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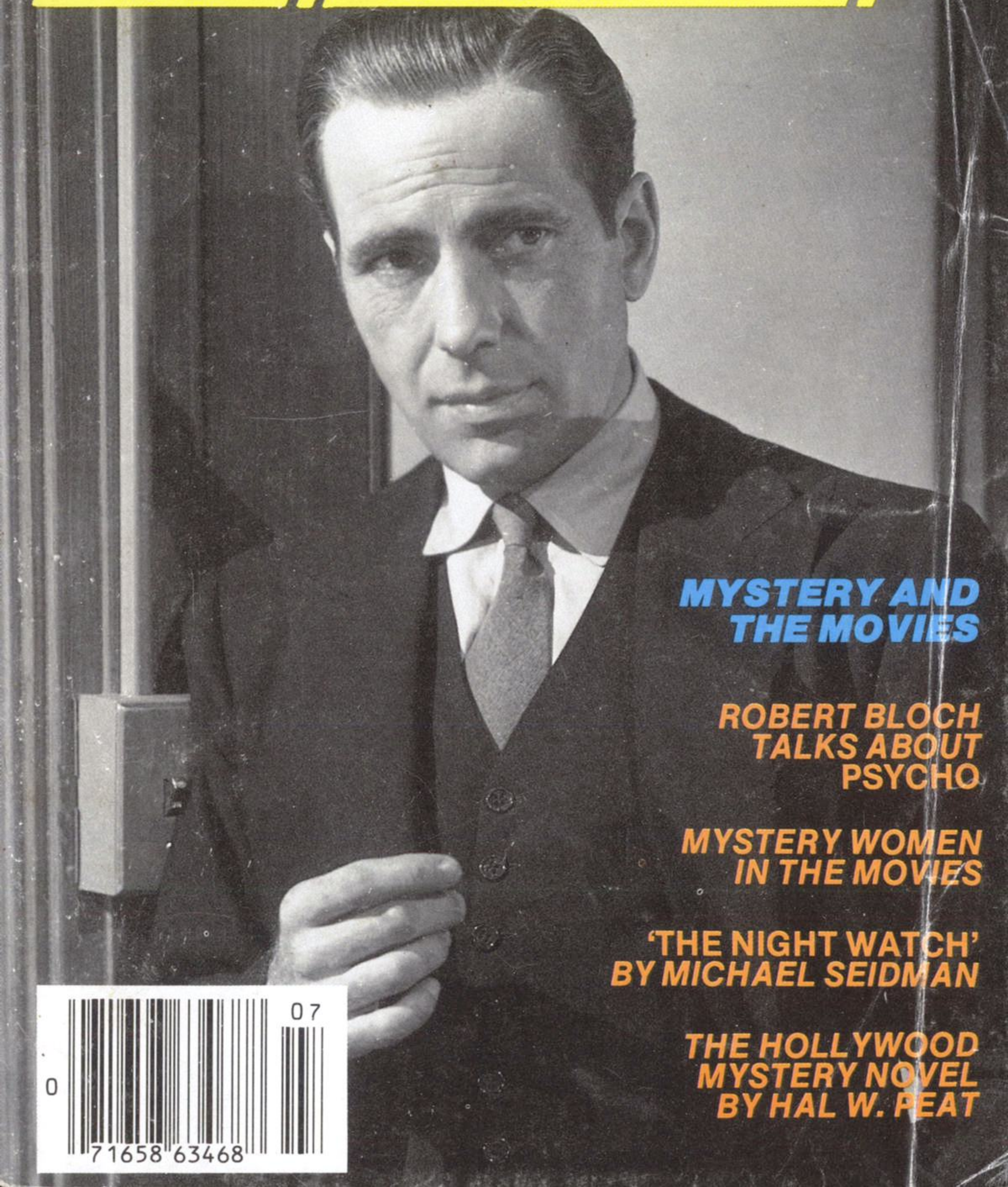

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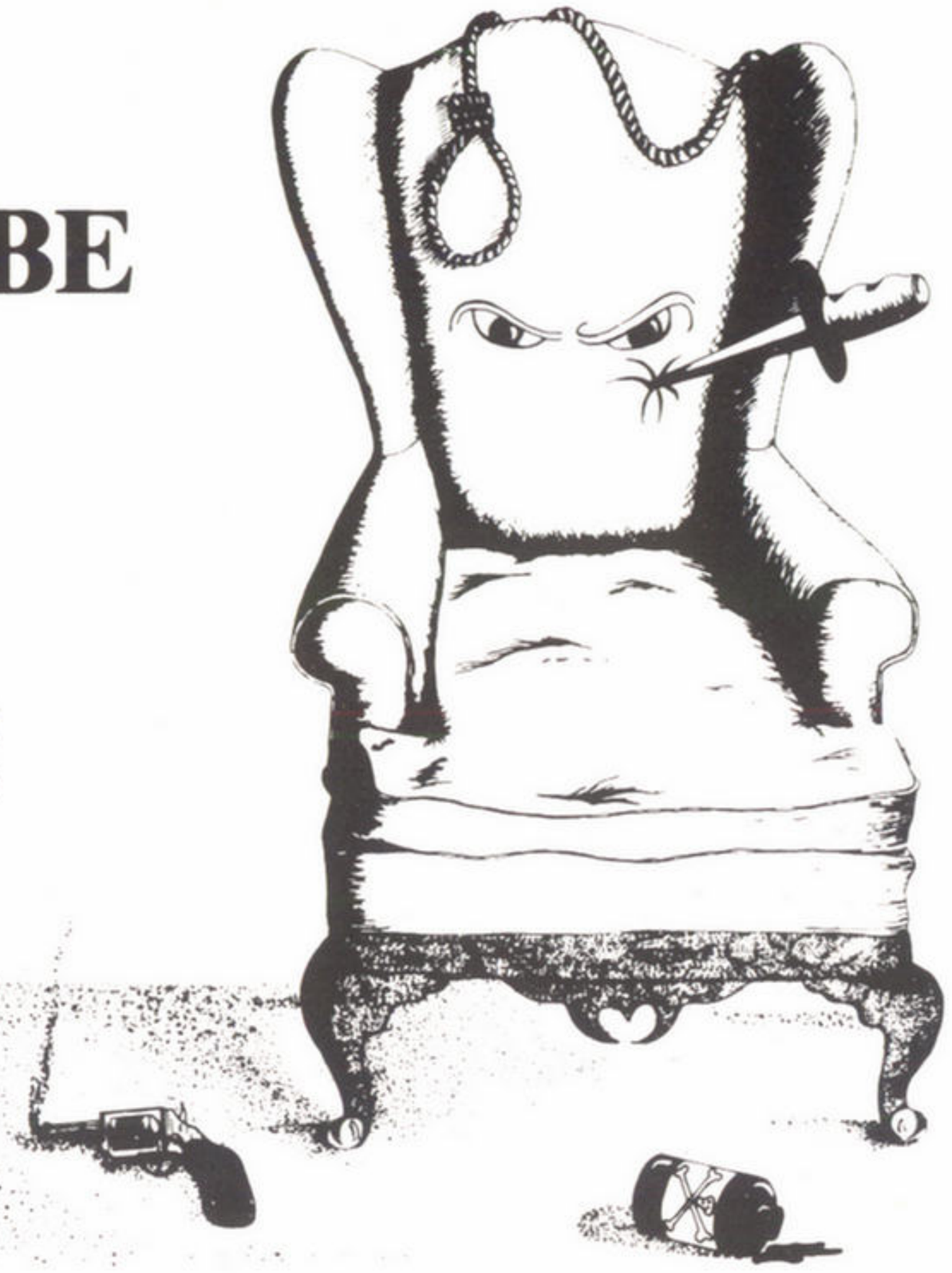

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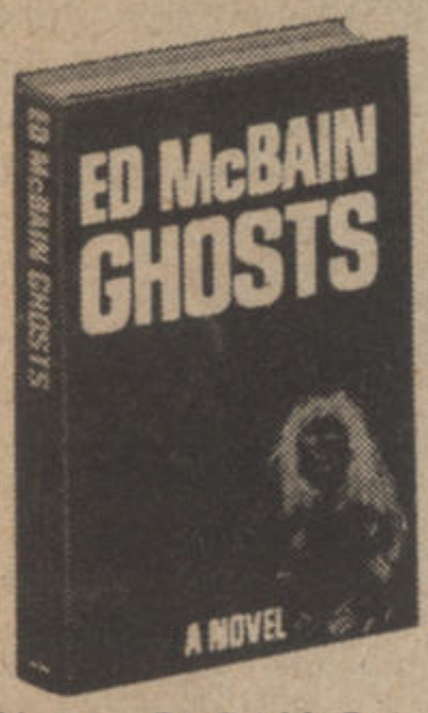

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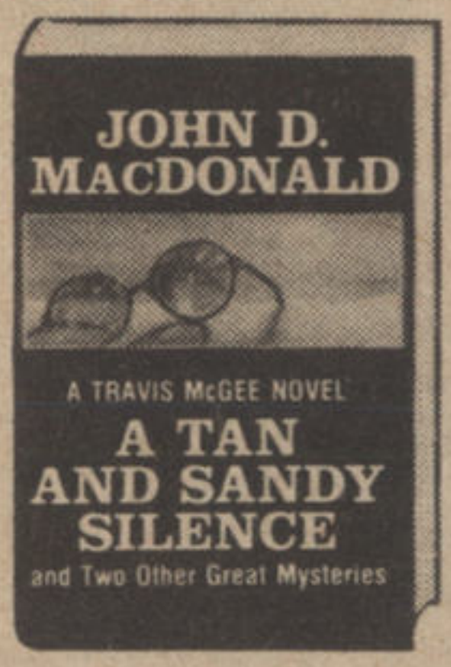

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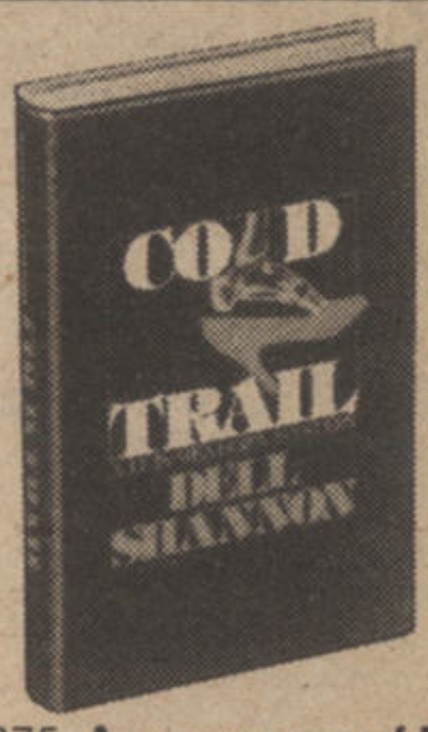

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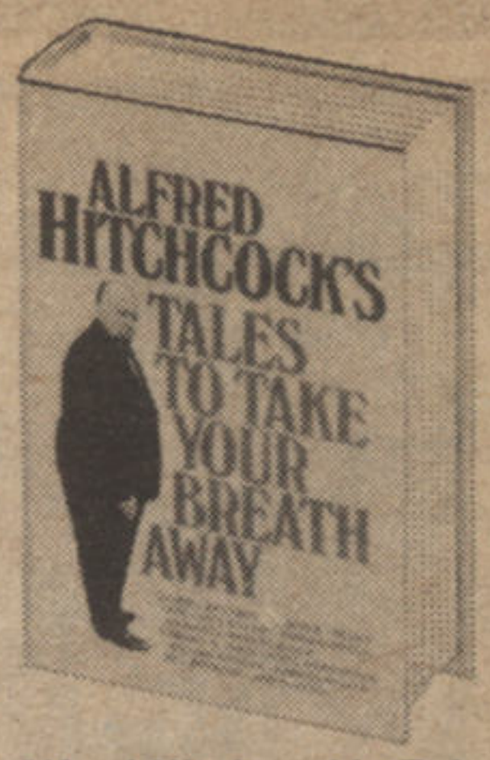

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New publications and fan clubs in the mystery field seem to be flourishing in ever growing numbers. One of the best new journals is THE DOSSIER, the official journal of the international spy society, produced by Richard L. Knudson and David A. Reinhardt. This zine is available for $12.00 for four issues from Richard L. Knudson, State University Of New York, Oneonta, N.Y. 13820. MYSTERY has been allowed a sneak preview of issue #2 (given to us by industrial spies, of course) and has found it to be much longer than the first issue but still filled with the same smooth blending of intelligent articles from both the fictional and true life worlds of spying that made issue #1 such a success. Appealingly put together, THE DOSSIER has quickly become a worthwhile contribution to the genre and a definite must for espionage fans.

Also from the world of espionage comes the current issue of BONDAGE, the striking 8½ X 11 glossy publication of THE JAMES BOND 007 FAN CLUB, filled chock full of information and photos from the world of James Bond. For information on the fan club or BONDAGE, contact Richard Schnekman at P.O. Box 414, Bronxville, NY 10708.

While on the subject of James Bond it should be mentioned that the latest Bond adventure from the pen of John Gardner, FOR SPECIAL SERVICES, is due out in May. In it Bond finds himself on loan to the United States, teamed up with the beautiful Cedar (Felix Lieter's daughter), and up against his old enemy S.P.E.C.T.E.R. and their Operation Heavenly Wolf.

Spies seem to be in fashion again and the MGM's renewed interest in producing a new MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. film (Robert Vaughn and David McCallum have already agreed to repeat the roles they made famous in that series) comes the new of a MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. FAN CLUB run by Sue Cole out of 2710 Rohlwing Road, Rollings Hills, IL 60008. Dues for the club are $6.00 per year which also covers the cost of subscription to the club's newsletter.

Two other fan clubs that have been mentioned before in the pages of MYSTERY but are definitely worth bringing up again are THE DOROTHY L. SAYERS HISTORICAL AND LITERARY SOCIETY, Roslyn House, Witham, Essex, CM8 2AQ, England, and THE EDGAR WALLACE SOCIETY, 4 Bradmore Road, Oxford, OX2 6QW, England. Dues for the Sayers Society are $5.00 per annum and for the Wallace organization they are $7.00 payable in international money order or pounds sterling.

THE CHESTERTON REVIEW from 1437 College Drive, Saakantoon, Saskatchewan, Canada 57N OW6, is now available for fans of that author. The publishers are planning several theme issues in the near future.

One last newsletter to bring to your attention is THE BONY BULLETIN which deals with the writings of Australia's Arthur Upfield and his detective Detective Inspector Napolean Bonaparte (Bony). The prime spot in the first issue goes to the article titled "Bony Was There" which takes a look at real places Bony visits during his adventures. This zine is available for $3.00 for 3 issues from Philip T. Asdell, 5719 Jefferson Blvd., Fredrick, MD 21709.

Some very good news for private eye fans is the fact that THE NOT SO PRIVATE EYE published by Andy Jaysnovitch, 6 Dana Estates Drive, Parlin, NJ 08859, has risen from the ashes like a phoenix and is again available at 75¢ an issue (stamps accepted). This is a very professionally put together fanzine and has a great deal to recommend it.

Robert Parker's new Spenser book is now on the bookshelves. It is called CEREMONY and has Spenser reluctantly picking up the trial of a teenaged prostitute.

Jonathan Valins hardboiled hero Harry Stoner is also back with us in his new adventure, DAY OF WRATH.

1981's TOUGH LUCK L.A. by Murry Sinclair, published in paperback by Pinnacle, has spawned a hardbacked sequel, ONLY IN L.A., also currently available.

Mickey Spillane is on the publishing scene again in MICKEY SPILLANE'S MIKE HAMMER: THE COMIC STRIP featuring a collection of that syndicated strip that appear3ed during the 1950's until it was dropped for being too violent. This quality paperback publication can be had from Ken Pierce, Box 332, Park Forect, IL 60466.

Bogart might not be around to reprise the role, but that hasn't daunted NBC from creating a new series for next fall based on one of Bogart's most popular films, CASABLANCA. No actor has yet been signed to fill Bogart's shoes as Rick, the sardonic owner of Rick's Cafe American, but both Powers Boothe (known for his portrayal of cult leader Jim Jones) and Armand Assante (currently portraying Mike Hammer in the remake of I, THE JURY) have refused role on the basis that they would rather not get involved with series television.

Producer David Wolper states that the series time frame will precede that of the original film and as a consequence the character portrayed by Ingrid Bergman will not appear. Other familar characters tough, such as Sam the piano player, the Vichy chief of police and that of the overweight owner of the rival Blue Parrot Cafe (Sidney Greenstreet's role in the film), will be around to strike a nostalgic note. And speaking of notes, we're wondering if the films hauntingly beautiful music score will also be reprised and if so will Sam get to play it again?

Last year, after a successful run on Broadway, Charlton Heston brought his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes to the stage of the Ahmanson Theater in Los Angeles in Paul Giovanni's CRUCIFER OF BLOOD. Now, proving that the ageless detective is still as durable as ever, CBS will be bringing the production to the rest of the nation via a two hour made-for-tv movie next season. Heston has agreed to continue in the role of Sherlock Holmes while the role of Watson is still uncast.

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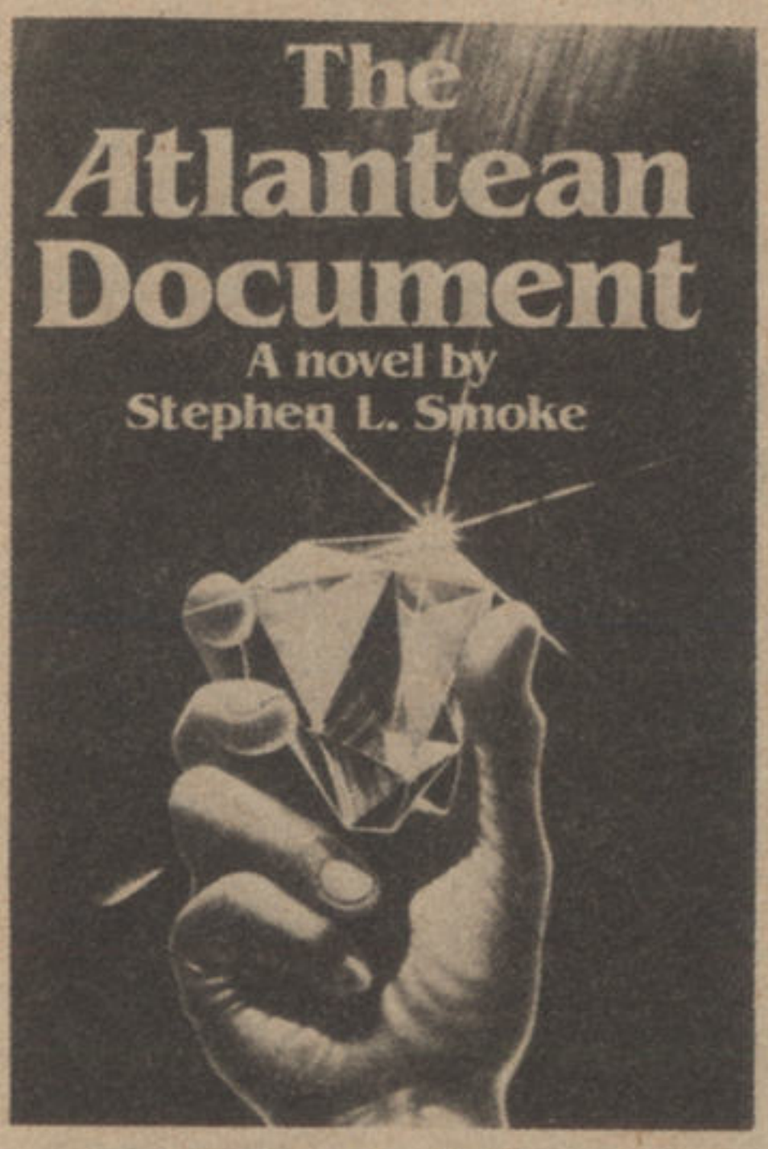

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Brennan:

I liked your review of Hill Street Blues. (Sept. 81 issue) However, you raised a familiar complaint about the camera work, and this is what I would like to take this oportunity to address.

First, the camera work in the style that it is used in this series serves two purposes. One, it gives viewers an immediate sense of the drama and the intensity of the situation. The much over-used term "cinema verite" may be used to explain much of the camera technique the viewer sees each week.

Secondly, the fixed shot of people entering the station may be the only shot that can be used without great alteration of the set. Again it gives the viewer a personal view much as if we were standing in the station house filling out a report and looked up to see who had come in.

