

**The World Played Chess**

**By Robert Dugoni**

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369pp**

*Review by Tom Miller*

**R**OBERT DUGONI is the author of the very popular Tracy Crosswhite series and the equally popular David Sloane series as well as a number of stand-alone novels including the critically acclaimed New York Times best seller *The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell*. In his just released novel *The World Played Chess*, Dugoni addresses the coming of age theme but in interesting ways while avoiding traditional clichés.

The central character is Vincent Bianco who in 2015 is dealing with how to or how to not assist his son Beau in his transition from semi-independent son into independent man as he prepares for departure to college and the next stage in his life. Inevitably Vincent recalls the similar time in his life which occurred in the summer of 1979. That year he worked in housing construction with two Vietnam vets, one of whom was William Goodman, who in spite of suffering from PTSD became something of a mentor to Vincent as he began to realize that his aimless carefree days were ending.

We are introduced to the story in the prologue where Vincent is considering how to deal with the journal that William kept during his Vietnam experience which Vincent has just received in the mail with no return name or address. The only guidance William has offered is the request that Vincent read the journal in the order in which it was written. Dugoni skillfully moves the reader from present day to Vincent's last carefree summer in 1979 to William's military experiences in 1967-68 and back and forth while never breaking the rhythm of the novel. It is remarkable how he is able to capture the appropriate point of view of each of the characters in each of the particular times and not lose us in the transition.

Dugoni did not fight in the Vietnam War but nonetheless in constructing William's journal and his point of view, he captures the abruptness of being thrust into a quagmire in which the senselessness and desperation of the situation unfolds. He gets it right.

This novel is moving, poignant, and insightful. For someone such as this reviewer who is a similar age to William the detail in the journal is particularly on point. And the title itself is particularly applicable – the world did indeed play chess while the young men were just playing checkers. I think all audiences would gain something from reading it.

