish and British I had imagined, but Italian? I ordered a copy of Ernle Bradford's 'Gibraltar' when I got back, and a fascination was born." Five years later, after training as a lawyer, he found a new angle after he learnt that Gibraltar had the most lawyers per capita in the world. "I came again to the Rock, wondering what it might be like to practise there. Instead, I decided to create a fictional lawyer, Spike Sanguinetti, and

write about his adventures. They are, I suspect, a little more dangerous and exciting than those experienced by most Gibraltarian lawyers, but still -- it's fiction, it's allowed! (I hope)." 'Hollow Mountain' is the third Spike Sanguinetti book in the series after 'Shadow of the Rock' and 'Sign of the Cross'. It has even more of Gibraltar than the other two (in the first, Spike follows a case to Morocco, in the second, to Malta). Thomas Mogford said, "the way I make Gibraltar more dangerous than it actually is was to focus on the fact that so many people have been upset by

Spike in the first two books -- so this time, the danger follows him to the Rock." In this latest novel melancholy continues to shroud the charismatic, brooding Sanguinetti, both in the present and the past, as his investigations lead to the mystery of his mother's suicide and to some startling revelations about Zahra. In telling the story of Sanguinetti's investigation of his law partner's assault, and his ongoing search for his vanished girlfriend, Zahra, Mogford imbues the tale with the sights and sounds



of Gibraltar, a peninsula bridging two continents and home to a multicultural stew

'Hollow Mountain' is a Spike Sanguinetti Mystery by Thomas Mogford

One of the advantages of being a literary critic is the exposure it gives to new authors especially when they turn out to be rather good. Thomas Mogford was/is one such author and it was fortuitous that I had the chance to crit his first novel in his 'Spike' Sanguinetti series, "Shadow of the Rock". Mogford has worked as a journalist and as a translator for the European Parliament. Although not a resident of Gibraltar he has spent time here and has researched both Gibraltar and the Gibraltarian in detail giving his characters (Spike Sanguinetti is a Gibraltarian lawyer) and setting considerable veracity. So much so that I remember with his first novel feeling that I had actually met the person on whom Spike Sanguinetti's law partner was

based -- it took me time to realise that the character was just so well drawn that he felt completely familiar to one who had worked in a local law firm. Spike, otherwise Somerset Sanguinetti, is the only child of a retired headmaster of Sacred Heart School and his wife, herself a much loved teacher, whose unexplained suicide has been a source of tension between father and son for years. Their family home is in Chicardo's Passage and in town Spike is partner in a law firm with the solid, bon viveur Peter Galliano. When the story opens Spike is on the Paradise Coast of Italy trying to locate the missing Zahra, the wild creature he had met in Morocco and with whom he had fallen in love. He had rescued her and brought her to Gibraltar from where she had eventually run off

BOOKreview by Christine Thomson

to a dubious life in Malta. Zahra was now apparently "owned" by a known international criminal Zigon and has sent Spike a message to forget about her, to go away and warning him that Zigon will not hesitate to kill anyone who crosses him. Fortuitously has meets the doorman of an elegant hotel in Portofino who believes he may be able to provide a lead to the missing Zahra. It is there Spike is forced to leave his search and return urgently to Gibraltar where his partner, Peter Galliano, has been the victim of a hit and run and is lying in a coma in St. Bernard's hospital. On his return to Gibraltar, quite apart from concern over the long term prognosis of his friend and partner, Spike has to pick up the case work left on Peter's desk. The most significant is a plea by a marine salvage company to work the wreck of an old naval vessel in British Gibraltar waters, a vessel which contained a large cargo of lead. There is good money to be made in old lead and the Royal Navy had agreed to the salvage for a split of the proceeds. The Canadian salvage company had also discovered a small safe containing silver bars and this additional salvage is the subject of the appeal to the Courts. The Royal Navy had again agreed the salvage but there were other agencies who were opposed to the licence including the silver. In addition there is the supposed suicide of Simon Grainger who has left a young, vulnerable widow and a small boy, Charlie. The widow does not believe her husband would have taken his own life and had approached Peter to press for further investigation into Simon's death. There is something about this bewildered young woman and her solemn child that touches Spike's heart and leads him to pick up this case also. Visiting the bereaved pair in their Moorish Castle Estate flat he is shown some of Simon's 'treasures' that he has brought up from diving in local waters, one of which is a ship's bell. Spike wins the court case for the salvage company with only one matter, the security of the

of remarkable richness and resonance. "The book means an enormous amount to me," he says. "I've loved trying to imagine what it would be like to be a Gibraltarian lawyer living and working on the Rock. I hope I have done justice to Spike Sanguinetti and his world. For such a small place Gibraltar is incredibly rich, diverse and complicated. Learning about it as I researched is what makes the Spike Sanguinetti books such incredible fun to write." Mogford is now on his way to a fourth book, currently titled 'Sleeping Dogs', which is set in Albania and Corfu (Spike's on the move again...) and comes out in April next year. 'Hollow Mountain' by Thomas Mogford is published by Bloomsbury Publishing.

salvage to be confirmed. It appears that the navy have arranged for the salvage to be stored deep in The Rock in what is known as "the stay behind cave" a second world war creation deep within The Rock which was to be brought into use only if Germany took Gibraltar when a few selected individuals would hide themselves in the cave and continue to spy on the Germans and send information back to the British. It is here we are reminded that Mons Calpe means "hollow mountain" a name that is even more pertinent since the British began to cut away at the heart of The Rock. But there is something fishy about the salvage company and Spike begins to look deeper at their activities discovering a connection with the ancient ship's bell found by Simon Grainger. Punctuating all this activity there is a strange meandering narrative; the thoughts of a hired killer, one with a taste for murder. The plot thickens and murder raises its gory head threatening Spike and those he loves, including the little boy, Charlie. Parallel plots begin to merge as Spike begins, at last, to understand the dangers that surround him and seeks a way to save Charlie and expose fraud. Intertwined with this are the concerns about the health of Peter Galliano, the discovery of some old letters from this mother written to someone named "J" and suggesting a reason for her subsequent suicide and, as always, Spike's need to find Zahra. I really would like to elaborate further on the plot which is really rather good but then I might spoil your enjoyment. The denouement of each of the various strands is bloody and dramatic but satisfying -- as it should be with a good thriller. Thomas Mogford's "Hollow Mountain" is published by Bloomsbury and is another success for this author who was shortlisted for the CWA Dagger Award for best new crime writer with his "Shadow of the Rock" and has made an equally convincing job of "Hollow Mountain". I hope it gives you as much pleasure as it gave me.

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