From another point of view or rather as an overview of the art form of cinematography, I would like to point to the possiblity of the influence of Cubism in the fast takes back and forth, the walking over-the-shoulder shots around and between the other actors. I can see an attempt to capture parallel planes of perspective much like the Cubists painters, although they were painting in a backlash to the development of film.

At any rate I wanted to share with you my feelings about the camera work and the staging of Hill Street Blues.

Charles V. Feeley Jr.
Brookfield, IL

Dear Editor,

As an avid fan of Sherlock Holmes, I came across the name of Arsene Lupin, gentleman Thief, who competed with the master detective himself in Arsene Lupin VS. Sherlock Holmes.

I became fascinated with this daring thief who has turned robbery into an art form, and immediately started to look for the English translations of his exciting adventures.

I wish so much to see an article on him and his creator Maurice Leblanc.

I have also learnt that in France there is a foundation and a journal devoted to the study of his career. Would any of your readers know their address?

Ahmed Khocht
W. Caldwell NJ

P.S. I would like to hear from all the fans of Arsene Lupin.

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THE PSYCHO MAN
AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT BLOCH

By Ray Zone

Robert Bloch is a master of the psychological mystery story. He is best known as the author of *Psycho,* a 1959 novel which Alfred Hitchcock adapted into a tremendously successful film that raised the ante on cinematic terror and popularized psychoanalytic concepts for an internation-al mass audience. Now, almost a quarter of a century later, Bloch has written a sequel to his masterpiece of terror, entitled *Psycho II.*

Bloch has written a number of mystery novels which make specific use of psychoanalysis in developing literary metaphors that compare the unravell-ing of a murder mystery with answering the riddles of the human mind. In the face of a blindly dispasssionate universe, the psychoanalyst, the detective and the writer plumb the depths of human experience to illuminate an apparent riddle.

Born in Chicago in 1917, Robert Bloch spent his formative years in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he became a confirmed movie fan after viewing *The Phantom of the Opera* starring Lon Chaney, Sr. After high school he went to work instead of college and was haunting libraries and newsstands acquiring a basic education in the literature of terror and fantasy.

In the thirties Bloch began his writing career turning out horror and science fiction stories for pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories.* He has always been a most prolific writer who is equally adept at creating horror, fantasy, science fiction or straight crime and detective fiction. By 1943 he had begun to produce many stories for the detective magazines and in 1947 his first full-length mystery novel, *The Scarf,* was published by Dial Press.

The Scarf, in many ways, is a precursor to *Psycho.* It is a tale of abnormal psychology, told in a terse first-person narrative, that explores the nature of obsession and something of the mind of the writer. Dan Morley, an aspiring author, tells of his rise to literary fame and confesses to a hatred of women that leads to murder. The roots of Morley's rage are traced to early childhood experiences as he records his subjective memories in a black notebook. "Get out your dream-books, boys. Get out your little hammers and tap me on the knees. Tell me about the Id and the Ego, the Psyche and the Libido. Make it convincing. Make it good. Just so you explain why I wake up drenched with sweat."

The character of a psychiatrist in *The Scarf* plays a key role. And it is he who provides, as in *Psycho,* the denouement in the tale which illuminates the pattern of the protagonist's murderous behavior. "Your writing became catharsis. And the scarf was a symbol of death. You wrote about women to exorcise them — and completed the exorcism with the scarf."

Bloch's next mystery novel, *The Kidnaper,* was published in a paperback original by Lion Books in 1954. After *Psycho,* it is his personal favorite among his literary "step-children." Of *The Kidnaper,* he has noted, "Nobody, but nobody, liked this little effort, which is a matter-of-fact, straightforward account of a vicious psychopathic kidnaper, told in the first person. I think it is my most honest book; there are no 'tricks' and there's no overt 'Look, Ma — I'm writing!' touches. I believe it was disliked just because it *was* realistic, and hence unpleasant." *The Kidnapper* has not been reprinted and is a very rare book today.

Throughout the forties and early fifties, Bloch continued to live in Wisconsin, where he supported himself writing advertising copy at the Gustav Marx Agency in Milwaukee. In 1957 he was living in Weyawauga when he heard news of the apprehension of a cannibalistic murderer and ghoul named Ed Gein who had been living just fifty miles away in the small town of Plainfield. Gein had been robbing graves for years and his rural farmhouse was littered with various parts of human bodies when he was apprehended.

It was this event which inspired Robert Bloch to create *Psycho.* Several years after *Psycho* was published, Bloch did research on the Gein case for an essay called "The Shambles of Ed Gein." The essay later appeared in a 1978 anthology, edited by Brian Garfield, entitled *I, Witness.* In this essay, Bloch discusses the genesis of *Psycho.* "What interested me was this notion that a ghoulish killer with perverted appetites could flourish almost openly in a small rural community where everybody prides himself on knowing everyone else's business. The concept proved so intriguing that I immediately set about planning a novel dealing with such a character."

So Robert Bloch created the character of Norman Bates, a motel owner and schizophrenic who leads a murderous double-life. In Alfred Hitchcock's film version of *Psycho,* Anthony Perkins created a vivid portrayal of the psychotic personality. The murder scene in a shower stall where Perkins stabs Janet Leigh to death has become a notorious cinematic legend.

At the conclusion of *Psycho,* Norman Bates is totally insane, having completely identified with the figure of his dead mother. The explanation of Norman's uncanny behavior is provided by a psychiatrist named Dr. Steiner. There is even an oblique reference to Ed Gein. "Almost the entire front page was given over to the Bates case. AP and UP picked it up right away, and there was quite a bit about it on television. Some of the write-ups compared

it to the Gein affair up north, a few years back." Bloch has given new life to Norman bates in *Psycho II.* He has set Bates loose in the world today which, one must admit, is an even more violent world than that of 1959.

Shortly after the success of *Psycho,* Bloch began writing for television and relocated to Los Angeles where he is still living today. He has written many episodes for television programs such as *Lock-up, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, Thriller* and Rod Serling's *Night Gallery.* His motion picture credits include *The Couch, Strait Jacket* and *The Night Walker* as well as the anthology films *Torture Garden, The House that Dripped Blood,* and *Asylum,* adapted from his short stories.

In his mystery fiction Bloch has continued to explore the psychopathic personality and many of his novels have an almost eerily prophetic timeliness. His 1967 novel, *Firebug,* for instance, deals with cults, a major phenomenon of the seventies, and is an acute exploration of pyromania. It, too, features the character of a psychiatrist and the denouement is a symbolic purging of the unconscious mind as the narrator, a newspaper reporter, recalls a traumatic event in his life that had been repressed from consciousness. The narrator speculates on the unconscious. "They've never invented a safe as reliable as the good old human skull. It can keep a lot of secrets snug and secure."

In his 1974 novel, *American Gothic,* as in *Psycho,* Bloch was basing his tale on historic events and a reality that was far stranger than fiction. *American Gothic* tells the story of G. Gordon Gregg, a murderous doctor based on the real-life character of Herman Mudgett, who used the alliterative pseudonymn of H.H. Holmes.

Mudgett built a castle, replete with hidden rooms and trapdoors, near the 1893 World's Fair Exposition in Chicago. He rented out rooms to many visitors to the Fair who subsequently disappeared. Eventually, Holmes was apprehended and executed for his crimes. By his own confession, he had poisoned or asphixiated no fewer than 27 victims. Upon examination of the murder castle, the police found such a quantity of human bones that they believed he may have killed over two hundred victims.

A more recent novel from 1979, *There Is a Serpent In Eden,* deals empathically with the problems of aging. It is set in a contemporary retirement community that is menaced by a trio of malevolent invaders. From chapter to chapter, Bloch renders the subjective states of a dozen characters in the book. His most striking achievement in the novel is a verbal free association depicting the mental state of an unbalanced, elderly lady who is a paranoid schizophrenic. "crazy talk, crazy talk, you'll drive yourself crazy talking like that. yes mother, no mother, but she wasn't her mother, she was just bill's wife ruth and she had no right to tell her what to do.

treating her like a child, lie down, you musn't get yourself excited, we're only trying to help you, you've got to take your pill now, here drink this."

I interviewed Robert Bloch in the comfortable confines of his study. He sat in an easy chair beneath a wall covered with photos documenting his varied career in radio, film and television. With great clarity and humor he articulated his thoughts on psychology and mystery fiction. When he autographed my copy of *Psycho,* I had realized a long cherished ambition. The inscription is telling; "For Ray Zone — This autobiographical effort — Robert Bloch."

With his work, Robert Bloch continues to demonstrate a deft mastery of psychological mystery fiction. For him as he states in his essay on Ed Gein, "The real chamber of horrors is the gray, twisted, pulsating, blood-flecked interior of the human mind."

M: How can mystery writers give their characters psychological validity?

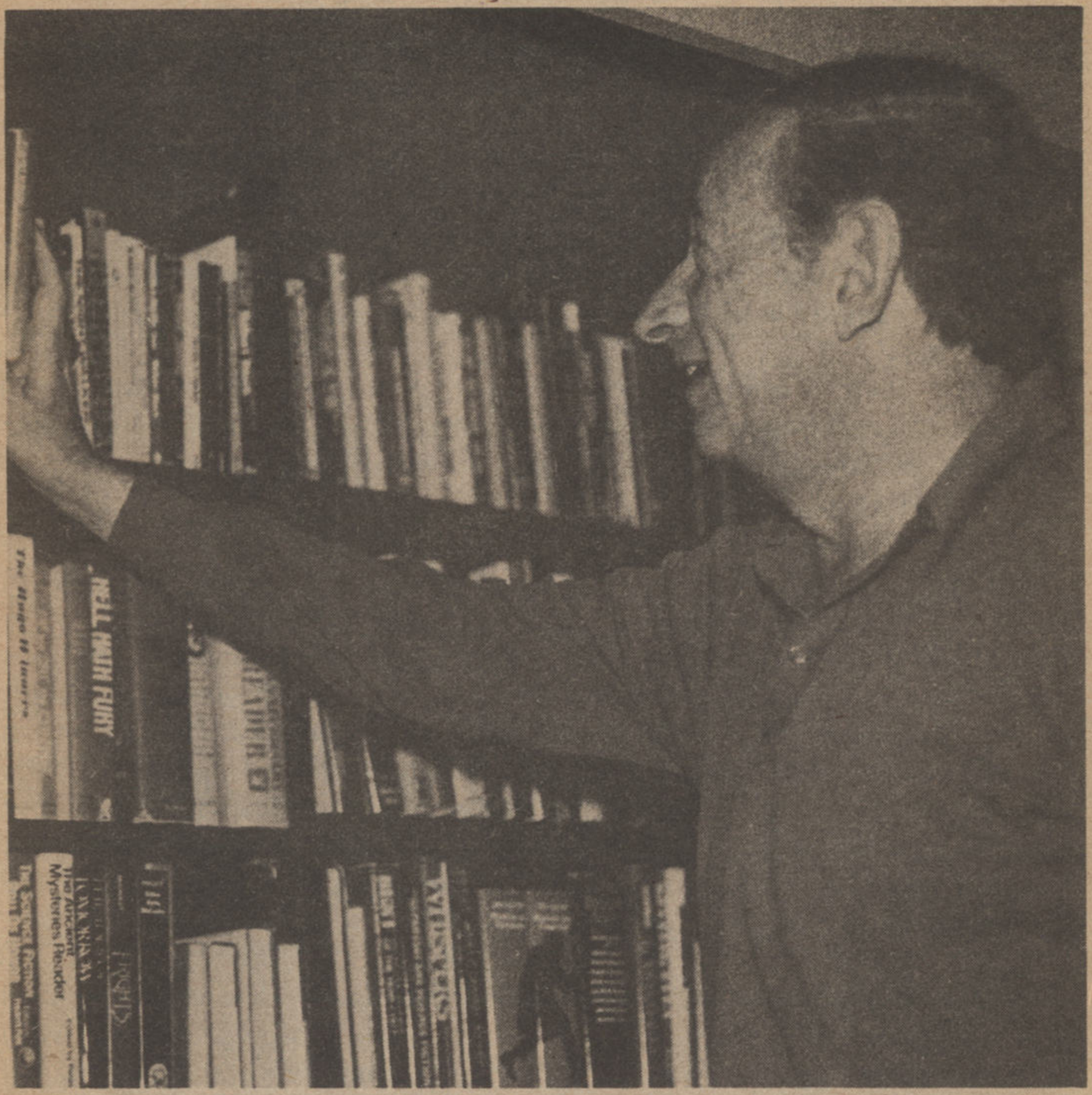
RB: By examining their own psyches, I think. I'm a great believer in impersonation. As far as I'm concerned, I impersonate every character that I write about to any extent. I start out by having to empathize with him and then try to adapt language patterns or conversation which will be constant with the character as I envision him. But all of them, of course, are a schizophrenic part of myself. All characters are schizoid splinters of the writer. He may think he is modeling them on real-life characters but something of the writer has to go into them. If not, he is not an author but merely a reporter. So I think each writer looks within himself to find the nuances of a well-rounded characterizaion.

M: How many hours a day do you write, roughly?

RB: I'm glad you used the term "roughly" because it's a rough business. I sit down at the typewriter, generally at nine in the morning, and will write until lunch time. I generally will be able to tell when I've had it for the day because there will be a lot of crumpled paper in the wastebasket. Then, of course, the day isn't ended. There's correspondence, business to attend to, roughly three hours work with what comes in the mail. I don't work, and never have worked, in the evenings, not consciously that is. I go to bed and I'm sure there's a lot of unconscious churning, planning for the next day going on which, thank heavens, I'm not usually aware of.

M: A character in *The Scarf* suggests that the magic in a writer's head is unaccountable. How do you initiate your own writer's magic?

RB: I wish I had a recipe for that process because I think I could make some money peddling it. But I haven't. I never know when an idea is going to come to me. It may be a phrase, something I've seen or read or just a bit of day dreaming and speculation, the extrapolation of a thought process. Almost everything is a possible source.



I think the most important thing for a writer to do is to maintain a certain constant awareness of his surroundings. It doesn't pay to skim a book, to gaze blankly at the television tube or theater screen and merely recede to get input. There has to be a mutuality. You've got to meet everything half-way. And I think that creates a flow of imagination. That's as close as I can come to it.

M: How much research into psychoanalytic literature did you do for *The Scarf?*

RB: I don't recall doing any at the time. I had, of course, read a few of the common texts. But there weren't many that were common back in the forties. There was Karl Menninger's *Man Against Himself* and perhaps a half

dozen other volumes. But a great deal of what is now common had not yet been translated or was not available except in the libraries of medical schools in the psychiatric section. You didn't find much on the shelves of the public library and there wasn't much by way of popularization. So much of *The Scarf* was extemporized. I was happy to get good reviews in psychiatric journals after it appeared because it was, by and large, a result of my own guesswork. It wasn't until a few years later that I realized I could do very well with that kind of character through empathy.

M: Do you think your novel, *The Kidnaper,* was ahead of its time?

RB: Thank you. I think if the novel had appeared when the kidnapping scare was at its height it would have had a far better reception. It would have found a better publisher. It would have attained a readership it was denied because it was published by a firm that went out of business a few months later. I prefer to think of that as coincidence. It's one of my favorites and nobody seems to care about it.

M: *Firebug,* your novel of arson, includes a cult. Why do you think people become psychologically involved with cults?

RB: It's my personal belief that most of the people who become involved in cults are people who cannot happily identify with ordinary groups or cultural constellations. These are people who are misfits, neglected or underprivileged and who have a yearning for something that is not properly supplied to them by their own family, by their friends, or by the institutions around them. So they find this kinship, this solidarity, this brotherhood, this sisterhood and fellowship within the confines of a cult.

The cult also give them something which, ultimately, they feel they've been denied and that is a feeling of elitism. They are privy to something which very few others are admitted to. They are the *illuminati,* as it were. They may adopt a distinctive style of dress. And with this too, whether it occurs in the cult or with stormtroopers, the psychological need and its satisfaction, I think, are the same. That's not to say that all cults are negative in their purposes and aspirations. But, in my observation, the majority of those that receive publicity certainly are. They are money machines. And it's unfortunate that people feel this need and succumb to it to the degree that they have in recent years.

M: *American Gothic,* like *Psycho,* is based on true events. What inspired it?

RB: I merely tried to introduce, to a certain extent, the element which is celebrated in my title. If you regard "Gothic" as a sort of *double-entendre* with its relationship to the gothic romances, then G. Gordon Gregg becomes the type of mysterious yet charming character that most of the heroines of the gothic novels succumb to. I have done a great deal of research on the

Mudgett case because my parents lived in Chicago and my grandparents had lived there. They told me about the events that occurred when they were children.

And now I find that much of the research I was unable to use in the book, because it would sound too fantastic, is going to be utilized in a full-length factual treatment of the same case which I am doing now for Reader's Digest Books. They asked me to do this. They're planning one of these huge omnibus volumes on strange events with sections by Colin Wilson, Norah Lofts and Judith Simmons. They asked me what I would like to do. And I said, "I would like to do *Dr. Holmes Murder Castle,*" because there was much that was so fantastic I had been unable to use it in my novel. So they said, "Go ahead, by all means." I'm embarking on that now and it won't be published until early 1983.

M: Could you comment on how Norman Bates evolved from Ed Gein?

RB: Well, that is a strange evolution to me. Most people who have written about this use a sort of reportorial shorthand and they intimate, however they phrase it, that I took Ed Gein as the model for Norman Bates. This is not actually correct. What I did was to take the case as a model for my story. What intrigued me was not the character, because I knew nothing about him. Bear in mind, Gein lived in a small town over forty miles away. I had no wheels. I never got over there. All I read was a few clippings that appeared in small town newspapers. So I knew nothing of the details.

All I knew was that here was a man who lived in a town that was smaller than the one I lived in who had been able to indulge in mass murder without anybody suspecting it. And I knew this situation would make a good novel. So I had to go from there and I constructed a character out of whole cloth. And I just proceeded as logically as possible.

How would such a man operate? The answer was that the crime was concealed from himself by virtue of a split personality. If he had an amnesic fugue during the murders he wouldn't be aware of them himself. So he wouldn't have this problem of having to cover up his tracks. He would be covering up the tracks of somebody else. Who would that somebody else be? Well, the most obvious psychiatric situation I felt would be known to the reader is the Oedipal conflict. So I said, "Alright, mother is the root of all evil here." It must be that he blames his crimes on his mother. Why would he do that? Well, he was dependent on his mother and she enforced his dependency. He had strangled her with a silver cord and he had to keep her alive somehow. So he kept her alive with his alter ego and devised a persona for her. How would he operate under this persona? Perhaps he would dress up like his mother. So we got into the transvestite thing which, at that time, was a fairly new device in fiction. Out of that I develped Norman Bates from

whole cloth.

It wasn't until several years after the book was published that I wrote a factual article on the Gein case for Mystery Writers of America. So I had to do some research into the facts. The facts were that Ed Gein did have a mother fixation. He did live alone after his mother's death and did become a transvestite. However, he did not dress up in women's garments. He dressed up in the skin of his victims. He had committed several murders, apparently, was also a cannibal, a necrophile and a few other things in his spare time. Which is to be accepted, after all, everyone should have a hobby. He was also subject to amnesic fugues and he had no memory whatsoever of the commission of his crimes. So I had come very close to the truth.

M: At the end of *Psycho,* Norman's schizophrenic personalities merge into the personality of his mother. Do these separate selves re-emerge in *Psycho II?*

RB: All I can tell you is that Norman Bates is loose again in today's world, amid today's violence. And that, to me, was the challenge of doing this particular book.

I said to myself, "What would be the situation if a man whose acts were regarded as monstrous twenty years ago were to re-emerge into a world where these acts are now commonplace?" They are going on all over. Mass murder is almost a way of life, if not a way of death. We accept terrorism. We accept international incidents. We accept arson, forcible rape, torture and mutilation, you name it. And not only in reality but on the movie screen, in our literature and in comic books. So Pandora's Box has been opened and all the ills are unleashed. What happens when Norman Bates pops out of that box again? How does he adjust? What does he do? And what can I do to keep the reader from being inured to such activities and impressions?

M: In your recent novel, *There Is a Serpent In Eden,* a little old lady saves the day by virtue of her delusions. In a world that increasingly resembles a madhouse, how may insanity be useful to us?

