BOOK BREAK

Latest McCone thriller is literary dessert



"A Wild and Lonely Place," by Marcia Muller (386 pp., \$19.95, The Mysteri-ous Press). Someone is plasting bomba in San Francis-

co's foreign embassies. Who will stop him before he strikes again? Sounds like a job for Sharon McCone

Detroit native Marcia Muller, creator of popular private eye McCone, has all the can't-miss

ingredients down pat here.

Her hard-edged female detective hangs her hat in the ever-appealing City Beside the Bay (as with McCono herself, its frayed spots only add interest). She drives a red sports car. Rarely runs out of drop-dead verbal come-backs. Likes kids, but has none of her own. Has a lover, but is unencumbered by marriage. Owns two cute cats. Dines on stuff like ropa viega, sourdough bread, and morning-after omelets. Favors wine and espresso for drinking. metimes shares a romantic cottage in Mendocino County with able lover Hy Ripinsky, Finds adventure in intriguing spots. Encounters colorful characters along the way (porno actress, religious zealot, loquacious Hispanic maid, et al.). You get the picture.

As the curtain rises on this latest As the curtain rises on this latest McCone mystery, we find our bold detective (these days, a kind of Nancy Drew-Wonder Woman-approaching middle-age type) in the American Southwest, approximately 6,500 feet above the Tehachapi Mountains, piloting a little Beecheraft that is about to be in big trouble. Suddenly, some potentially lethal, clear air turbulence sends the aircraft into a plummeting spin. McCone's passengers — the aforementioned Hy, sick as a dog, and a small, frightened girl — can't help, of course. The chips are decidedly down, and McCone must save herself (and her passengers) by herself. This being a 1990s detective novel, our dauntless he-roine finds herself in similar do-or-die situations with incredible frequency. (She makes a lengthy, nighttime swim through unfamiliar waters to save the girl; swims back to a rescue boat, the girl in tow; deftly dodges would-be cap-tors at the local airport; outsmarts an-other wily foe at another airport; lands a crippled plane...)

If some of these remarks sound a bit like left-handed compliments, perhaps I'll plead nolo contendre. If you open this book expecting a notable literary

landmark, you're in for disappointment. It's about as a formulaic as they come right now, which can be seriously for-mulaic. On the menu of literature, you'd be sure to find it in the dessert column (maybe under "sorbets"?). But, on the other hand, who among us wants or needs to read a masterpiece every time out? God knows, sometimes des-

time out? God knows, sometimes des-sert — and dessert alone — is what can get you out of bed in the morning. Go along as McCone traces the clu-sive Deplo-bumber through the streets of San Frandisco, and on to such far-flung spots as the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean, the Keys, the Mojave Desert. You'll catch a glimpse of Phoenix and Dallas, too. And you'll even get a quick look at the local color around Fresno and Bakerslield. ("When I was a little kid in Fresno," one character oberves, "my daddy used to say that on a clear summer night you could sit on your front porch and listen to Baker-sield suck.")

With her straight-on, no-nonsense with her attaignt on, no honsense prose, Muller is one of the best around at building tension with words, with grabbing readers' attention from the outset and efficiently riveting them to their seats to the end. She's also a whize at moving her story ever forward via di-alogue, a form of action in itself in this

action-packed story.

Surprisingly, 1 found special fun in this techno-thriller precisely because of Muller's attention to technical detail. Muller's attention to technical detail.
Since my ignorance of computers is a
shame and disgrace, I'm usually pitifully lost in any form of cyberspace. Consequently, I closely identified with
McCone and her stated "inability to
internalize computer-related information." Throughout this novel, she has no choice but to change that "inability." And, as she does so, her learning becomes a basic, clearly-stated "lesson" for readers who don't know a window from a board from a room, electronically

apeaking.
So, for all kinds of different reasons, you could do much worse than leaning back, putting up your feet, and follow-ing the intrepid McCone as she goes af-

ing the interpol mecone as an egoes atter the had guy.

If you really want to get the full flavor of the story, perhaps you'd best do so with a warming cup of espresso at hand.

Or perhaps a bottle of '93 Deer Hill Chardonnay — the kind McCone's say. ing for her fast-approaching, 40th birth-

Victoria Diaz of Livonia, a longtime member of Detroit Women Writers, has n lifelang interest in reading "everything from great novels to cereal boxes



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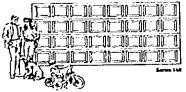
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