Dismas Hardy, the dart-playing, saloon-keeping lawyer who is one of John Lescroart's most consistently interesting and appealing heroes, faces a dilemma: if he can prove to a jury that Graham Russo helped his father Sal kill himself because the sick old man asked him to, a liberal San Francisco jury will probably vote to acquit Graham of first-degree murder. Hardy would love to plead manslaughter to escape the wrath of the states attorney general who wants to nail Graham. However, despite the evidence against him, Graham insists he didn't do it. What is a lawyer to do, and who can he believe? Although Lescroart leads the reader up and down a few blind alleys before the truth comes out, the mystery is not the thing here. Its the characters and their back stories that make this such a good read. Foremost among them is Graham, who washed out of pro baseball and walked out of a promising law career before finding the father who once deserted him long ago. The core of the story is Graham's relationship with Sal, who's losing his mind to Alzheimer's but may still be a threat to a federal judge who was once his closest friend. Then there's Sarah Evans, the homicide cop who falls in love with her suspect. For good measure, there are some changes in the lives of those characters who are familiar to readers from other Dismas Hardy adventures -- Abe Glitsky, the half Jewish, half black cop; Drysdale, the D.A. who's been beaten in court by Dismas in previous outings; Frannie, Dismas's wife; Moses, his brother-in-law; and Dismas himself, who becomes more interesting every time Lescroart brings him back. While the pacing is languorous and the denouement not as tight as it might be, The Mercy Rule provides a complex and satisfying reading experience. --Jane Adams

The good thing about a Lescroart mystery is not so much the mystery as the characters who intersect the mystery. Murders the name but the players are the game. Here Lescroart touches on an emotionally charged issue, euthanasia or mercy killing. There's a nice analogy with the game of baseball, perhaps unintentional, which is that in the early levels of the game the adolescent players learn the slaughter rule, allowing a team
which has no chance of winning having fallen behind an insurmountable lead, to exit with some self respect intact.
Hence we have Sal Russo, years ago a bright guy married to his sweetheart, knowing all along she is from a different life, years later preparing to die alone, the target of an agonizing tumor complicated by the onset of alzheimers. He is reunited by his oldest son, Graham, who tried his own (and his fathers) dream of playing in the big game, only to fall short. Sal dies under mysterious circumstances with a DNR (do not revive) warning in plain view.
That Graham is arrested, then released, then indicted for murder, reflects the indecision the politicians, their constituents and the police have on this painful topic. Do the terminally ill have control over the time that they cross the river, or do we let events rob them of their remaining dignity? Dismas Hardy is again the reluctant guardian at the gate, not wanting murder as a crime he defends, all the while knowing its where his true strength . . . and definition lies.
If there is an irritant, it is the tedious relationship he has with his wife, Frannie. So many alter egos of the novelists heroes love their partner for what they do, yet make life difficult for them because they do it. Kudos as an aside to Lucy Chenier, Elvis Pikes lover, who got up and left. But with that one comment, a multi-latered book for the reader who wants social issues, murder most foul, great complicated characters and unexpected twists. Not a fast read but a very good job.