RB: I think it's becoming more and more of a refuge because so many people are living with stresses and pressures that they cannot cope with and they've never been properly prepared for. This is certainly the reason why hallucinogenic drugs have enjoyed such a great popularity. And I think that certain types of aberration are becoming more and more acceptable to the general public. What was once considered unusual is now a normal sight, such as people walking down the street talking to themselves as on the main streets of our cities where winos gather. And now we have bag ladies all over. We have kids walking down the street muttering. Many times I've heard them. And they're in contact with various hallucinations and delusions that are self-created, self-induced and apparently necessary to them. They

just can't bear up to the demands society places on them. And, in that sense, insanity may be a useful tool for survival. And that's kind of a grotesque commentary on what's happened to the world. Perhaps it's a necessary defense. After all, the world is turning into an asylum. And there may be very little point in being sane.

M: Shortly after the film version of *Psycho* apeared, a midwestern murder trial occurred where the defense claimed the defendant was unhinged by viewing the film. What is your opinion of such a defense?

RB: My opinion is that this gentleman's hinges were not too well affixed beforehand. I, naturally, had this drawn to my attention. There were several such allegations made. And in each instance a follow-up uncovered the fact that the alleged defendants were copping out. They all had prior records of abnormal behavior.

This has been a common cop-out, as you probably know, throughout the past few years in which the mass media have disseminated information. I've yet, however, been unable to ascertain just what movie John Wilkes Booth was viewing before he went out and assassinated Lincoln, what books were being read by Benedict Arnold or what inspired him to treason.

I take a dim view of this. If one were to adhere to the tenets of clinical psychology, one would realize that virtually anything could trigger off an individual who was prone to mental disorder. There's no way of anticipating what particular sight, sound, odor or sensory impression of any sort will do so. If depiction or discussion of violent crime or murder is culpable then what does that say for the constant display of such material on the television news broadcasts day after day, night after night, and on the front pages of every newspaper and most magazines? How is one to distinguish between reality and imagination in that regard?

We have lived, some of us, through World War II, the Korean War, Viet Nam and all the other blood baths that have cost the lives of perhaps fifty million people in aggregate with all their tortures and all their massacres in concentration camps and prisons. During all that time most countries, including the United States, had a policy of conscription. I suppose thirty to forty million young men since 1940 were brought into the armed forces at one time or another, taught to kill, given weapons and trained in their use. And then suddenly, after combat service, they're released again.

I would certainly think that such an exposure would have a far greater effect on the individual than what he or she might read in a book or see on a movie screen with the full knowledge beforehand that it was imaginary. I refuse to let imaginary violence become the scapegoat for what is real violence. It's that simple.


HUME

DEATH IS THE STAR: THE HOLLYWOOD MYSTERY NOVEL, AND WHY IT CONTINUES TO FASCINATE

By Hal W. Peat

Drawing By Kelly Hume

Some novels employ illusion to create mystery. Others rely on the harder surfaces of reality to pose much the same question. The Hollywood mystery novel is a special hybrid of both techniques, using both a world of illusion and the reality behind it to create both the structure of mystery and its own comment on a very unique community.

To understand anything of its fascination, one must first be aware of its background. For the Hollywood mystery novel does have its own forerunners and progenitors, both literary and cinematic (as perhaps no other sub-genre does). Spawned in the traditional setting of the American private eye, Los Angeles, it can lay claim to both a Dashiel Hammett and a Raymond Chandler as being among its unwary ancestors. Their contribution to the development of the protagonist in these novels is obvious: the independent investigator, free to follow his own instincts and methods, who despite his worldly cynicism will doggedly pursue a case to its final solution.

Among the earliest legitimate examples of the Hollywood mystery novel is *The Studio Murder Mystery* (1929) by A.C. and Carmen Edington. Filled with crudely drawn, stereotyped figures, it is nonetheless interesting for several

of the elements it introduces. One of these is the effect of a violent death on the studio system, and the attitudes of the various studio principals toward its intrusion. On the one hand there is the view of the demanding director, for whom the murder must not be allowed to interfere at all; on the other hand, there is the strongly held notion of the studio head that his business is a family affair, and a murder within the family must of necessity involve the fate of his whole business. These attitudes will find their echo in much later examples of the genre.

Yet another element introduced is the figure of the studio chief and founder, a sort of local lord of life and death. In *The Studio Murder Mystery,* we find him in the colorful, folksy person of Abe Rosenthal, next to whom the investigating law officer (anonymously enough named Smith) is merely a cypher. The studio mogul carves out an empire for his heirs, but as we shall frequently see, it is the welfare of his extended family — the studio — that concerns him most. Finally, the novel presents a very early Hollywood of seeming innocence, laughter and hope: it is an atmosphere in startling contrast to later periods.

Several novels of the Thirties and Forties can be seen as permutations of variations of the Hollywood mystery novel, and will contribute to its totality in one way or another. Among them, most notably, are *The Black Camel,* by Earl D. Biggers, and Dorothy B. Hughes' *In A Lonely·Place.* Actually one in the series of Charlie Chan mysteries, *The Black Camel* features a declining star called Shelah Fane who meets an even suddener decline while on location in Hawaii. What is interesting here is not so much the reasons or surroundings of the murder, but the perception we receive of death stalking and overtaking a faltering star. So it is that we are ironically informed before Shelah Fane's demise that "Longer than most rockets she had hung blazing in the sky; now she must endure the swift lonely drop in the dark."

In A Lonely Place, although it involves no filmland personae and is a Hollywood mystery only in the broader sense of physical setting and plot, is nevertheless something of a landmark in both its book and film forms for its portrayal of post-War *angst,* alienation, and the dark randomness of violence in Los Angeles, all elements to be drawn on in later Hollywood novels.

It is in those novels published in the later Seventies and early Eighties that the full flowering of interest in the theme of Death in the Dream Factory takes place. Five of the most entertaining of these have been written by Stuart Kaminsky in his Toby Peters series. *Bullet For A Star* (1977), the first, is set in the heyday of the big studios. Toby Peters, investigator and former studio security man, is called in by Warners' to help out in a blackmail case. A murder occurs almost immediately, but the attempt on Errol Flynn's life

does not succeed; in spite of his "wicked ways," Flynn is still a star in an era when bullets cannot touch him off-screen either. Peter Lorre, Edward G. Robinson and Gary Cooper also make appearances almost as stellar as their on-screen roles. Villainy is left strictly to a B-rate actor and his scheming wife (one of those beautiful-but-amoral women in the style of Hayworth in "Lady from Shanghai"). Kaminsky's second Hollywood mystery, *Murder On The Yellow Brick Road* (1978), has Toby Peters helping out a frightened Judy Garland at MGM. "People come and go so quickly out here," muses Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz,* which is exactly the problem that Peters faces. Kaminsky chooses the most ironic of settings for a murder — the set of the yellow brick road to Oz. Instead of leading to a happy ending, it leads instead to a sudden, violent one for a "munchkin" extra of the Hollywood favorite. Again, there is a sprinkling of off-screen cameos: Garland, of course, and Clark Gable among them. And Raymond Chandler himself materializes, acting not so much as a guardian angel but as a kind of foil upon which the authenticity of Peters and his world are further established.

In both these novels, the hero is faced with the often obdurate and ever unscrupulous power of the studios, personified most lovingly at MGM by the fearsome Louis B. Mayer, quintessential self-made mogul who rules from a white-upholstered office that exactly suggests his determination to keep his studio's reputation spotless.

Toby must also contend with his brother and frequent opponent, a detective on the L.A. police force who is as hard-working, uptight and explosive as Toby is offbeat, inquisitive and an outsider at ease in his rough-edged existence. The bad food, shabby living quarters, run-down automobiles and dingy characters he encounters all fit Toby as comfortably as the cheap suits he wears. His own self-description sums up much of the style of the protagonist of the Hollywood mystery: "I was a first-rate, determined plodder with a hard head. That was the way I worked, and the way I liked it."

The second two Toby Peters mysteries continue with much the same formula as the first two: a call for help from a celebrity, appearances by stars and literary figures, and a battering series of chases and fights for Peters. *The Howard Hughes Affair* (1979) opens with death hot on the heels of Peters in a center of the entertainment industry — the NBC studios. This time around, it is the figure of Basil Rathbone who shares with Peters the relationship he had with Chandler in *Murder On The Yellow Brick Road.* Rathbone hopes Toby can "give me some insight, as the resident Holmes, into how a real detective works." They are opposed by a clutch of Nazi emigres who bring their own brand of death to Hollywood. The struggle between Peters and his adversaries in this story foreshadows the coming worldwide conflagration, which engulfs America with Pearl Harbor by novel's

end.

In *Never Cross A vampire* (1980), Kaminsky has his hero take on two celebrity clients — Bela Lugosi and William Faulkner. Lugosi, fallen on hard times, hires Peters to find out which of the Dark Knights of Transylvania (a vampire club) is sending Lugosi death threats. Faulkner has been quite simply set up for a murder, that of a Hollywood agent. Toby inevitably gets beaten up by a "caped figure in black" — who turns out to be the actor-lover of the murdered agent's wife. While the plot here may strain all credibility, there is yet a certain irony in the terror of an on-screen vampire being shadowed off-screen by a very real, if macabre, threat of death.

You Bet Your Life (1980) takes Toby Peters out of the Hollywood mystery milieu and off to Chicago to aid the Marx brothers in financial problems involving the Mob. However, the latest in this series, *High Midnight* (1981), again centers on the predicament of a star in Hollywood needing physical protection from a violent death. In this instance, it is an already-aging Gary Cooper who seeks out Peters' services. The not very tongue-in-cheek title refers to a screenplay Cooper is being blackmailed to play the lead in. Toby's job is find out which of the shady, down-and-out characters associated with the screenplay are desperate enough to commit murder to see it produced (or not produced). As one fading actress with a bit part in it tells him: "I guess we're all screwy enough. That what you wanted?" While death confronts Peters no less than twice in the form of corpses dumped within his own seedy rooms, this lean and often violent side of Los Angeles is light years away from the world of a star like Cooper. When Peters explains how he derives a certain exuberance from the fear he experiences in a confrontation with gangsters, Cooper can only relate to the incident and feeling by comparing it to the sensation he gets from driving a fast car on a narrow road. However, this doesn't prevent Kaminsky from having Peters later compare his own pursuit by a killer to being "like Robert Donat in 'The 39 Steps.' All I needed was Alfred Hitchcock behind me to tell me what to do." The make-believe of Hollywood is not very far behind even for a man as down-to-earth as Toby Peters in a town which is fond of having its life imitate its "art".

Andrew Bergman's remarkable *Hollywood and LeVine* (1976) take place in a Hollywood of a slightly later but far more somber period, the time of the McCarthy witch-hunts and blacklists. A screenwriter is murderd at the outset — a victim of the fear gripping the film community. Other witch-hunt victims are previously respected members of the industry who must be sacrificed so that Hollywood itself can retain its endangered position of privilege and power in America. Jack LeVine, a New York P.I. out on the Coast working on his friend's murder case, ironically finds the slain writer's

treatment of death on script to be totally unreal: "It treated death like something you find in an Easter egg and death isn't like that; it's nasty and inconvenient and enormous."

Collusion between the law, the studios and the media in suppressing or misrepresenting the facts of the murder is essential to protect the studio system. LeVine believes "Warners' flaks had worked overtime, either at getting the cops to keep mum or holding their advertising power to the *Times'* throat." Not only must he deal with the venality of studio executives and the usual obstructive homicide detective, but also a clique of fellow-travelling actors and writers and a young Congressman Nixon who makes a bizarre appearance on the trail of the Red Conspiracy.

Brad Solomon's *The Gone Man* (1977) picks up on yet another P.I. still smarting from the effects of the McCarthy years. Set in a later decade, the shifting sands of Hollywood have become a veritable quicksand that easily swallows up its victims. And Hollywood dynasties, in particular, already seem to be on the verge of collapse only a generation after their creation. The murder victim, Jamie Stockton, is the son of a film mogul and as witless, shallow and corrupt as his father is cunning, tenacious and manipulative. Neither he nor his sister Amanda, the typically spoilt Hollywood princess, observe rules or taboos of any kind. Charlie Quinlan, former actor turned gumshoe (he shares a name with the unforgettable police chief of Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*) is faced with an uncooperative family who do not really wish to be faced with the truth of what they have become. For Hollywood sleuths must frequently deal in conclusions which are not happy ones — in stark contrast to the fantasy endings Hollywood delighted in serving up to the rest of the world for so long. As Charlie Quinlan's producer girlfriend warns him: "Come back to the movies. We can make happy endings in the movies. If we can raise enough money first. In the real stuff, private detectives sometimes get killed."

Johathan Fast's *The Inner Circle* (1979) comes full circle from the Forties world of Kaminsky's novels, in which murder and corruption may occasionally rear an ugly head, but where the world of the stars remains an ideal, shining realm. We can still look up to a Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart or Raymond Chandler, but those with success in the Hollywood of *Inner Circle* have been reduced to very ordinary, stumbling mortals. Now we see a far darker side to fame as the sphere of the stars is revealed as a descent into an inferno of barbarism, ritual murder and black magic. The Age of Manson has arrived. Louis Pinkle, an investigative freelance writer, leads a life as tenuous as any detective. Plagued by determined landlords, shortsighted lawmen and ungenerous employers, he still tries to unravel the apparent murder of an erstwhile-friend turned TV star, and discovers that "Fame had

to feed on itself, like a snake consuming its tail."

This self-cannibalism is the motif of the story; the "Inner circle" takes its members from obscurity to fame to oblivion. It raises the unknown to an idol worshipped by millions, then sacrifices the idol so the wheel may continue to turn and yet another take his or her place. The shadowy settings of the late Forties and Fifties have receded to expose an even stranger terrain; the City of the Angels is now populated by more than a few devils. At the funeral of slain star Tony Valenti they appear in full force, "aging producers chewing on cigars and young agents hiding their claws in the pockets of their Saint Laurent suits." Pinkle pities anyone who actually wants to be inside the film business, yet as a frustrated screenwriter himself he is insidiously drawn to it. Wise enough to know the industry "uses actors like toilet paper — and anyone else it can," he is still lured by its glitter. .The sinister mood is heightened by a Los Angeles "filled with strange tropical plants that flourish in the hot sunny, arid air, growing so fast you can almost see them creep along, and if one of these days the gardeners go on strike, we'll all be done for."

From mercilessly unblinking sunlight to mercilessly unceasing rain, from would-be to Oscar-winning screenwriter are the differences in atmosphere and character between this novel and Thomas Gifford's *Hollywood Gothic* (1979). As Gifford's tale begins, the elements have left the L.A. region a wasteland of death and destruction, with "villages swept away, graveyards excavated, vast meandering homes dumped down canyon walls and disappearing beneath thousands of tons of mud and shale." It is almost a reflection of the human and moral chaos we now see, in the circumstances surrounding a murder, to be of deep and long-standing origin. For just as the downpours seem likely to obliterate Los Angeles, so too Hollywood's shaky and rotted foundations appear to be on the brink of collapse. Studio czar Solomon Roth's daughter is murdered (with an Oscar to the skull) and husband Toby Challis is accused and convicted. On the way to incarceration, the plane carrying him crashes and he is able to return semi-incognito to L.A. to investigate his apparent frame-up.

Sprung from his sentence in this almost miraculous fashion, Challis bears out the truth that, as one character puts it, "There's always an angel, a way to do things in Hollywood. Never forget that." It is the key to survival and success in filmland, but it is also the principle which entirely changes the rules of the game surrounding a crime and makes its resolution so unexpected. Pretense, distortion and make-believe are as characteristic of Hollywood off-screen as on. The studio elite firmly believe that society's laws stop at the studio gate. As Roth claims of his own company: "Maximus comes first. Ours is a closed society, that's always been my view."

In this environment where lies are the everyday norm, Toby Challis, the former insider turned desperate outsider, must try to uncover the truth among the sham and fiction. His search leads him across a quite surreal landscape of eccentric astrologers in mobile homes, scholoarly agents in Sunset strip suites, moguls on estates decorated with life-size dinosaurs, and mobsters with their heavies throughout. The truth may be a valuable commodity sometimes but, as Challis finds, it requires a degree of selflessness which cannot survive in a town of overinflated egos. Even Roth admits there's "Too much ego, and the truth can always be shaped to our ends."

Shaping the truth to less than truthful ends also plays a starring part in George Baxt's *The Neon Graveyard* (1979), which opens with a murder in a late movie mogul's transplanted-to-Hollywood castle, now riddled with hidden cameras and bugging devices to assist in blackmail and extortion. Baxt gives an obvious significance to the Hearst-like domain where former star Hagar Simon entertains lavishly while running a front for the mob. It is visibly, as one character puts it, "the last dinosaur." Though a majestic symbol of the "old" Hollywood, it also represents corruption in the present. And by now it is hardly surprising that the foremost of the tale's villains should emerge as the investigating homicide chief himself. On the Hollywood side, there is a vicious columnist, Lila Frank, who is actually an operative for her deported father back in Sicily. The protagonist, Norton Valentine, is a slick federal investigator out to solve his friend's murder and crack the operation at the castle. But even he is no longer the uncompromised outsider, for, much like Toby Challis, his former wife has become precariously involved in a decadence that threatens to engulf him. *The Neon Graveyard,* as its name implies, depicts a Hollywood at its most grotesque, a painted mask upon a corpse-like face. Gone is even the mood of melancholy sadness of *Hollywood Gothic.* Instead there is only a circus-like atmosphere in which the truth behind the murder is a kind of bizarre joke, and the main spectacle becomes the cardboard cut-out characters which are all that is left of Hollywood.

In *Good Night and Good-bye* (1979), a night blacker than any *film noir* scenario could provide has descended on Hollywood. Timothy Harris writes so knowingly of Los Angeles that one can practically touch the palm trees and taste the smog and see the knives being slipped into backs. This time, death truly is the "star" — in a disputed film script which disappears (and for which several people are prepared to kill one another). Its story concerns the carnage of Vietnam, safely written about from the shores of Malibu several years later. As private eye Thomas Kyd, hired to find its thief, tartly remarks: "time heals all wounds; it was as if the statute of limitations had run out on

the crimes of Vietnam; the subject was finally dead enough to be good box office."

The typically unreal existence that screenwriter Paul Sassari leads is exemplified by his Malibu house, which is garishly decorated on the outside with life-size, sinister figures of trolls and gnomes. Sassari is a particularly ugly figure, appropriately valued by those around him for what he values only himself — money. Even his to his lawyer and friend, he is just "an oil well." The circumstances surrounding Sassari's murder are too sordid to be revealed in their entirety to the public. As Kyd knows, there were too many stars and studio executives at the fatal party for the truth to be fully told. Once more, death is only allowed to show a face that Hollywood can cosmeticize. Sassari is in fact something more than an oil well: he is an instrument of death for anything honest or serious, such as his secretary Raymond Kepler. Thus Kepler's former teacher confides to Kyd: "Such a type succumbs to the Sassaris of this world the way your American Indians died of the common cold. There is no place for them in Hollywood. "Kyd is wise to the ways of Hollywood folk; his own attitude toward their savagery and corruption is one of casual weariness. He can sit back in his office and compare the Hollywood types he has known to "a tribe of New Guinea headhunters." The only person who shakes him out of this affected indifference is Sassari's wife, Laura. She is the enigma Kyd cannot wholly penetrate or possess — one minute the frightened child-woman, the next the sophisticated and cunning Hollywood lady, yet always alluring and elusive.

There are no real closed-end solutions to the Hollywood murder mystery, only momentary pauses in an ongoing game. Death makes merely a passing stir on the surface of people's lives. It is an occasion for stars, directors and studio executives to appear properly mournful for the world and the media, then to turn quickly back to the more pleaurable — and profitable concerns of the Dream Factory. In Joseph Wambaugh's *The Glitter Dome* (1981), we are caustically told of the funeral of a murdered studio head whose eulogy "was written by an Oscar-winning screenwriter" and whose entourage "was choreographed by an Oscar-winning director." Death, although fearsome, can be made seemly: the embalmings, memorial services and lavish marble crypts are all part of the attempt to elevate him or her to an indestructible level.

While Wambaugh writes with considerable rabelaisian relish of the tacky streets and people of Hollywood today, of the grotesque, tawdry side of the "film captital of the world" with its pimps and pushers, dopers and runaways, would-be performers and prostitiutes, there is an underlying revulsion at the sub-humanness of it all, as expresses in the person of Martin Welborn, one

of the two detectives assigned to investigage mogul Nigel St. Claire's death (itself the ironic outcome of the latter's involvement in a murdeous "snuff" movie). Welborn is a refugee from the world of the seminary, still aching for the ritualized, tradition-laden church he once knew. Confronted daily by the unending secular horrors of the streets, he ultimately concludes that the struggle to live in such a world is futile, though "Hollywood, California is no more evil than Hannibal, Missouri. There's no evil. No good. It's all an accident."

Though set in the same tough, cynical environment, Hamilton Caine's *Carpenter, Detective* (1980) provides a less jaundiced, somewhat kinder view of the eccentricities of Los Angeles today. Caine's investigator, Ace Carpenter, is assigned to track down the errant daughter of a socialite millionaire whose life is in danger following the murder of a self-help guru last seen with her. Again there is the mixed bag of night creatures that have come to populate the Hollywood mystery novel: vengeful prostituties, ambitious barboys, myopic cult followers, lost children and lost adults. Again there is the sense of a world anesthetized against its own corruption, ugliness, a place where "starvation and pestilence were just salt and pepper spicings for a good script." In spite of all of that, Carpenter is the kind of detective who can find shreds of decency and integrity out there — whether it be in a bartender, a stripper or even a detective on the L.A. Force.

Whereto the Hollywood mystery novel from its present point? It has spanned much of Hollywood history itself, from an age of innocence when stars were mythical figures seen in superhuman proportions on the big screen and the studios were virtual empires unto themslves, to later decades of equal disillusionment and decay. Its hero is certainly no longer as tough or sure-footed as the Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe of yore; instead he has taken on all the sensibilities of a later age with all its strengths and weaknesses. But even if he is often battered or shaken, this latter-day investigator will survive — and knows it — if only because he really couldn't be bothered to be as afraid of death as everyone else. Says Charlie Quinlan in *The Gone Man*: "I can recover from a beating. I can heal from a gunshot. At least I have. And if someone's going to kill me — if it's really going to happen, it's going to happen." Being the eternal breeding-ground for suspicion, rumor, rivalry, masquerade and strange coincidences, Hollywood remains the perfect stage for further variations of literary intrigue, continuing to attract attention from new quarters. The possibilities for further mystery beneath the giant sign on the hills are apparently endless. After all, as almost any character in one of these novels might tell you — that's Hollywood.

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THE NIGHT WATCH

By Michael Seidman

Responsible. Yes, that was the word. He was responsible. That was what Paula couldn't, or wouldn't, understand. He knew the meaning of the word, accepted it. For himself and both of them. Yes, that was it. She would just have to learn, she ...

David realized that he was speaking, that the thoughts had moved from brain to lip. He looked around, but the streets were empty at one o'clock on this dreary Friday morning. So, only he would realize that he was crazy; after all, it is only crazy people who speak to themselves on the streets. Or those with money in the bank, and he certainly didn't fall into that category. Uh-uh, no, Paula saw to that. Well ...

Five minutes later he turned a key slowly, equating the lack of speed with s'ence. First the Medeco cylinder, then the Yale. He turned the knob, pushed carefully, not knowing if she'd chained the door before going to bed, one of her favorite tricks, lately. Tonight, she hadn't. Good.

The apartment was dark, the door to the hall leading to the bedrooms shut against any sounds he might make coming in. He left the apartment door open, tossed his coat over one of the dining room chairs, and walked into the kitchen. The bag of garbage was still there. He lifted it out of the

plastic waste can and went out to the incinerator. Returning, he closed the door, double locking and putting the night chain into place.

It was only one thirty, too early. He went into the living room, smelling the stale cigarette smoke and a pall of incense. On the coffee table in front of the couch he could see a toppled wine glass. The television was still warm to his touch. He stood for a moment in the middle of the room, making out shapes in the light filtering in from the streets, trying to find the comfort that should have been there, in his home. Instead, there was the feeling of foreignness, the out of place sense he got when he returned to hotel rooms during business trips. He shuddered.

Walking back toward the bedrooms, he stopped and kicked off his shoes, then opened the door to the hall. Directly in front of him was his bedroom, *their* bedroom. Down the hall to the right was Susan's room. He pushed the door to the master bedroom open, and took two or three steps into the cool darkness. He could see Paula's form on the bed, foetal, facing away toward the window. Her hair, usually a dark stain against the white linen, was a tight cap, set and rolled in curlers.

He backed out of the room, closing the door, and turned toward the baby's bedroom. No, not a baby, he thought, Susie was four, a gangly, buck-toothed, skinny bundle. Still, his baby, his anchor. Her door was open, the room lit by a small nightlight.

She was uncovered, all arms and legs sprawled across the top of the bed, lying on her back. He sat on the edge of her bed, wiping the damp curls on her forehead. Paula wouldn't turn the radiators in their room on, nor would she turn them off in here. Susie's eyes opened as his hand rested on her brow, and she smiled, moving her lips in a greeting that didn't sound, and folding them into a kiss as her eyes closed again.

Now he felt the comfort he was looking for earlier, in the living room. And he felt the impact of what was going to happen; it all began to have meaning as he sat in this room, his daughter's tiny hand touching his leg. He pressed the button on the side of his cheap digial watch, the button that made the light come on. Black against silver: 1:57:34.

The watch was a toy, a gift to himself. He hadn't needed it; somewhere in one of his drawers the Rolex Paula had given him as a wedding gift lay in its box. But this one would have allowed him to time how long he was staying with Susie, if that had made any difference. It was only a detail, though, it didn't matter. Not now. Just a detail.

Details. Susie had had a brother, though she never knew him. He'd died six years earlier, at nine months. He shouldn't have lived that long, a squirming motley of congenital defects. David Saul Kleinman, Jr. They'd argued about that, about naming the child after him.

"You can't do it," Paula said, "you can't name a child after yourself."

She was wrong, of course. It was only a tradition, and an Ashkenazic one at that. The Sephardic Jews did it all the time. When the baby was born, not lost in miscarriage as was the first, and the nurse came to him and asked for the information for the birth certificate, he had said, "David Saul, Junior." It was done. His first chance at immortality had been lost in a gush of cramps and blood in a toilet, he wasn't going to take chances now. He prevailed, yes, and saw the sickly, blue infant in the ICU, and felt the tiny deaths of each passing day as the baby grew weaker, faded, died.

He'd wanted to leave Paula after the miscarriage, when she insisted that they try again; but couldn't. He was *responsible.* Instead, he held her, listened to her tears, stayed, made sterile love, impregnated her, fathered a grotesque. And didn't leave, again.

There were no arguments about names the third time. "Do whatever you want, Paula. It really doesn't matter. Just be happy. I don't care, it doesn't matter." It didn't, nothing did, except getting through each day, getting finally to this one.

He looked down at Susie and saw his hand around her throat, felt the small pulse on the left side beating against his thumb, the other four fingers lost on the right, felt the pressure building, heard the whimper, felt soft breath brushing the back of his hand. Soft, sweet breath.

In the bedroom above a phone rang, once twice, was answered in the middle of the third ring. It startled him, sounding too loud. A neighbor's mother lay in Pennsylvania, so far away, so dead.

David walked back to the living room, touching his bedroom door in passing, a benediction. *May the Lord make his countenance to shine upon thee ...* It had been so long since anything shone in there.

The last year had been torture, pain upon pain in geometric progression, each breath he drew a mistake, an assault, according to Paula, on her. She would sit for periods of silence lasting a day, a week, staring at her plate at dinner, picking at the food as if each bite would be the one that would kill her. And quickly he began to have that same hope, willing it to happen, willing to help. He would watch with downcast eyes from across the table, feeling his stomach turn as she deliberately chewed each sliver of chicken, each shred of red meat, until she pushed the nearly full plate away, rose, and disappeared into the bedroom, closing the door.

As he cleared the table, laughed with Susie and played with her until bedtime, he could occasionally hear her voice as she talked on the phone to unknown, disembodied voices. Now and then the phone would ring, and she'd answer before the echo of the first bell had died.

Now and then, he would wash the dishes, too.

Eventually, he'd hear the shower running and she'd finally come into the living room, settling herself as far away as possible from him, ask why he didn't speak to her.

Then she would get up to do the dishes.

She began analysis, and things got worse. He'd come home in the evenings, not knowing if she was on the other side of the door — afraid she had left, angry with himself that *he* hadn't.

She would go from bitter silence to seductive. His moods were unimportant; if she wanted to make love, that was all that was necessary. If he spurned her, he didn't love her; if he made love to her, he didn't love her.

There had been one night, a week earlier. She began teasing his ear with her tongue as he lay in bed, waiting for the sleep which took ever longer to arrive. "What's the matter, David," she'd whispered, "don't you love me? Don't you want me, David? Other men do. I'm highly desirable."

He turned on his side to face her, stared at her face framed in lacquer black hair. "Paula, right now I'd just as soon kill you as touch you, you realize that, don't you? Hell, it probably isn't even me you're thinking about. If you're so damned *desirable* why don't you go get someone else. Go on. I'm tired."

"Oh, yes, David, I'm desirable." She laughed, and slid her body over his, and he understood, finally, the game they were playing, saw the rules written in letters of fire on the wall. Because it was a game, a challenge. She wanted him gone, wanted him replaced by someone who would spend all his time in bed with her, but *she* wouldn't leave, she wanted him to leave, to be the bad guy. And then she touched him in all the right places and he stopped fighting and listened to her laugh as she cut another notch in whatever totem pole she was using to record her wins.

Now he stood in the apartment he hadn't wanted, but had taken to satisfy her, to keep her happy because she'd be living near her family in an area with things to do (if they could afford to do them) instead of the boredom of the suburbs. It had gotten to be home, after a time. Now his home was in his head.

He felt along the book shelf until be came to the box holding the seven inch reel of tape he called his trip tape. It had taken him five weeks to record it, working slowly and carefully, segueing each cut into the next. It was an assortment of music: jazz, pop, folk, rock — Donald Byrd's "Christo Redentor" would flow into the "Love Them from *The Godfather*." "Meadowlands" would become "Rhapsody in Blue." Four hours of sounds that took him out of himself, out of the West side, and allowed him to be somewhere

else, to be someone else.

He threaded the tape through his Revox A77, and pressed the button on the amp which disconnected the room speakers. He plugged in the electrostatic headphones. Freddy Hubbard's trumpet on "Stolen Moments" filled his head. He lay on the couch, eyes closed. As the cut came to an end, he checked his watch: 2:53:03.

He didn't hear the sirens when the fire engines pulled up on the street, one floor below; the seal on the 'phones was almost hermetic, blocking out all sounds — that's why he'd gotten them in the first place. They were heavy and uncomfortable, but they allowed him to be alone. He'd bought them a week after he and Paula had returned from their honeymoon.

So, sealed off, he didn't hear the bells and clangor. But the flashing red lights, brushing his closed lids in their regular, rapid pattern, brought him back. There was still an hour to go on this side of the tape, which meant it was almost four o'clock.

He got up and stopped the tape, leaving the headphones on the couch. He could hear the firemen calling to each other, the banging of hooks and oxygen tanks as they were thrown into the trucks. He didn't smell anything. Another false alarm.

Taking a few steps to the coffee table, David picked up the glass he had seen earlier and sniffed it. The Beaujolais. He took the glass into the kitchen, rinsed it in the sink and left it on the sideboard to drain.

He went to the bedroom and walked to Paula's side of the bed. She was lying on her back now, covers thrown askew. He could make out the soft mounds of her breasts. He leaned over to give her a kiss, a parting gesture, but stopped as her breath, sour with wine, enveloped his face. He pulled back. She must have sensed him leaning over her, because she scowled, reaching for the blankets and pulling them up over her, almost covering her head. He felt tears of frustration, loss, forming and turned away to sit on the window sill. He pulled the blinds up and watched through the condensation on the window as the last of the fire trucks pulled away.

Idly, he began tracing designs on the window, feeling the cold moisture and grit press against his finger. Swirls, lines, flames, doodling the only patterns he was comfortable with, the same one pencilled on the note papers littering his desk. Looking down from his perch, he saw a cat dart under a car, chasing a bit of rolling paper. Susie would have laughed, if she'd been there to see it.

He felt his eyes begin to burn. It was getting late, it would soon be time. He ran his hand across the window, erasing his designs and twisted around to look at Paula, thinking he could hear her whining in her sleep. Wine-sour breath; whine-sour voice.

He left the bedroom door open this time, and got the ashtrays from the living room, dumping one into a paperbag in the kitchen, leaving the other on the dining room table.

He sat there, smoking, playing with the matchbook, remembering the scene from the old war movie: a matchbook, with a burning cigarette left in it, held down by the matches, then thrown into a boxcar carrying ammo to the Nazi front lines. He took three or four drags from his Camel, then slipped the half-smoked cigarette under the match heads. He put the fuse, resting on the side edge, in the littered ashtray and started the stopwatch mode on his digital, watching the hundreths of seconds, then the seconds, flick by in the low light. Two minutes later there was a flare, blinding him, as the matches ignited and the matchbbok itself began to curl in a blue flame. He closed his eyes against the brightness, smelling the rancid smoke of burning butts and pieces of paper. He used the empty ashtray to snuff the fire, grinding down to make sure it was out, then took both ashtrays to the sink, running cold water over them and washing the sodden ash down the drain. He cleaned both trays, leaving them, dripping, on the dining room table.

He went back to the stereo system and started it up again, then stretched out, headphones in place.

He had wanted it to work. He'd wanted to get married since he was eighteen, a way of running away from home. All he wanted was to be happy, to be left alone. He'd done all he was supposed to, hadn't he? He certainly hadn't blamed Paula for the miscarriage; or for little David's tortured life and death. He had stuck by her, the way a man should. He'd given her everything she wanted, when what she wanted was reasonable. The fact that he didn't like to hug and cuddle all the time, what did that have to do with anything? He was a *nice* man. He loved her, their child. A nice man.

Paula had laughed about that, too, that night a week ago. Spent, each lying on their side of the bed, she reminded him of what he had said about killing her. "I can just see the papers now, David, you know, when all the neighbors are interviewed. 'Mrs. Doofus, who has known the couple for five years, just couldn't believe what she was hearing. "He was such a nice, quiet man," she said.'"

The tape ended, and David sat up, listening to the ghosts begin to haunt the apartment. He rubbed his burning eyes with the heels of his palms. It was time for the dawn, a trumpet voluntary of light; instead, there was a rumble of grey, a discordance of cold and drizzle.

Had he kissed Susie goodnight? Probably, he thought, it was the first thing he did whenever he came home after she'd gone to bed. Yes, he remembered her damp brow. He remembered the phone ringing. Time, what time was it? Was there any time left? Was there anything left?

He lit another cigarette, and sat running the corner of the matchbook under a fingernail. In the lightening room he could make out the line *Close Cover Before Striking.* He hadn't; the time had come to live dangerously.

He got up with a sigh, the cigarette dangling from his lips, and went into the dining room to get his coat. It was six thirty; Paula would be getting up in about an hour, to get Susie ready for school, to get herself ready for whatever it was she did all day long. Probably sit around feeling sorry for herself, he thought, instead of trying to do something about her situation.

He caped the coat over his shoulders, put the cigarette under the match heads, and tossed the set-up toward the table.

He unlocked the door, opening and closing it softly, locking it. He stood silently, then leaned forward, kissing the cold, green metal, trying to hug the door as he'd tried to hug Paula at any given time over the last three months. The door was more responsive, he thought; at least, it didn't move away. Now, he did, turning and walking briskly down the carpeted hall to the stairwell, then down and out, into the damp morning.

He walked for a few blocks, moving into another neighborhood just by crossing a street. At a corner luncheonette he ordered a steak and eggs, hash browns, coffee. No more arguments, petty or otherwise. No more of her complaints about money, about his not loving her, about the parties and functions he had to attend for business. No more watching and listening to her chew her food with her mouth open, not changing even when he pointed it out to her, told her he couldn't take her anyplace as long as she did things like that, things which would embarrass him.

He ordered another cup of coffee, trying to remember every detail of the night, the feel of Susie's throat as the phone upstairs rang, the sight of the matchbook flaring. He realized now, when it was too late, that he should have left the wine glass on the table, should have doctored the scene, left the ashtrays dirty, so that it would appear as if Paula had fallen into the drunken stupor. As she probably had.

Too late. Too late for anything. It was over. They'd come for him sometime. Where had he been all night? He'd only be able to shrug as they described the scene, and they'd lead him away, maybe looking at him with pity. They'd probably be men, the police officers, and they'd understand. He'd tell them that they'd had a fight, yes, that was it, they'd had a fight last night because Paula was being unfaithful, and he'd spent the night walking. Yes, that was it. And he'd cry about how responsible he felt, how he should have stayed. Yes, he'd say, I guess I am responsible. And everything would be okay. He'd take the insurance money and start over.

He was smiling as he left the luncheonette to join the rush hour crowds moving toward the subway. The smile faded a bit when he realized that he hadn't heard any fire engines since he left the house, and he looked west to

(Continued on page 42)

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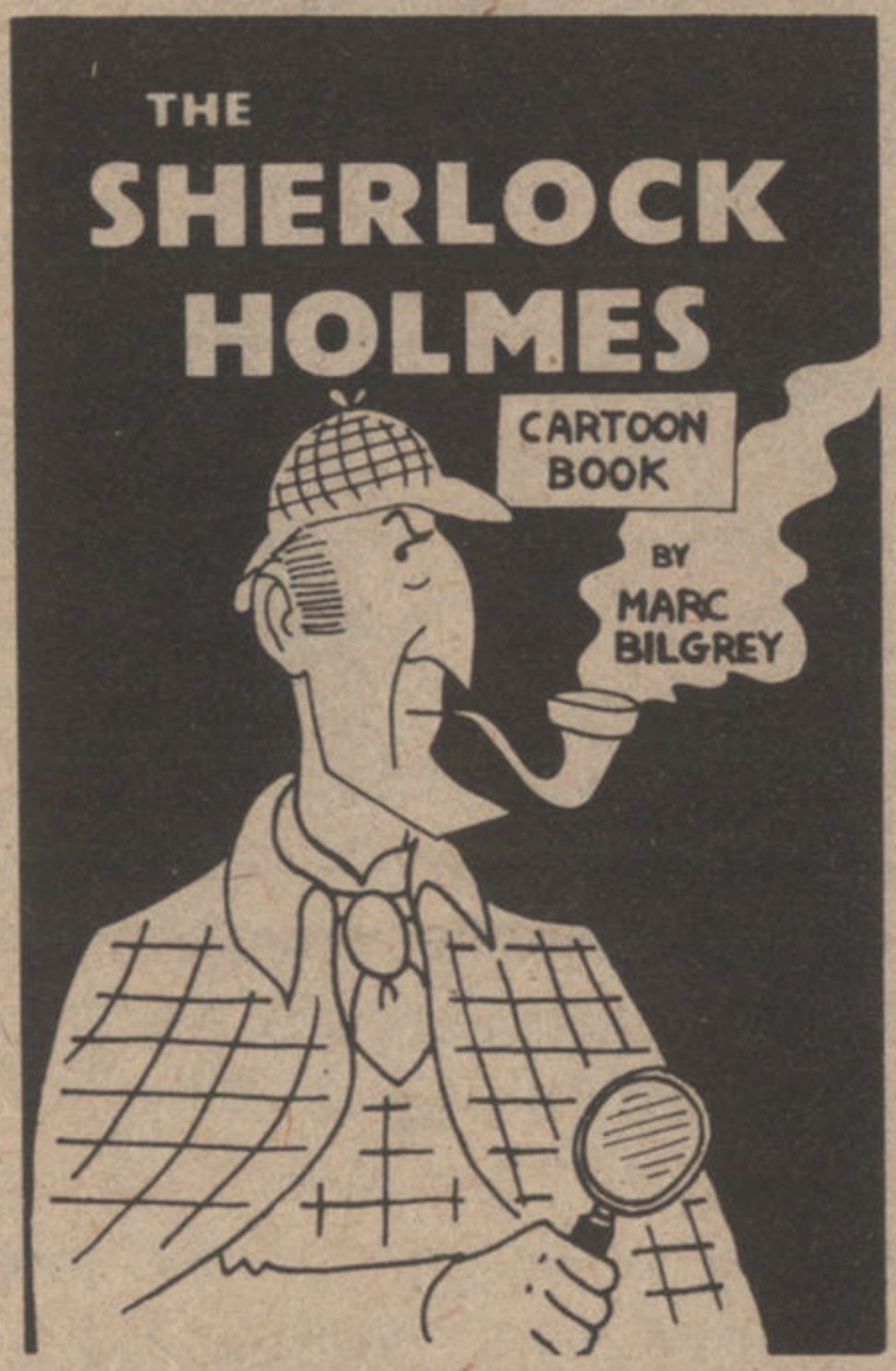

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DEATH IN A BLUE STEEL CASE: THE GUN IN DETECTIVE FICTION

By Loren D. Estleman

"Drop the gun!"

How often have we read or heard some variation of that line in the course of the best and worst in mysteries? Why do we hold our seats when it occurs, waiting breathlessly for what happens next? Would our reaction be as strong if the weapon referred to was a cosh or a bludgeon or even a knife?

Probably not. The very word "gun" has a blunt, threatening sound, like a report. It can refer to any one of a wide variety of percussion arms, from a lady's purse automatic concealable in the palm of one's hand to an artillery piece weighing several tons, and yet when it is employed, we most often think of a stubby black revolver clenched in a determined fist, as short and ugly as its name.

Its origins are almost mystical. No evidence has been found to support the common belief that gunpowder was invented by the Chinese. Credit has also gone to the Turks, Arabs, and a 14th-century German monk called "Black Berthold" who is said to have discovered it by explosive accident while crushing charcoal, sulphur and saltpeter in a mortar.

When the firearm made its first appearance in fiction is also unknown. As early as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), we see the diminutive subjects of Liliput relieving Swift's hero of his pistols, and describing one as

> *... a hollow Pillar of Iron, about the Length of a Man, fastened to a strong Piece of Timber, larger than the Pillar; and upon one*

side of the Pillar ... huge Pieces of Iron sticking out, cut into strange Figures; which we know not what to make of.

Whenever it was introduced, the weapon must have found an audience. Far more characters have gone to their rewards through its influence than from strangling, drowning, electrocution, beating, burning, defenestration, and the injection of the venom of the well-known South American blowfish — put together. Perhaps nowhere has it been put to more potent use than in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), wherein a feudal knight is vanquished by the time-traveling hero with a revolver a thousand years before its invention.

These early examples notwithstanding, the gun's greatest literary impact occurs in the field of mystery and crime. This is because unlike war stories, in which loud reports lose their ability to shock by their very ubiquity, the mystery presents them as an alarming departure from the norm. Often the victim is alone, working late in a darkened study or walking past an alley, when there is an explosion and a spurt of flame from the shadows, a falling body, footsteps hurrying away, and then silence, sudden and absolute. An instant in time has substituted death for life.

At first its effect was negligible. The gun plays a surprisingly small role in the tales of Arthur Conan Doyle, and none at all in the seminal mysteries of Edgar Allan Poe. In Sherlock Holmes' possession, it is either a toy with which to while away idle hours initialing a wall with "bullet-pocks," or a cudgel employed to discourage similarly armed adversaries from using their own to better advantage. Gunfire is heard but three times on the side of justice in Doyle's sixty adventures, twice to dispatch murderous dogs and once to silence a gibbering aborigine who himself seems scarcely human. This reticence may be traced to the tradtional English distaste for firearms, while in Poe's case we might interpret his opinion of the noisy, smoky things as anathema to that precise chain of logic he invented to stave off his own creeping madness.

With the introudction of the "murder at the vicarage" school in the 1920s, the gun slipped even further into the background. As typified by Agatha Christie's dependence on poison, lethal letter openers, and demon devices, murder was regarded as an art form in itself, rather than a means to an end as formerly. Envenomed darts found their way from African blowguns into m'lord's bloodstream; priceless art objects were recruited to crush aristocratic skulls; noxious gas billowed into the back seats of sealed limousines through the drivers' speaking tubes. On those rare occasions when a gun was produced, it was as a prop in the hands of desperate culprits at the denouement, and was seldom fired. The instruments of death had to be rare and expensive; Thus, murder was restricted to the upper classes.

But even as these highly civilized puzzlers flourished, a rumbling was heard in the distance that would swell to a roar by the end of the decade. A public accustomed to reading of real-life gangsters machine-gunned in broad daylight on public streets in the headlines of those Prohibition days craved something more meaty in their entertainment. In 1920, while Christie's *Mysterious Affair at Styles* was selling out in bookstores on both sides of the Atlantic, H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan added *Black Mask* to the growing list of pulp magazine titles on the stands. In its pages, obscure authors such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler placed guns in the hands of their sharp-tongued private detective heroes and told them to start blasting.

And blast they did, often at the expense of credibility. Years after he had graduated to novels and international acclaim, Chandler ruefully recalled the form's limitations:

> *... the demand was for constant action; if you stopped to think you were lost. When in doubt have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand. This could get to be pretty silly, but somehow it didn't seem to matter.*

He acknowledged his debt to Hammett, who "gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand-wrought dueling pistols, curare and tropical fish." Usually, "the means at hand" was a gun.

Mystery fiction of the Depression years was dominated by this "hard-boiled" school, which found echoes in the work of Ernest Hemingway ("The Killer," *To Have and Have Not*) and enabled W. R. Burnett to write *Little Caesar, High Sierra,* and *The Asphalt Jungle,* which considered with the classic films based on them, bid fair to become the Bounty trilogy of American crime. Through them the public learned to call a gun a "gat," "heater," "Roscoe," and by a dozen other endearments that by their very banality robbed it of its sinister overtones.

With the end of World War II and the atomic bomb a reality, the literature of violence split into two camps, both ruled by the gun. Mickey Spillane's *I, the Jury* (1948) gave final authority to the man with death in his hand, while Ian Fleming, in *Casino Royale* (1953) drew a line through the globe with enemies on either side and their armed proxies battling for supremacy on the line. The popularity of Fleming's books in his native England would seem to indicate a new attitude toward firearms since the days of Sherlock Holmes.

Although the heroes of both series eventually take on Communism, their differences are acute, and revolve around conscience; Fleming's James

Bond has one, Spillane's Mike Hammer has not. Says Hammer:

> *Maybe some day I'd stand on the steps of the Kremlin with a gun in my fist and I'd yell for them to come out and if they wouldn't I'd go in and get them and when I had them lined against the wall I'd start shooting until all I had left was a row of corpses that bled on the cold floors and in whose thick red blood would be the promise of a peace that would stick for more generations than I'd live to see.*

His bloodthirstiness finds no parallel in Bond, despite the latter's celebrated "license to kill." Handed the task of "terminating" an enemy agent with a high-powered rifle, he must give himself a pep talk before he can carry it out.

The late Sixties saw a marriage of the romance of James Bond with the mindless brutality of Mike Hammer in Don Pendleton's "Executioner" series, which pitted a hero armed with automatic weapons against the Mafia. Here, as in the war story, the frequency of gunplay soon reduces the shock factor, leaving only tedium. But the sheer number of imitations still to be found in the stalls suggests that all that gore has struck a responsive chord among readers.

The gun is viewed as a necessary tool of survival in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969), wherein the basic conflict in the Bolan novels is reversed and the Mafia henchman is the hero. The weapon's psychological impact is considered an intergral part of its usefulness, as when Michael Corleone's associates are preparing a revolver for his ambush of members of the rival gang:

> *They decided to leave it noisy. They didn't want an innocent bystander misunderstanding the situation and interfering out of ignorant courage. The report of the gun would keep them away from Michael.*

The enthusiasm that greeted Nicholas Meyer's Sherlock Holmes pastiche *The Seven Per-Cent Solution* in 1974, and its subsequent clones, signaled a brief return to the English school of non-violent detection. But in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate atmosphere of the Eighties, high-level intrigue, aided not a little by low-level triggerwork, came into its own on the bestselling momentum of Frederick Forsyth, Robert Ludlum, and Graham Greene (whose *This Gun for Hire* set the pace as early as 1936). Intricate plotting and subtle motives predominate in this sub-genre, but when all the globe-trotting and clandestine bull sessions are done, it is usually powder and lead that settles the issue.

Why this facination for so potent an engine of destruction?

Today's adults, vaguely familiar with Freud's theories, may feel the answer is obvious. But like all pioneers, the Viennese physician placed too

much importance on his own discoveries. Modern psychiatrists generally agree that while the libido is a prime factor in our actions, it is not the only factor. It follows that for all its resemblance to the male organ, the gun need not be equated sex alone for hold its eerie sway.

There is the for more important factor of power, and our need to possess it. The chicken-and-the-egg controversy pales beside the question of whether mankind equates power with sex or sex with power, but the fact that the two are linked is significant.

In a world of lasers and nuclear weaponry, the gun remains the most lethal instrument accessible to the average person. Outlaw it, and it will still remain so, just as liquor was easily obtained years after the passage of the Volstead Act. Whether one owns a firearm or not (or even cares to), it represents the triumph of steel over flesh – *all* flesh, regardless of wealth or education. And equality has always been the goal of human endeavor.

Loren D. Estleman is the author of several books, including *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes, Sherlcok Holmes vs Dracula,* and *Angel Eyes,* his current book about Detroit Private Eye Amos Walker.

(Continued from page 36)

see if there was any smoke, but all he saw was the flat grey sky, unbroken by anything darker. It was probably taking longer for the table to burn, that's all.

He caught someone looking at him; realized he was speaking out loud again. Well, he would calm down now, be in control again. He dropped a token in the fare box, pushing and pushed in the crowd. As he went down the stairs to the platform he pictured the scene in the dining room as he had walked out of the apartment, the matchbook with its cigarette fuse, the puddle of water from the dripping ashtrays ...

The downtown express roared into the station, steel on steel on bone.

Susie sat in the living room, waiting for breakfast, complaining softly of a sore throat and telling Captain Kangaroo about the dream of her daddy loving her in the night, while Paula wondered whether David had come home, frightened that something might have happened to him, and knowing that if anything had, they'd come to tell her, or call her. She felt a headache build around the sound of Susie's voice as a pearl forms around an irritant on the body of an oyster.

They did come to tell her, finally, as she was swallowing a Valium and cussing David's thoughtlessness, and wondering at the bruise on her daughter's neck.

And knowing, she dressed and took Susan to school.

WOMEN OF MYSTERY

By Sheila Merritt

"I haven't lived a good life. I've been bad. Worse than you could know." Brigid O'Shaughnessy thus summarizes her life in the 1941 film, "The Maltese Falcon." This summation could also be applied to the following femmes fatales of film: Velma in "Murder My Sweet" (1944), Phyllis in "Double Indemnity" (1944), and Alice in "The Woman in the Window" (1944). To say these women have "been bad" is indeed an understatement, but even more remarkable than their lurid pasts is their penchant for trying to lead men to doom. They are the seductive catalysts that draw out the potential criminal instincts in men.

The potential criminality of Sam Spade is tested by Brigid, but his sense of duty prevails. Sam (portrayed by Humphrey Bogart) is not immune to Brigid's (Mary Astor's) charms. He is aware, however, of her pathological lying, her greed, and her calculated mannerisms. He even congratulates her on her facility to slip into a demure, girlish manner: "You're good, you're real good." This is high praise, indeed, coming from a sardonic private detective who is usually blase about deceit. He is, in fact, indulging in a deceitful affair with his partner's wife. Iva, the woman in question, is not only an adultress; she is an informer as well: She calls the police to implicate Sam in her husband's murder because she is jealous of Brigid. Sam is thus involved with two untrustworthy women. The only woman he can trust is Effie, his

secretary. She is devoted, honest, and therefore not a woman to whom Sam is attracted. He even, when she behaves stoically at the sight of the dying Captain Jacoby, calls her a "good man," thereby stripping her of her sex. In Sam's opinion, therefore, a good woman is not sexually stimulating, whereas a ruthless woman is extremely desirable. The object of Sam's desire must exude a sense of danger; she must be an obstacle to surmount in his struggle with duty, since he equates passion with danger and deception. He tells Brigid that he won't shield her from punishment "because all of me wants to, regardless of consequences, and because you've counted on that with me." Later, however, he admits that "a lot more money would have been one more item on your side of the scales." Sam is, evidentally, aware of his latent criminal instincts. It is this awareness that brings triumph in his struggle with the allure of crime.

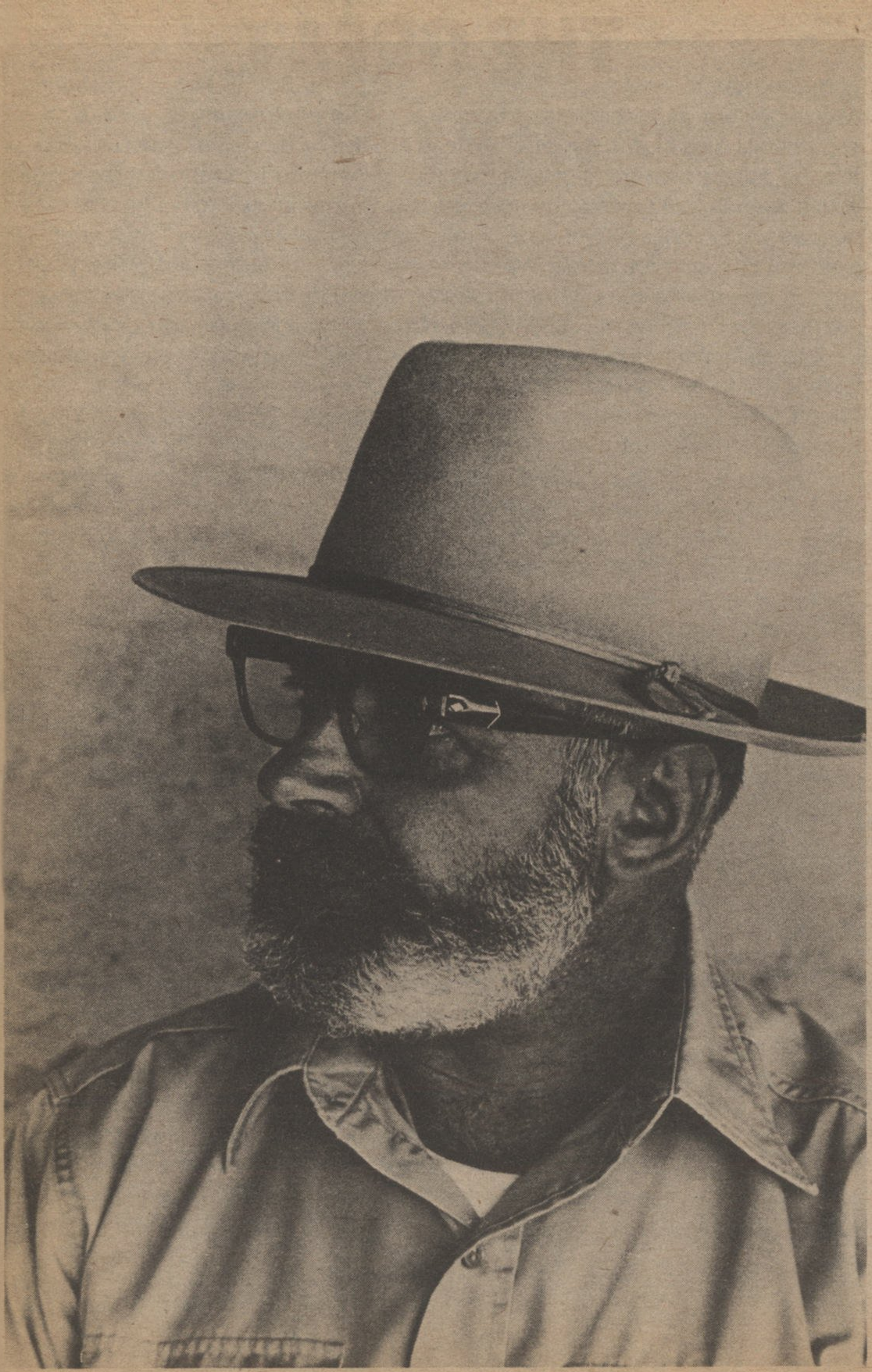
Moose Malloy, the dim-witted hulk of "Murder My Sweet," is about as unaware as a fellow can be with regard to the alluring Velma (played by Claire Trevor.) Velma, who is described as being as "cute as lace pants," is the object of his obsessive quest, a quest in which he recruits the aid of private detective Philip Marlowe. The street-wise, hard-boiled Marlowe (portrayed by Dick Powell) is initially unaware that Velma and his client Mrs. Grayle are the same person. Mrs. Grayle, in her desire to obliterate any traces of her identity as Velma, murders two men and attempts to shoot Marlowe. She has used her sexuality to attain her wealth and social standing, and will use any means possible to maintain them. Her attempt to seduce Marlowe is an example of the femme fatale in action: She projects glamor, wealth, and sexual insatiability. The detective, however, resists: he is aware that opulence can border perilously on excess and excess can be fatal. He opts instead for Velma's stepdaughter, "a cute kid." She is attractive, but not seductive, smart, but not coldly calculating. Imagery such as "lace pants" would never be ascribed to her. She is, in short, not a threat to his ability to remain on the periphery of the law: Marlowe is safe with his self-control and a woman who won't lead him into conflict with it.

Walter (Fred MacMurray), in "Double Indemnity," struggles with his self-control and loses the battle. His inner conflict begins with mild stirrings of sensual awareness. He recalls how his senses were heightened on his arrival at Phyllis' home: The scent of honeysuckle is overpowering, and later its fragrance becomes sickeningly cloying. This overripe ambience gives him (at least in retrospect) subliminal clues of the dangerously alluring appeal of Phyllis. Phyllis (played by Barbara Stanwyck) is, like the honeysuckle, intially seductive only later to become overpowering and cloying. She appears glamorous but there is an undercurrent of cheapness lurking beneath the veneer, as exemplified by her anklet (which Walter is quick to notice) and her

perfume bought in Mexico. Walter's instant attraction to her is indicative to two important aspects of his character: (1) he is choosing to ignore those subliminal clues of danger, and (2) he is not the nice guy insurance salesman that he appears to be, since he would not hesitate to embark on an affair with a woman he knows to be married. It is Phyllis' desire to rid herself of her husband and collect the insurance money that awakens in Walter his dormant capacity for crime. When the crime is suggested by Phyllis, Walter initially abhors the idea. Later, However, *he* plots the elaborate details and decides that settling for $50,000 is petty when $100,000 is possible with double indemnity insurance. The ardor that leads to their murderous collaboration is, ironically, weakened once the crime is committed. When Walter's life becomes linked with Phyllis's "straight down the line," precautions are taken so that their relationship will be unknown to those investigating the death. These precautions include Walter's attentiveness to Phyllis's suspicious stepdaughter. His attentiveness in non-sexual, and, therefore, smoothes Walter rather than provoking him. The sexual provocation which leads Walter to commit murder is depicted thus as highly destructive. Like Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, Walter can only feel comfortable in a relationship free of sexual agression.

Sexual attraction is again presented as potential for ruin in "The Woman in the Window." In this film, a staid academician (Edward G. Robinson) dreams of being led into a series of events which result in murder. The professor is in the course of evaluating his life, and the portrait of a glamorous woman escalates the evaluation process. His introspection leads him to the conclusion that he is mundane and middle-aged. When Alice (played by Joan Bennett), the object of his fascination, appears to him "in the flesh," he is already in the ideal psychological framework to become enmeshed in whatever she has in store for him. Again the woman is the impetus for the crime, but again, it is the man who works out the details, thereby exhibiting an extraordinary penchant for criminal activity. Although this criminal activity is only taking place in the academician's subconscious, the message is clear: Beware the beauty who can motivate those latent criminal proclivities.

The beauty and sexuality of these women who "haven't lived a good life" stimulate men to evolute their criminal potential. The causing of this evaluation is not a crime in itself — the men ultimately decide whether or not to exercise their potential. The so-called "femme fatale" merely suggests criminal deeds. Her deadliness to the male is a result of his own decision to follow her lead.



THE GREAT MYSTERY SERIES: *MATT HELM*

By Andy East

Left: Donald Hamilton. *Photo courtesy of Fawcett-Gold Medal Books*

You won't find the building on any fancy tour of Washington D.C. It's a rather ancient structure situated on an obscure street, never mind where. The adventurous male tourist, if he should find the building, would initially be delighted with the women who have visited its second floor. But only initially.

Jean and Sara were both attractive women who knew about the building. Especially Jean. She called it Murderers' Row. And Sara? She once recalled a man with cold, gray eyes known as Mac. Or were they cold and black? What did she call Mac's outfit? The Wrecking Crew! I use the word 'were' because Jean and Sara are dead now.

You've probably guessed that Jean and Sara were secret agents, as were some dedicated gents named Vance, Paul, and Ames. There's one agent who remembered Jean and Sara, and the rest of the outfit. He stands about six-four, and his thin frame makes him seem kind of innocent. Truth is, he's one of the most dangerous men in the world, and he's employed by our own government. He once described himself as a transplanted Scandinavian. By the way, his name is Eric. In case you haven't guessed, they use code names in this group, including Jean and Sara.

Eric's real name, if it matters, is Matt Helm.

Of course, you've heard of Matt Helm, Donald Hamilton's lethal secret agent who has blazed his way through eighteen chilling paperback originals and over 12,000,000 copies. What is it, then, that has made the Helm adventures so consistently popular since *Death of a Citizen* and *The Wrecking Crew,* the first two Helm books, were published by Fawcett-Gold Medal in 1960?

Donald Hamilton was probably the first spy novelist to use the first person in his stories, preceding Len Deighton by two years. This aspect of the series development recalls the hardboiled, private eye school of the forties, and through a skillful blend of suspenseful writing, inventive plotting, and glib

humor, Donald Hamilton gave the modern spy novel a new form. In his review of *The Silencers* (1962), the fourth Helm book, the late Anthony Boucher said, "The resolute hardness of story, prose, and Helm should earn Hamilton the title of the Hammett of espionage". Hamilton's primacy in the field has been further strengthened by the fact that he penned such celebrated suspense novels as *Date with Darkness* (1947) and *Line of Fire* (1955) before he created Matt Helm.

Although the first three Helm books don't offer fantastic plots, they are unique as spy novels for their meticulous development of Matt Helm as a man of action and the organization for which he works.

Unlike many paperback heroes, Matt Helm's background is somewhat nebulous. When we first meet him in *Death of a Citizen* (1960), he is a successful author of Western novels and an outdoor photographer, and lives comfortably in Santa Fe, New Mexico with his wife, Beth – "a tallish, willowy girl" —, and their three children. However, the book's opening passage immediately defines Helm as a man aware of his past:

"I was taking a Martini across to my wife, who was still chatting with our host, Amos Darrell, the physicist, when the front door opened, and a man came in to join the party. He meant nothing to me — but with him was the girl we'd called Tina during the war". (Chapter 1).

Tina's presence quickly revives the memory of Mac, Helm's Army superior, and his shadowy organization; Helm and Tina had fought and loved together during a secret mission in Europe. Mac's words to Helm at the end of the war haunt him again: "How can we give you a discharge, when we don't exist?" (Chapter 3)

The brutal death in Helm's studio of an attractive Spanish girl, whom he had met at the Darrell's party, allies Helm and Tina on a perilous journey across New Mexico and Texas in his 1951 Chevy truck. Helm belligerently accosts a mysterious woman in San Antonio, who turns out to be Sarah, one of Mac's best agents, and when he learns the startling truth behind Tina's postwar alliegances, Helm is drawn into a bitter web of murder and intrigue. Helm's savage instincts seize him when his young daughter is kidnapped; Beth eventually learns of his wartime profession of killer and spy.

Anthony Boucher called *Death of a Citizen*, "A harsh and sometimes shocking story, told with restraint, power, and conviction". The theme of manipulating a peaceful citizen into a man of violence is a common one in many first novels in an action series, notably *The Executioner.* While *Death of a Citizen* isn't the best of the Helm series, it stands out as the model for the modern man of action novel, and with Mr. Hamilton's realistic conception of Matt Helm, it may be the most important spy thriller ever published.

The savage function of Mac's outfit is more clearly defined in *The*

Wrecking Crew (1960). Helm utilizes his photographic and literary background to track down an elusive master spy known as Caselius. Set in Mr. Hamilton's native Sweden, this entry initiated the staples of Eric's tantalizing companion; the cynical female and male operatives in Helm's camp, both of whom eventually meet horrifying deaths; and refined the alluring Tina-style *femme fatale* who suffers an equally brutal death at Helm's hands. Helm's explosive showdown with Caselius in the Swedish ore country established the feverish pace for future confrontations. While the Matt Helm books are loaded with gun expertise, *The Wrecking Crew* also offers photographic lore.

The Removers (1961) is the most complex of the early books. Beth has married a rancher in Reno, Nevada, and fate puts Helm on the trail of a vicious assassin named Martell, who has joined the Reno mob. This Helm novel is unusually brutal, and contains an ironic twist that briefly brings Helm back into Beth's life. Hamilton's plotting in this novel is so taut that he's able to use a mere spare tire to sketch out an intriguing diversion.

Hamilton's first large-scale Helm book, *The Silencers* (1962), features his most original plot device — a deadly enemy spy, known only as Cowboy, who looks and acts the part. During a dangerous assignment in Juarez, Mexico involving top agent Sarah, Helm encounters her sister, a saucy Texas beauty named Gail Hendricks. Sarah's violent death and the discovery of a crucial microfilm launch Helm and Gail on a gruelling mission from El Paso, Texas into the mountains of New Mexico to hunt down the man Mac believes to be Cowboy. The book's ferocious climax, set in a desolate mountain church, ranks among the best in the series. Helm develops a relationship with Gail, and is to see her between his next few jobs.

Although *Murderers' Row* (1962) lacks the scope of *The Silencers,* it measure up as the most violent of the early books, surpassing *The Removers.* Helm is on the trail of a missing nuclear scientist, and his eventual confrontation with the beautiful, avaricious Robin Rosten is both amusing and chilling. Helm is depicted at his most barbarous here as he severely assaults a female operative in a Maryland motel room, as part of an intricate plan, to convince the enemy of her treacherous leanings.

The Ambushers (1963) may be the first postwar spy novel to employ the notion of an American agent assassinating a Cuban-backed dictator on foreign soil, as Helm does early in the book. In the opinion of many fans, this is the best Helm book; with its emphasis on adventure and gun lore, it also emerges as the classic man of action novel. Hamilton dexterously fuses the schemes of a fanatical Nazi war criminal based in northern Mexico and a Soviet missile smuggled out of Cuba into a frightening mass-destruction plot. This book established Helm's huge following, and it is here that both Vadya, Eric's beautifully enigmatic Russian counterpart, and Mac's secret

ranch in Arizona are introduced.

The next two Helm books, *The Shadowers* and *The Ravagers* (both 1964), intensified the Helm cult. *The Shadowers* is the most suspenseful in the canon. Helm's hazardous mission of liquidating a ruthless spy master and his cover marriage to a beautiful space scientist are masterfully laced into a spellbinding thriller, even if it lacks the size of *The Silencers* or *The Ambushers.* Gail Hendrick's untimely death and an obsessive desire for revenge are neatly interwoven into the main plot; the book also offers a tantalizing locked-room puzzle. Hamilton's menacing villian, Karl Kroch, makes *The Shadowers* one of the finest suspense novels ever written.

The Ravagers is unique for its lack of a central villain. Instead, Helm confronts a pipeline of spies on a lethal journey across Canada, transporting some secret plans for a new laser. *The Ravagers* combines the scope of *The Silencers* with the suspense of *The Shadowers.* The shattering climax features a seemingly innocent weapon that will haunt the reader long after the book has been finished.

By the time *The Devastators* (1965) appeared, the spy craze was in full gear, and in his first Helm book involving Peking, Hamilton serves up a nerve-racking yarn about bubonic plague, set against big-power politics. Helm plays some deadly games with Vadya as they match wits with Madame Ling, the book's nefrious conspirator. In the midst of the paperback spy hysteria, sales of the Matt Helm books had soared to 5,000,000.

The Betrayers (1966) and *The Menacers* (1968) transcended Helm beyond the super-agent level. The growing Asian anger over U.S. involvement in Vietnam dominates *The Betrayers*; Eric unmasks an insidious blueprint to destroy an American troopship in the Pacific. Mac's senior man in the exotic Hawaiian Isles, an explosives expert called The Monk, is suspected of involvement with Peking, and Helm's elusive Chinese adversary, Mr. Soo, is introduced in this book.

The self-mocking quality of *The Menacers* cleverly reflects the passing of the spy mania; Vadya, Hamilton's most prominent cold War symbol, is killed early in the book. The disturbing report of a U.F.O. on the Mexican coast generates a compelling story of competing government groups, including Mac's, attempting to cash in on the U.F.O. incident. The book introduces two self-seeking representatives of opposing agencies, Herbert Leonard and Ramon Solana-Ruiz, who turn up in later books; Hamilton's villain, Harsek, fits in nicely with the book's self-spoofing manner. Hamilton skillfully handles the U.F.O. material, and his heroine, Annette O'Leary, stands out as his most appealing earning her a second appearance in *The Poisoners* (1971).

Hamilton's popularity is especially evident in the seven books following *The Menacers.* The suspenseful style of the earlier books is maintained, and

Hamilton repeatedly conceived alarmingly real plots. Critics continued to lavish praise on his later books. The current plethora of action series began in 1969 with *The executioner,* and Hamilton's later Helm books demonstrate his constant progression beyond his imitators.

Mr. Soo returns in *The Interlopers* (1969) and *The Poisoners* (1971), and his underlying motives in both books reflects Peking's global desperation during the period. In *The Interlopers,* Helm impersonates a dead communist assassin who had been selected to kill the President-elect. *the Poisoners* reprises elements from *The Removers* and *Murderers' Row;* the mob frames the murder of Annette O'Leary on an innocent man, and the riddle of a missing scientist figures in an avaricious scheme aimed at two of America's weaknesses.

The Intriguers (1972) is Hamilton's most underrated Helm book. Herbert Leonard returns to dismantle the Washington intelligence community, including Mac's group, to achieve his own political ends. Hamilton's grasp of chaotic election-year politics is superb, and it is in this book that Mac's identity is finally revealed.

Robin Rosten joins forces with Eric in *The Intimidators* (1974), the most spectacular entry in the series. Matt and Robin make a surprisingly good team as they unravel the disappearance of a prominent family in the Bermuda Triangle. This is Hamilton's longest Helm book, and he adroitly blends the assassination of a Soviet master spy and scorching Caribbean politics to craft a gripping thriller.

The oil crisis and a mad desire for revenge play against each other in *the Terminators* (1975). Helm is faced with a ruthless magnate and a remorseful friend of Mac's in this story about a scheme to steal Norwegian oil. The character contrast sketches out a particularly disturbing sub-plot for a Helm book. Unquestionably, *The Terminators* is Hamilton's most offbeat Helm adventure.

Helm is the odd man out in *The Retaliators* (1976) when $20,000 turns up in his bank account. This is another large-scale Helm adventure in the fashion of *The Silencers* and *The Ambushers.* Helm's foray across the Mexican coast and Arizona with the wife of a corporate magnate unveils an unsavory plot to turn Baja, California into a millionaire's paradise. The intimidating character of Andrew Euler, a security chief who thinks Helm has been accepting payoffs, blends in nicely with the main plot. Ramon Solana-Ruiz returns to give Eric the expected bad time in Mexican territory, and in his final appearance, Mr. Soo doesn't figure as prominently as in earlier entries. The man of action values in this book, especially its gun lore, are unusually high.

The Terrorizers (1977) isn't really a disappointing book, but Helm's talents seem wasted against the angry schemes of a crude terrorist squad.

Hamilton's epic novel on international terrorism, *The Mona Intercept* (1980), his first non-Helm suspense work since *Assignment: Murder* (1956), was far more effective. the best chapters occur early in the book when Helm loses his memory after a plane crash near British Columbian, and is taken for a successful free-lance photographer, a shadow of his former self.

A new Matt Helm book, *The Revengers*, scheduled for later this year, will usher Donald Hamilton's savage secret agent into his third decade. Donald Hamilton created the man of action when he sired Matt Helm twenty-two years ago; his appearance as a paperback original signalled a major development in itself. Bristling with expertise on firearms and provocative locales, the Helm books have never gone out of print, unlike the more highly flaunted James Bond thrillers, and in an era of uncertainty in the publishing industry, they have remained with the same imprint, Fawcett-Gold Medal, since 1960.

The best recommedation for the Matt Helm series can be found in Anthony Boucher's review of *The Shadowers:* "One of the few credible secret agents in today's fiction. Helm is a genuinely tough and tough-minded protagonist; your reading diet lacks essential vitamins if you overlook him".

Mr. Boucher scornfully disapproved of Ian Fleming's James Bond.

This is all you need to know! Matt Helm is back in *The Revengers*, the nineteenth in Donald Hamilton's bestselling series, to be published by Fawcett-Gold Medal in November 1982.

Matt Helm's retired associate is murdered after the publication of an expose' on his career ... and Helm's off on the trail of the killer. But first he's assigned by the Agency to protect journalist Eleanor Brand, author of the expose' series. Before long, Matt and Elly — working side by side seeking clues to the killer's identity — become romantically involved.

A twisted trail leads them to George Winifred Lorca, former mafia hoodlum turned respected U.S. Senator. But Helm and Lorca have unfinished business to settle from years earlier. Amid the danger and sizzling romance, Matt and Elly begin to suspect Lorca as the murderer, but still lack solid proof. The affair then takes on a bizarre angle when Lorca's beautiful but deranged daughter, Serena, enters the picture and drags in some family secrets that are both deadly and fantastic.

In an explosive climax, Matt and Elly are targets of another deadly plot, masterminded by Serena! But the killers eventually meet revenge — Matt Helm style — and Matt and Elly are together at last.

Preview of *The Revengers,* by Donald Hamilton, courtesy of Fawcett-Gold Medal Books, copyright 1982.

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MYSTERY MOVIEGOER

THE ALAN LADD FILMS

By Thomas Godfrey

THE FILMS OF ALAN LADD by Marilyn Henry and Ron DeSourdis Citadel Press, $16.95

Critics never thought much of Alan Ladd, but audience loved him. He became a star with one of his first starring roles (*This Gun For Hire,* 1942) and was a box office draw for the next decade. His career sputted downhill after *Shane* (1953). Alcohol and dissipation finished him off ten years later, but he is still fondly recalled through his old films, and the dynasty of filmmakers who today carry his name.

He was short and sullen, and had the trim, compact physique of a competitive swimmer, which he had been in his student days in Little Rock, Arkansas. He came to Hollywood in the early 1930's and knocked around for a decade in walk-ons and bits, until an aggressive young agent named Sue Carol (nee Evelyn Lederer) spotted him and decided he had the stuff of which big careers are made. (They later wed in 1941.)

In *This Gun For Hire* (1942), he played a cool, amoral killer named Raven, and stole the notices from nominal star Robert Preston. It also marked his first teaming with Veronica Lake, a partnership well-remembered today, with those of Bogart and Bacall, Loy and Powell.

Unlike Bogart and Mitchem of this same period, Ladd was good-looking in a well-scrubbed, traditional way. He never projected great depth or complexity, but rather a stoic, hard-bitten and indifference that war-weary audiences readily identified with. Critics noted he was stony-faced and monotonous, and too disinterested to ever get very romantic. But, he was also tough and masculine in an authoritative, no-nonsense fashion, yet

another loner sticking to his own peculiar set of rules.

He followed up his initial success with a series of films that showcased his individual talent to its best effect; a remake of Dashiell Hammett's *The Glass Key* (1942), the popular *Blue Dahlia* (1946) from Raymond Chandler's original screenply, *Lucky Jordan* (1942), *O.S.S.* (1946), both wartime espionage, *Calcutta* (1947), and *Whispering Smith* (1948), his first extension into the western film.

He was good, as authors Henry and DeSourdis mention, in the title role of the 1949 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby,* but his remembered success came later (1953) with his performance as that remote, isolated symbol of decency, *Shane.*

As his physical appearance began to deteriorate, audiences were turning to new leading men like Paul Newman, Tab Hunter and Rock Hudson. By 1954 he had been drinking heavily and acquired a reputation of being difficult to work with. His insecurities were not helped by some stories about his stature that now circulated, such as Shelley Winters's public complaints about having to stand in a ditch during the filming of their scenes together in *Saskatchewan* (1955).

He played out his career in a series of routine features, mostly westerns, and had been off the screen for a year, when he was found in 1962 at home, the victim of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He returned to the screen for one final picture, *The* (trashy) *Carpetbaggers,* in a featured role, and then was found dead, the victim of drugs and alcohol in January 1964.

As with other books in the Citadel Press series, THE FILMS OF ALAN LADD is generously illustrated with stills from his pictures. Henry and DeSourdis raise it above the standard by steering clear of gushing chit-chat and verbal fawning that has marred several other entries in this series.

The authors are very persuasive in claiming Ladd was under-rated in his time. His range was limited. But, so was Cary Grant's and Spencer Tracy's, by evidence of *The Pride and the Passion,* and *Edward, My Son,* respectively. Perhaps more than those two men, Alan Ladd was the personification of an era. An era that came and went with the '40's. (The same might be said for his co-star Lake.) Yet, it was a screen presence that looks right in its time on the late movies and in revival houses. And THE FILMS OF ALAN LADD has captured it well.

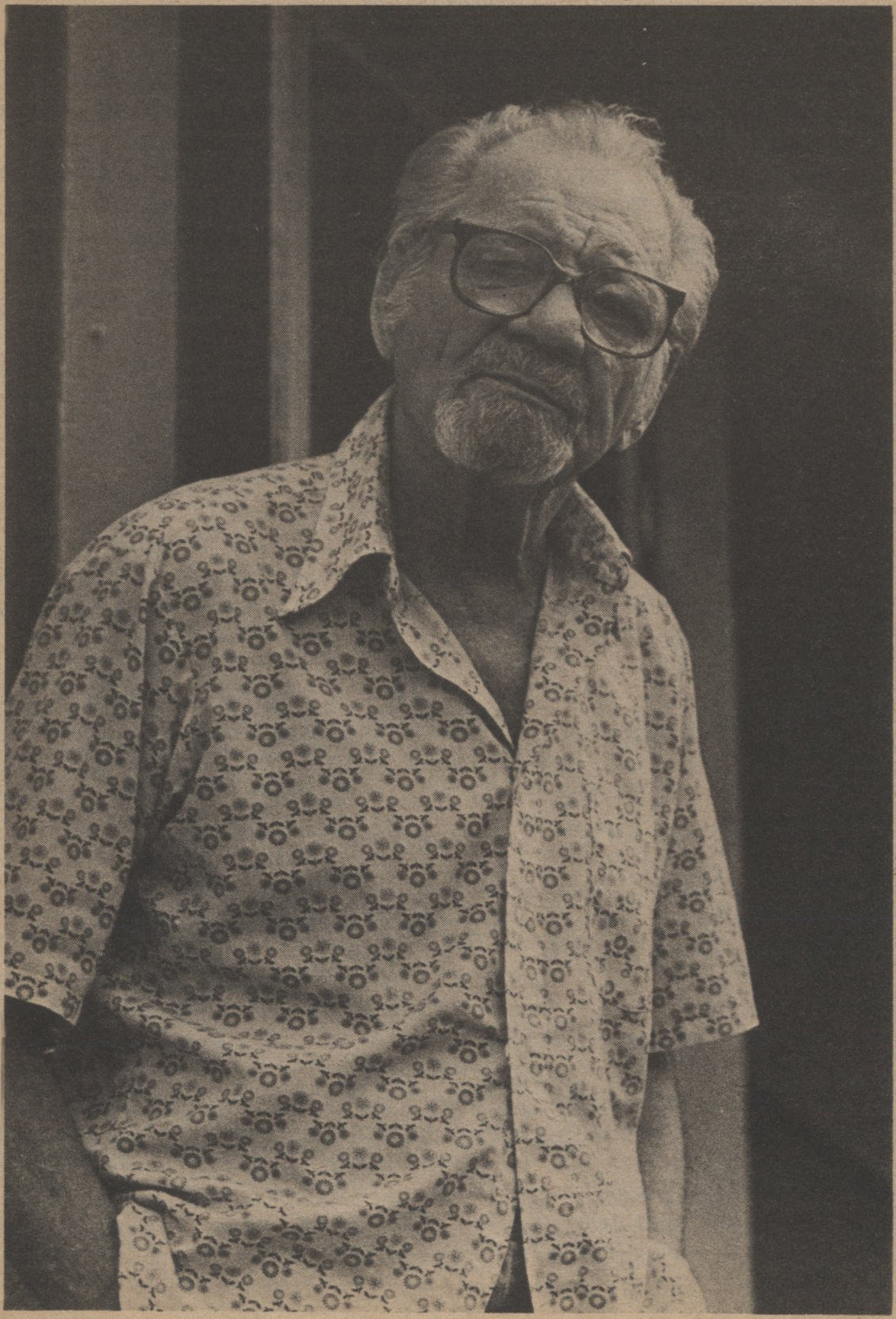
(Mr. Godfrey's reviews of current films will return in the next issue.)

JOHNNY BRIGHT, JIMMY CAGNEY, AND THE PUSH HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD

By David Wilson

Long before I knew anything about James Cagney, Bill Wellman or John Bright, I saw a picture of a guy pushing a grapefruit into a girl's face. I was about seven years old and the picture impressed me because I knew about grapefruits and like them. But here was a guy with an entirely different idea about breakfast and, apparently, the stunt had made him famous. Before I could come up with any dangerous ideas, the picture was filed away, in fact and in memory.

Fifty years ago Cagney was the guy with the grapefruit, Mae Clarke was the girl, and they were both actors working for Wellman, a thirty-four year old movie director making THE PUBLIC ENEMY (Warner Brothers, 1931). Wellman was a former World War I flyer who had done stunts while breaking into the business as an assistant director at Fox. Even after directing WINGS (Paramount, 1927), his first big hit, he was still a rabble-rouser and a provocative practical joker. He still liked to fight. When he finished shooting the new script, about gangsters and bootleggers, his producer Daryl Zanuck



began taking credit for the grapefruit scene.

But Wellman wanted the credit back. In the script, he said, Cagney was supposed to throw the grapefruit at Ms. Clarke. Wellman said that really, he wanted to do the scene himself — only at home, not at the studio.

"I had (Cagney) do what I didn't do to the cold, beautiful face of my then wife," he wrote. "... squash that grapefruit in her lovely face, and put some northern lights on it, at least it would break the monotony. I didn't do it — there must be something chaste about me."

Despite the unlikely remark about chastity, the explanation sounds plausible. Plausible — but not true, according to John Bright, one of the two men who wrote THE PUBLIC ENEMY. Bright says that Wellman just photographed the action that was already in the script, based on a book written in 1930, by Bright and his fun-loving partner, Kubec Glasman. Though never published, the novel's original title still appeared in the movie's dialogue, when the actor Donald Cook screamed at Cagney: "There's blood in that keg! *Beer And Blood,* blood and beer!"

Audiences noted that the grapefruit scene was only the most powerful among many tough, hard-hitting moments. The film gathered its strength in episodic fragments, in a near-documentary style: a florist throws flowers out of his delivery truck to make way for booze; a couple push a baby carriage filled with bottles.

Cagney's character is bad — a neighbor girl calls him "the worst boy in town" — but it takes the misguided temperance amendment to turn him into a hard-core hoodlum. He and his pal, Edward Woods, become official beer salesmen for "Nails" Nathan, a local hood. Their duties include stealing beer and customers from their competitors, beating up the recalcitrant. Cagney's star rises along with Nathan's. He moves into a nice apartment and is able to afford women and fine clothing. He catches up with "Puttynose," a penny-ante Fagin who has turned the boys to crime. The camera is discrete, lingering over Woods while the ear is engaged with an off-color song sung by "Puttynose." The banter is interrupted by a gunshot, again, off screen, and the sound of the singer falling across his keyboard. Above all looms the cold-blooded figure of Cagney.

Wellman pulled out all stops in the last fifteen minutes of THE PUBLIC ENEMY. He had Cagney attack a rival gang in retribution for the death of Woods. Shot up, Cagney stumbled through the rain, across a sidewalk and gutter. "I'm not so tough," he moaned, lurched and fell, as the camera moved in for a close-up. It would have been easy to finish the film at that point. Instead, Cagney made one more appearance, mummy-wrapped and deposited like a milk bottle on the steps of his mother's home.

THE PUBLIC ENEMY was released when Prohibition was in the forefront

of U.S. thought, and Al Capone was as well known as the President.

Just seven years before Warner Brothers released this gutty motion picture, its co-author, Bright, was graduating from High School with hopes of becoming a professional writer. He worked his way to Paris on a cattle boat determined to meet three men — Anatole France, Ernest Hemingway and Havelock Ellis.

France died while Bright was in passage. Hemingway was equally elusive, until after he returned from Madrid's bullfighting season and guided his coterie into a bar. Fearing an embarrassment, Bright waited until be could speak to Hemingway alone in the toilet. "Mr. Hemingway," Bright mumbled, "I'm a writer too!"

"Yeah," the master said, "Well, what do you want, kid?"

"I don't know," Bright added, "because I don't know what to write."

"Well, write about what you know!"

"But I don't know anything."

Hemingway lead the seventeen-year-old back into the bar. "Well, find out, for Christ's sakes!" He introduced the boy around his table.

"It was," Bright recalls, "the beginning of an existential experience."

Back in Chicago, Bright wrote poetry, short stories, literary criticism and a satirical biography of "Big Bill" Thompson, a Chicago mayor as notorious in his day as Richard Daly was during his. Between Bright's college terms he spent one summer working as a copy boy for Ben Hecht.

Later, in Hollywood, Bright almost immediately began trying to break away from typecasting as a specialist on crime and the underworld. He wrote movies about baseball, bullfighting, and he made a documentary about Nazi war guilt. He wrote and lived with the race car drivers in Indiannapolis for THE ROAR OF THE CROWD (Warner's, 1932). He even took a few spins around the track with the defending champ.

Until Bright left Warner Brothers he was one half of the studio's top writing team, finishing four more pictures for Cagney. At Paramount he turned Mae West's Broadway play Diamond 'Lil into SHE DONE HIM WRONG (1933). JOHN MEAD'S WOMAN (Paramount, 1937), was a film about ecology; Bright was not unhappy when Time magazine called it an "anti-capitalist capsule." A PALOOKA NAMED JOE was a popular picture based on a comic strip featuring a boxer. "But as an agreement with the syndicate, Joe couldn't drink, smoke, kiss a girl or do anything human," Bright recalled recently.

During blacklisting it was inevitable that Bright's name would appear on the lists. To avoid the ban he wrote under the names of friends. In Mexico he adapted B. Traven's books and proved that Hal Croves, Traven's representative, was in fact Traven himself. But Bright kept the news to himself, uncomfortable with the thought of litigation, which would have undoubtedly

followed any revelations. When he returned from Mexico he left behind his secretary, who became Traven's wife.

Fortunately, Bright never completely escaped the crime or gangster story, succeedding in creating several of the genre's most memorable scenes. "Crime," he explained, "Is in the essential quality of man, so why shouldn't it be in the essential quality of a man's writing?" After THE PUBLIC ENEMY Bright and Glasman wrote SMART MONEY (1931) and BLOND CRAZY (1931), starring Cagney again, as a gangster. UNION DEPOT (First National, 1932) was a mystery set in a railroad station starring Douglas Fairbanks Jr. At Paramount, Bright wrote THE ACCUSING FINGER and made George Raft a check forger for a sequence in IF I HAD A MILLION (1933). Then he returned to Warner Brothers to write SAN QUENTIN (1937), with Robert Tasker, a new collaborator and a graduate of the latter institution. After the war the noirish effects of Bright's adaptation of I WALK ALONE (Paramount, 1947) provided the basis for Byran Haskin's first directorial effort. Haskin was the former head of special effects at Warner's and the future director of Paramount's WAR OF THE WORLDS (1953) and ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS (1964). I WALK ALONE also turned out to be the first big break for its co-stars, Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster.

During the years of his blacklisting, Bright wrote a third book, *It's Cleaner On The Inside*. Published in 1961 by the British firm of Neville Spearman, it returned to the era of bootlegging but switched to the west coast, using California landmarks like San Quentin and Hollywood Legion Stadium. Bright's hero is a bellboy who furnishes the booze for "Chubby Chandler," a thinly disguised Fatty Arbuckle staying at the "Versailles" hotel in San Francisco. In these environs he works his way up from criminal to author to suicide victim. Despite the severity of these plot twists, the book is one of the most challenging and autobiographical of Bright's published or filmed work. His publisher called the book "swiftly paced, pithy, packed with drama ... Hogarthian."

In person, Bright does not appear to be a gangster or a criminal, there is no resemblance to Cagney or Raft. There is none of that ethnicity or our stereotypes and indeed, Bright is a writer, not a gangster, with the breadth and depth of knowledge that are a good writer's working tools. He lives with his close friend Charlie, who has four feet and barks, and stacked around his apartment, on the wrong side of Beverly Hills, he has his books: his own, his collaborators, many others — and his manuscripts. He writes in long-hand and then edits at the typewriter. He has never completely recovered form the period of blacklisting and today has several unsold scripts and books, including an autobiography. In the unfortunate refrain of most modern writers, the projects are making the rounds.

On the day I met Bright, L.A. was enduring record-setting high temperatures and he was at ease and expansive after a day spent marching picket for the Writer's Guild strike. All his windows were open, his doorway covered only by a screen, and he was almost out of beers. Around the room were photographs and the caricatures of David Levine. Among the photos was Bright as a child, and beside that one, a photo with Dalton Trumbo, a best friend and collaborator. There was an inscription from Trumbo that said something like this: "To John, who started it all."

I persuaded Bright to talk about grapefruits and guns, to tell me how THE PUBLIC ENEMY came about.

"It started when I got a job in a drugstore," be explained. "Glasman, the owner, was a freelance playboy and a frustrated writer. We were in the heart of the badlands (Chicago) and a lot of our customers were hoodlums, including two of those we wrote about in the book. We used to go out to nightclubs owned and frequented by them. We were parttime bootleggers."

Mystery: What were your duties?

Bright: Delivering liquor, mainly.

M: Was that better than the usual drugstore pay?

B: Oh sure, because I was very well tipped. But I also delivered other things, besides liquor. I sold Alka Seltzer and worked behind the soda fountain.

M: Did Warner's bring you out to work on the picture?

B: No, I came out chasing a girl. And Glasman followed me out, so we wrote the novel out here, and sold it, unpublished, to Warner Brothers. Kubec brought more savvy to the subject and I brought a greater literary skill and execution. We got along very well, with good results, and we were both signed to a five-year contract which began modestly and ended very big. The title of our story was changed because *Beer And Blood* was considered unacceptable: it had the word blood in it — so you can see how they felt in those days.

M: Who was your publisher?

B: Nobody. The film was novelized by someone else and our names were put on it. It was a job of complete butchery, to protect the title. We had been dickering with a publishing house that wanted to censor us. It wanted a lot of the seamy and salty stuff taken out and we refused. Warner's stepped in and asked to buy the publication rights and we agreed. We thought they'd be able to get us a good publisher. As it is, the original novel has never been published. It's a shame that it wasn't produced as we wrote it because it embraced the whole picture of Chicago's underworld. The Irish, Polish, Jewish and Italian hoodlums all had different cultural backgrounds and antagonisms. The Irish were very puritanical and never dabbled in prostitution. That was left for the Poles and the Italians. In the gangster wars there was that added quality of morality.

M: But there is none of that in the film.

B: No. In our first conference with Zanuck he said that the problem with our novel was that there were five distinct stories in it. Which of the five would we use? We could only tell one or we'd have a twelve-hour picture. Zanuck said, "Before we leave this office let's detemine which of the five we'll use." Zanuck had an extraordinary sense of a film's continuity and he was pulling for the Tommy Powers story. It was the least complicated and it offered the least censorship problems.

M: You also wrote the screenplay?

B: Oh yes. It took us six or seven weeks. An old time craftsman named Harvey Thiew gave us technical assistance, teaching us the difference between fade-out, fade-in, and other esoteric terms.

M: How much of your original story is still left in the picture?

B: About seventy-five percent, exempting the idea of censorship. Of

course the language was a big problem. It's difficult to make a hard-bitten character believeable when he's talking like a Sunday school superintendent. You strip them of all reality when you have them talk that way. All of us beat our brains out trying to get around it.

M: But THE PUBLIC ENEMY beat it better than most.

B: Well, there was a secret. The essence of good criminal dialogue is understatement, and the reason for that is self evident. It's the always possible presence of the law. What amateur writers do is overstate. A typical expression was to — "take care of the guy." Well, this had nothing to do with care, nursing, or anything altruistic or benevolent. It had to do with murder. It required the manipulation of language to give it a very special meaning.

M: Did you work very closely with Wellman?

B: Oh yes. He was our choice, as a matter of fact. Archie Mayo, who had directed DOORWAY TO HELL (Warner's, 1930), was scheduled to direct our script but Mayo wanted to do a woman's picture. Wellman was in the doghouse, between pictures, so we played studio politics and sneaked copies of several scenes to him. He went in to see Zanuck, his pal, and asked him if he could do it. As a result, our relationship was very good. We also got Cagney his job, too. He was supposed to play the second lead, not the starring part, but meeting with Jim convinced us otherwise. He was perfect. When we had first discussed the casting with Zanuck we were dismayed when we found that his choice for Tom Powers was Eddie Woods. Zanuck told us that when we saw Woods in MOTHERS CRY (Warner's, 1930) we'd want him for Tommy. So he ran the picture. Woods played the part of a stool pigeon and he did very well. But he wasn't the hard-bitten, swaggering hoodlum we had in mind. Powers was based on a real gangster we knew, an extroverted Irishman with a chip on his shoulder, constantly picking up every challenge. Cagney was supposed to play the small part of his friend, Matt Doyle, but on a hunch, we gave him a couple of scenes to read as the lead. After that, there was no doubt about it. We took him to Wellman and said, "This guy should play the lead!" Then he read for Wellman and Bill convinced Zanuck. Cagney became the most believeable hoodlum who was ever on the screen.

M: Do you recall the scene with the grapefruit?

B: Of course, and not just its finish, but what preceded it, in that it illustrated the hoodlum's contemptuous attitude towards women. I was on the set the day we were filming it because it was the last scene shot. Mae Clarke took Cagney aside and said, "I read the scene but I've got a terrible cold. My nose is so sore that I can hardly touch it. So will you fake that scene, with the grapefruit?" Cagney was a sweet guy, the opposite of the characters he played on the screen. He said, "Sure, honey." But Wellman

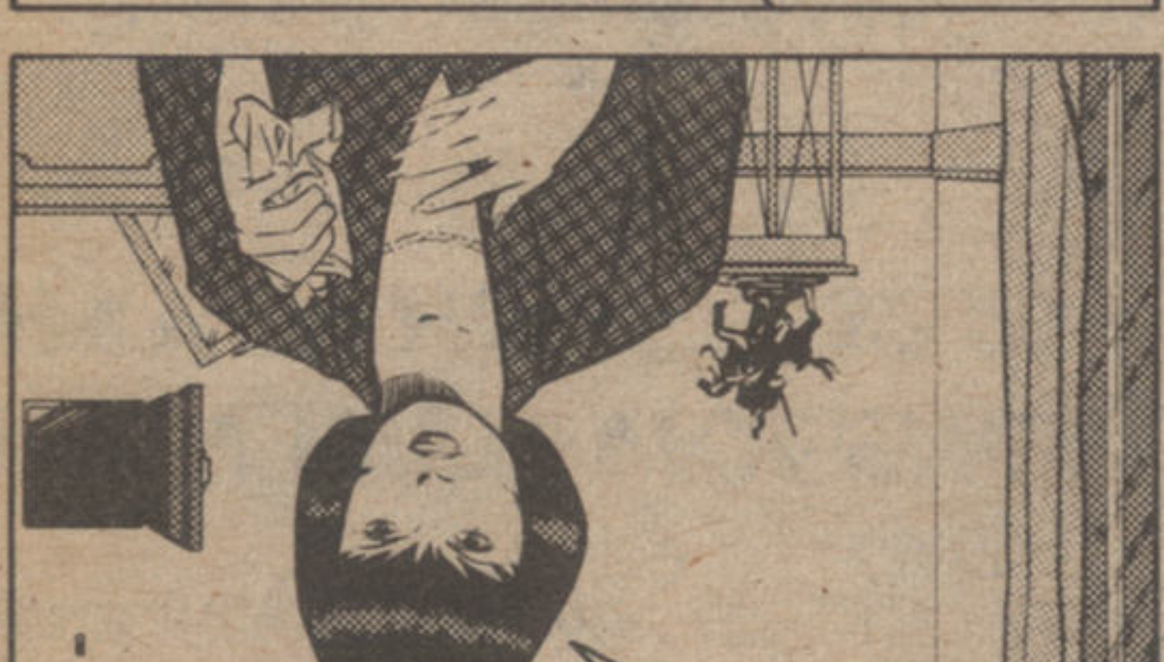
overheard their conversation and took Cagney aside. He said, "Jimmy, this picture is your big chance; it's your opportunity. It can turn you into one of the big stars in this business. And this is the scene that's going to make the picture. They'll be talking about this scene long after the picture is forgetton. This scene! So I don't care what that broad says about faking it, you're going to give it to her — but good! Everything depends on it, for the picture, and for you — everything. Don't be a goddamned fool!"

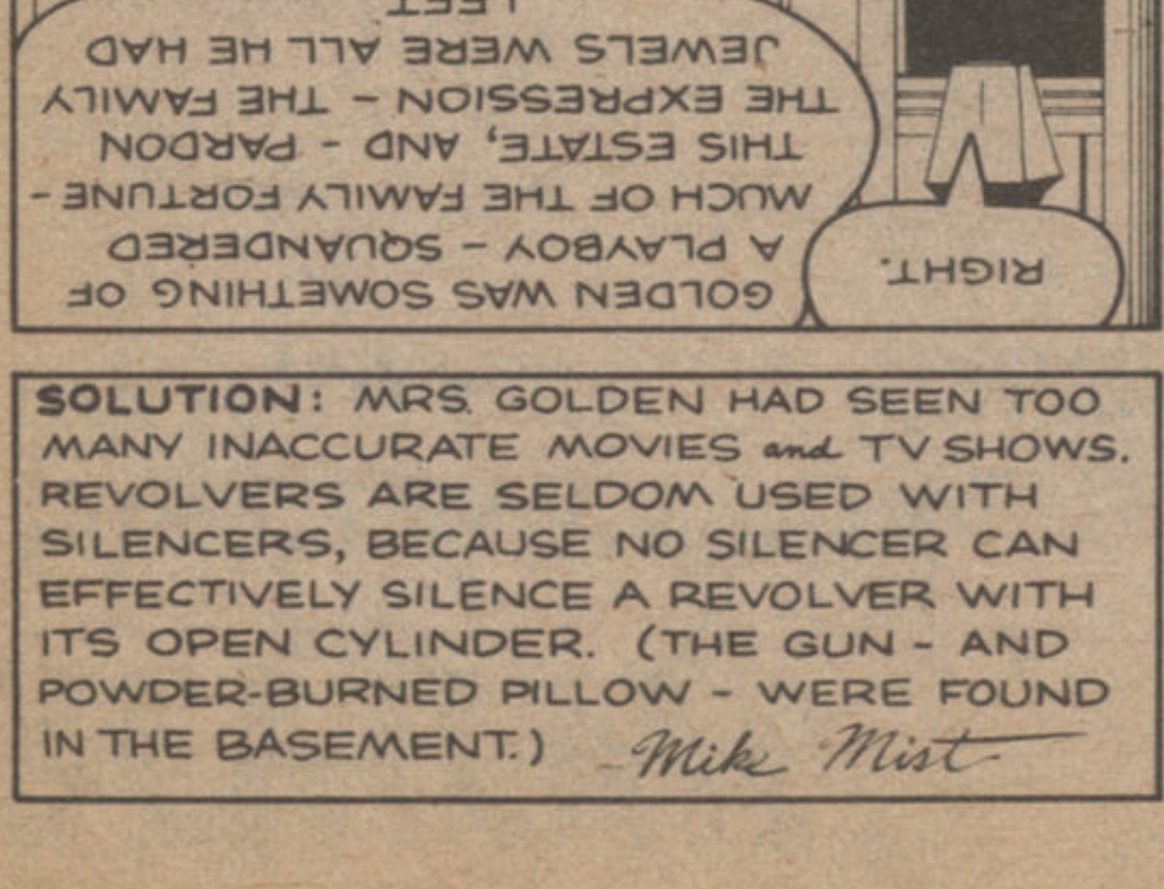
So Cagney's head dropped down, he was obviously torn. Well, professionalism won. Not really ego, but professionalism, because Wellman was right from a professional point of view. And Cagney put in a professional touch of his own. — You know where a grapefruit is cut, it's like a razor, where the sections are divided. Cagney not only pushed the thing in her face, he turned it. The scene was shot with one camera and with no possibility of a retake, because when Cagney pushed the fruit in her face the look was genuine. It said *Betrayal*! And the moment Wellman said "Cut," after the twist, she jumped to her feet and hauled off and slugged Cagney across the face. She said, "You dirty, double-crossing Irish bastard!" She was weeping and screaming, and holding her nose, and she turned to Wellman and said, "You jerkoff, you son-of-a-bitch! And you too," she said, turning to me. "You wrote the goddamn thing! You'll never get me in this studio again!" Well, she never returned. a retake was absolutely impossible. Wellman looked at Jannings, the cameraman, and the soundman, and said, "Well, how was it?" "We think we got it," they said. Wellman said, "How many Catholics here? All those who are Catholics, get out your candles. How many are Jews, how many are Protestants, how many believe in God? We've got to pray that the film comes out." We stayed up all night, dozing, drinking coffee and liquor, waiting for the film outside the lab. Everything depended upon it and, fortunately, it came out!

David Wilson, whose interview with W.R. Burnett appeared in our July issue, has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, Coast magazine, Wide Angle and the Los Angeles Free Press. He has been a Research Editor and a writer for *Close-Up: The Hollywood Director* and *Close-Up: The Contemporary Director* (Scarecrow Press) and is currently preparing a book about Hollywood.

THE MIKE MIST MINUTE MIST-ERY

"SILENCE ISN'T GOLDEN"





SOLUTION: MRS. GOLDEN HAD SEEN TOO MANY INACCURATE MOVIES and TV SHOWS. REVOLVERS ARE SELDOM USED WITH SILENCERS, BECAUSE NO SILENCER CAN EFFECTIVELY SILENCE A REVOLVER WITH ITS OPEN CYLINDER. (THE GUN - AND POWDER-BURNED PILLOW - WERE FOUND IN THE BASEMENT.) *Mike Mist*

REVIEWS

THE GLENNA POWERS CASE: HILLARY WAUGH RAVEN HOUSE MYSTERIES: $2.25

Simon Kaye is a private investigator who is invited to remove the naive, dope-sodden younger sister from the scene of a murder. His quixotic deed leads him inextricably into a labyrinth of murder and drug-dealing from the downtown slums to the billionaire's mansion on the hill with stops along the way at sundry orgies.

Hillary Waugh is the executive vice president of the Mystery Writers of America, and he has provided us with a fast-paced action yarn with plenty of gun-play. The problem here is that the gun used in two of the murders cannot be silenced as Mr. Waugh claims: on the other hand had he used the Ingram sub-machine gun which come equipped with a silencer, he would have had to delete the reference to the machine gun's staccato rhythm. A good book if you can overlook the implausibility caused by the author's ignorance of firearms.

RAIN WITH VIOLENCE: DELL SHANNON RAVEN HOUSE: $2.25

This is a reprint of one of Dell Shannon's earlier books, as witness the reference to three dollar hotel rooms and ten cent bus fares. For those of you not familiar with Ms. Shannon's Luis Mendoza series, each book contains half a dozen or so murders all brought to the attention of the Los Angeles Homicide Squad, and their solution through good, solid investigative police methods. I find the nature of these books annoying with their disjointed hopping from case to case, and I still think that any well-educated leader of such a squad should not need to intersperse his conversation with Spanish phrases. Hercule Poirot's lapses into French used to irritate me. Lieutenant Mendoza's Spanish even more so.

However, a good read for established fans of Dell Shannon.

THE MILLION DOLLAR BROAD

By John Stevenson

If there is anything I dislike more than to be woken up by a knock at my door at three a.m. it is to discover that the knocking was done by a .38 Police Positive. I have never liked guns and when they are pointed at me I like them even less. It was debatable as to whether I disliked the gun or the person holding it the most. The guy at the safe end of the gun was no stranger to me; he was one of the hangers-on who invariably accompanied Big George Froman, one of the city's big-time gamblers. I didn't know his name and I didn't want to know it at three o'clock in the morning. He was chaperoned by a gorilla who had all the charisma of a brick wall and let just the same amount of light from the weak globe at the end of the hall past his shoulders.

As soon as I opened the door the gun returned to its nesting place somewhere beneath the pin-striped jacket. That gave me a little confidence and I said, "You've got the wrong apartment," before I slammed the door and started back toward my bed again.

I took no more than two steps before the knocking started again. I could have ignored it but my chances of getting back to sleep with that racket going on were about the same as they would be if he started shooting through the door. I hastily unlocked it again.

"Mr. Froman wants to see you."

"Tell him to make an appointment with my secretary."

"Since when does a punk reporter have a secretary?"

That was a good question, but I resented being called a punk reporter. After all, I got a byline at least three times a month.

"Some other time. It's three in the morning."

The pinstriped suit was pushed aside by the brick wall and I felt a hand the size of a bulldozer grasp the front of my bathrobe, and I was hoisted into the air and shaken until the porcelain caps on my teeth rattled.

"Take it easy, Tiger. Mr. Froman doesn't want him roughed up, he just wants to talk to him." There was a lot to be said for that approach, maybe there was a heart of gold beating under that pinstriped suit. Tiger set me down hard enough to drive my feet halfway through the hardwood flooring and brushed his hand off on the seat of his pants while I explored what was left of my dental work and my bathrobe. That bathrobe had never been one of my favorite pieces of clothing but I would rather have seen it wear out gradually than to see it lose two out of three falls to Tiger, and I seemed to have a loose cap.

"Go get a shirt and a pair of pants on. We're going to see Mr. Froman," the pinstriped suit told me. I'm not sure what clothing protocol called for on a trip to see a big-time gambler at that time of the morning but I took a chance and slipped on a pair of jeans and a tee shirt and then because it was February where even in Los Angeles the nights are known to get cold enough to freeze the balls off a pawnbroker's sign I slipped on a denim jacket.

I was ushered out of my apartment by Tiger who temporarily seemed to have lost the desire to play me like a maraca and directed into the back seat of a black Ford. At least it didn't look like a hearse, they use Cadillacs for that, which was small comfort. I tried to figure out why Big George Froman would want to see me. The reason I knew of him and recognized the hood who was driving the car was that George Froman had been before the Grand Jury to show reason why he should not be indicted for fixing football games. I had attended the Grand Jury sessions with Frank Sawyer, the senior crime

reporter for the *Globe*, and when he had succumbed to a bout of flu I had filled in for him which was when I got my first byline in the paper. Since then the city editor had used me for reporting smaller crimes whenever Frank Sawyer was out of town. Like most junior reporters I was still looking for my big scoop. My only knowledge of George Froman was the times I had seen him sitting in front of the Grand Jury invoking the fifth amendment. If George knew of me it would have been only a fleeting glimpse of my face in the press box.

Pinstripe drove with a minimum of conversation which suited me fine. I am not at my conversational best at that hour of the morning; as a matter of fact I don't start to enjoy conversation until well after lunch, and given my presnt company it would not take a great deal of persuasion to make me forego it entirely. We drove out to Malibu and turned into a driveway on one of the streets off the main highway and stopped in front of a colonial mansion. I started to think that a tuxedo might have been more in keeping with my surroundings than the denims I wore. Tiger got out of the car and gave me a none too gentle assist up the steps where the door was opened by Big George Froman.

"Mr. Hamilton," he said, "I'm so glad you could come."

"The invitation was couched in terms that I found irresistible," I told him.

"I hope they didn't hurt you. I gave them specific instructions not to rough you up."

"They didn't rough me up," I assured him, "but they were sorely tempted."

"Now that you're here, won't you please come in. I've got a job for you."

He turned and led me through a hallway that was hung with modern paintings that I didn't understand. These days, if an artist paints a picture that is recognizable it's not considered art, and he gets drummed out of the association or whatever it is that they pay their dues to. He turned into a cozy little room about the size of the Dodger Stadium that had a log fire burning at one end and crossed to a bar. "Drink? I've got some sixteen-year-old scotch and Napoleon brandy."

"Now that I've been successfully kidnapped I'll settle for this year's beer," I said.

He snapped the cap off a bottle of Heinekin and handed it to me. "I haven't kidnapped you, Mr. Hamilton, and I hope you didn't get that impression from my men. The truth is that I need somebody to do a very delicate job for me and I intend to pay the person who does it for me very well.

"What do they call you? Mr. Hamilton sounds so formal."

"Everybody calls me Rick," I told him.

"Good, Rick. And you must call me George. Now, Rick, what would you

like most of all, right now?"

"Right now, I want to go back to bed."

"I'm afraid that won't be possible until you've done a little errand for me. Isn't there something else you'd like?"

"You mean like a million dollars?"

"I don't have a million dollars I can spare right now. Something else? After all you're a newspaperman."

"As long as we're playing guessing games," I told him between sips of beer, "you can buy me the Chicago Tribune."

"What would you say to the scoop of your life?"

"If you've got Koumeini locked up in one of the back rooms, I'd like to interview him."

"That's politics. I thought you were a crime reporter."

"I am, but Al Capone is dead."

"How about the inside story of a million dollar kidnapping?"

"You'll never get that much for me"

"I'm not talking about you. I'm talking about my daughter."

I must have looked blank because it had never occurred to me that George Froman was human enough to have a daughter. "Your daughter?"

"She was snatched three days ago and they're holding her for a million dollar ransom. I need you to act as go-between. In return, I'll give you the inside story for your paper. Is it a deal?"

"Why me? Why not the guys you sent for me?"

"All of my men could be recognized and if they thought I was double crossing them I might never get my daughter back again."

"Have you been to the cops?"

"I was warned not to, and in any case, me and the cops don't hit it off too good." That, I could understand.

"But why me?"

"The *Globe* has always been sympathetic to me, and Frank Sawyer is out of town."

I knew thaf Frank was away, but if it was a million dollar kidnapping I was more than happy to fill in for him. "Why don't you give me the details," I said waving the empty beer bottle at him. I might be on the brink of the story of a lifetime but there was no reason why I should write it while I was thirsty. Big George refilled his glass and brought me another beer.

"Norma went for a drive along the coast three days ago and when she didn't return I got a call from them before I even had a chance to start worrying. They told me they were holding her and that they wanted a million bucks for her release, and that if I went to the cops they'd kill her. I just got a

call this evening telling me where to deliver the money."

"Why did they wait three days to give you the delivery instructions?"

"Rick," he said as patiently as he could, "do you have any idea of how long it takes to get your hands on a million bucks?"

I had spent all of my twenty-seven years trying to accumulate cash and I was still working on my first two grand, so I nodded my head wisely.

"I stalled them for a while," he went on, "and I had to sell off some securities and I had to sell my interest in a place in Las Vegas. I got all the money together this afternoon and this evening they called with the instructions. I want you to deliver it and bring Norma home."

"How will I know it's Norma? It might be just any girl they picked up."

He opened a drawer in the desk and brought me a photograph of a girl with long blond tresses, blue eyes and a figure that made me wonder why anybody would rather have a million bucks. I said, "No, that ain't just any girl."

"I'd better warn you," he told me, "I feel very strongly about my daughter, and if anything happens to her while they have her, I intend to see that those punks get what's coming to them. And the same goes for the ride home."

It's not often I get a chance to put my foot down with a guy like Big George Froman and I might never have another opportunity so I said, "If you don't trust me, you can always get somebody else."

But apparently Big George had already made up his mind and there was nothing I could do except talk myself out of a scoop. He opened another drawer in the desk and pulled out a .38 Detective Special and laid it beside the beer bottle.

"Somebody should tell you, George. I don't like guns."

"You just did." He picked it up and stuffed it into the waistband of my jeans. "It's my daughter we're talking about, Rick, so it really doesn't matter what you like. Come over here and I'll give you the directions to make the payoff."

He consulted a slip of paper on the desk next to the telephone, "you're to take the Lonesome Pine Canyon Road for 4.7 miles. You'll find a dirt road going off the the right. At the end of that road there will be a cabin. Stop and blow your horn twice then walk straight in. Norma will be there with a guard. Give him the money and bring Norma back. You got all that?"

"I've got everything but the money."

He reached down and from under the desk he pulled out an attache case. I took it from him and started to open it.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going to count it."

"Don't you trust me, Rick? Believe me, it's all there. Time's awasting. Get

out there and bring Norma home."

I stood up and buttoned my jacket over the gun butt and picked up the attache case. "You have a car I can use?"

"There's a Chevy at the side of the house. The keys are in it."

He walked with me out of the house to the car. I dropped that attache case on the passenger seat and backed the car out to the driveway. When I started to turn the car round I saw Tiger climbing into the black Ford.

"Hold it," I yelled to George. "Where the hell is he going?"

"He's just going to follow you to the Canyon Road. You've got a million dollars of my money there, and I'm entitled to a little insurance."

I said, "I've already had one run-in with him, and if he comes anywhere near me I might forget that I don't like guns and that this one was given to me to protect your daughter."

"He's just going to escort you through traffic."

"Just make sure he knows that and also that if he comes within a dozen feet of me I'll blast him."

Big George went over to the black Ford and leaned down and spoke to Tiger, then came back. "He feels sad that you don't trust him but I have his word that he won't approach you unless somebody tries to hold you up."

My teeth still ached from the time that Tiger had promised Big George that he wouldn't rough me up and I secretly longed for the opportunity to stamp on his face, not that that would change his looks much but it would do a lot for my feelings, but George was getting impatient so I slipped the car into gear and wheeled it out of the driveway heading for Lonesome Pine Canyon Road. There was very little traffic around and I had no trouble recognizing Tiger's headlights behind me. The power of prayer wasn't working and Tiger stayed on the road instead of running off the highway into the ocean below us.

I reached Lonesome Pine Canyon road and watched Tiger in my mirror as he turned round and went back the way he had come. I took note of the odometer reading and at 4.7 miles turned on to the dirt road. It was starting to get light and by the time I reached the cabin it was full daylight.

There was an open space in front of the cabin but the only sign of life I could see was a battered jeep. I turned the car round in case I wanted to get out of there in a hurry, parked it and checked the gun in my waistband. Now that the chips were down I was through taking people on trust. I picked up the attache case, hit the horn twice, and walked over to the cabin. I gave him the courtesy of a knock before entering in case he had decided that he would rather have the girl.

It was only daylight outside. Inside it was gloomy and I could barely make out a figure seated behind a table with a gun pointed at my midriff. Off to

one side was the girl and she was everything her photograph had promised. At least she was until she opened her mouth.

She said, "Have you come to rescue me?" and her voice had all the emotion you see in the subtitles on foreign movies.

"Bring the money over here," her guard told me and I laid the attache case on the table and watched him open it. The money was stacked in neat little bundles held with rubber bands. I had often wondered what a million dollars looked like, but it didn't impress me. All I could say for it was that it was damned heavy. He started to stack the piles face down on the table.

"You've got the money," I said. "I'm going to take the girl."

"Sit down and wait while I count it." He pulled the first pile of twenties toward him and started counting them.

I walked over and sat down next to Norma. It didn't take me long to get bored watching him count money and I turned my attention back to the girl. She had come through her ordeal remarkably well. In fact the thought crossed my mind that she must have been kept somewhere else and brought here for the exchange. There was no other way I could explain her cleanwashed appearance.

He was only halfway through counting the money and I wondered how long it would be before he made the next move. "Hurry it up, will you?" I said.

"What's your hurry?"

"I promised Big George I'd take his daughter home."

He put down the stack of bills he was counting and picked up the gun. "Don't you know I can't let you go now that you could recognize me?"

"You should have thought of that before I got here," I said.

Norma may have had all the emotion of one of the pictures of Jackson that he was counting, but she got the message. She stood up beside me and I grasped her left arm in my right hand. I stood up and left him shift his aim to my head then I threw Norma across the room to the door then grabbed the table and tipped it over on him. He fell back with the chair under him below a heap of money and the remains of the table and while he was still scrabbling around looking for the gun I dashed after Norma and together we raced for the car. We got about halfway there when there was a shot and looking back I could see the guard standing in the doorway trying to line his gun up for another shot.

I braced my feet and skidded to a halt, yanked the gun that Big George had given me from my waistband, took careful aim and squeezed a shot off at him. He staggered back into the cabin and Norma and I reached the car safely. I started the engine and we spewed gravel all the way to the Canyon Road.

Whatever doubts Big George had entertained about my morality and his

daughter were misplaced. She spent the entire trip fussing with her hair. Not that she was any great conversationalist, but she could have said thanks.

We pulled up in front of the Froman mansion and I blasted the horn; the door opened to reveal Big George standing there, and Tiger drove in behind me. I got out of the car and walked around to meet Big George but before I could do or say anything Norma threw her arms round my neck and kissed me. Just as Big George reached me she said, "Thank you for rescuing me."

There was a definite glint in George's eye and to distract his attention I waved my thumb at Tiger. "Where's he been?" I demanded.

"He was waiting for you on the main highway to escort you back again."

"Well, if he kisses me, I'll puke all over your nice clean car."

"You'd better come in and have some breakfast." I followed George into the room we had been in before and I gave him his gun back and told him the story while Norma excused herself to go take a shower.

We moved into the breakfast room where a maidservant served us fruit juice, cold cereal, bacon and eggs and toast. After my third cup of coffee George asked me to go through it all again for him. When I got through with the story he said, "You did well, Rick. Here's a little bonus for you," and he handed me an envelope.

When I opened it I could see that there were ten one hundred dollar bills inside. While I was counting them Norma came back in wearing a bright yellow dress slit from the knee almost up to the armpit.

"There's just one point, George."

"What's that, Rick?"

"It's our duty as citizens to inform the police of any crime that takes place within our knowledge. Now do I call the cops, or do you?"

"Are you going to write the story for your paper just as you told it to me?"

"Yes. Is there any reason why I shouldn't?"

"No, but why don't you make another copy and send it to the police. That way you would be doing your duty by informing them, and I can steer clear of the cops."

I said, "I might have to get back to you for some background stuff for follow-up details for the paper."

"Any time you want me, you know where to get hold of me."

He escorted me to the front door, pumped my hand like I was about to become his long lost brother and instructed the hood in the pinstripe suit to drive me to my office. I wrote my story, sent a copy of it over to police headquarters to Lieutenant Caldwell, who was Frank Sawyer's contact and basked in the glory that was rightfully mine as a junior reporter with a scoop.

It was afternoon when Lieutenant Caldwell came for me. The only thing that surprised me was that it had taken him so long.

"I thought you might be around to see me," I said.

"I'd like you to come with us to George Froman's house and clear up a few points."

"Anything I can do," I told him.

We drove there in silence and when we arrived the hood had changed his pinstriped suit for a Hawaiian shirt, and a pair of shorts that revealed his knobby knees. George was lying on a chaise lounge, Norma was swimming in the pool and Tiger was rubbing suntan oil on George's back. There wre the remains of steaks on the redwood picnic table and the embers in the barbecue glowed.

Without formality Lieutenant Caldwell thrust his copy of my story under George's nose while the uniformed cop he had brought with us tried to keep his eyes off Norma's legs. "Have you seen this?" he asked George.

"No, but if it's the same story that Rick told me earlier, I know what's in it."

Lieutenant Caldwell said, "I'd appreciate it if you'd read it now."

George raised himself to a sitting position and took the sheets of paper and started reading them. Norma got out of the pool and came over to see what all the fuss was about. George finished reading my story and said, "Of course I wasn't actually there, but this was. the way Rick told me it happened."

Caldwell took the pages and handed them to Norma. "Is this the way it happened?"

I didn't like the way he was handling this. He appeared to have something up his sleeve that nobody knew about. When Norma finished reading and nodded her agreement as to the way the part concerning her had happened, Caldwell said, "I want all of you to stay where you can be reached. You will all be needed at Hamilton's trial."

"ME?" I said. "Why should you arrest me?"

"When I got this story I went out to the cabin and I found the guy with a bullet hole in his head and no sign of the money. So either you had an accomplice or you found time to go back and pick up the money and make sure that the guy was dead. I'm taking you in on a charge of second degree murder."

"That's ridiculous," I said. "The whole thing was a set up from start to finish. If you need someone to arrest you should pull in George and Norma for conspiracy. There was no kidnapping. The entire thing was figured out by George and Norma and the guy who played the part of the kidnapper; they just wanted to sue me as a patsy.

"George wouldn't let me see the money in the attache case and when the kidnapper put the money on the table he put the bills face down and it wasn't until I tipped the table over that I saw the face of the bills. There was a

very good reason for that; every bill had the same number. The most difficult thing to do when making counterfeit money is to change the serial number, as a matter of fact it's impossible. All they really needed me for was to be a witness to the fact that George had given somebody a million dollars to satisfy the IRS."

George said, "Ransom is an illegal payment, and is not tax-deductible."

"You've learned your lesson well," I said, "but while we're all thinking just how honest you are, you've got a sharp tax lawyer ready to take the IRS to court to appeal their decision on the grounds of a casualty loss."

Turning to Lieutenant Caldwell I said, "George had charged me with the safety of Norma, and her job was to see that I got out of there without seeing that the money was phoney. That's why there was a running gun fight."

Caldwell said, "By your own admission you fired a shot at the kidnapper."

I said, "When George gave me the gun he stuck it into the waistband of my pants without giving me a chance to look at it. I didn't get a look at it until I arrived at the cabin and it was loaded with blanks."

"The gun the kidnapper had was loaded with real ammunition," Caldwell told me.

I said, "When I brought Norma home they gave me breakfast and then sent me off to the office to write the story. As soon as I left George reloaded the gun with live ammunition and drove out to the cabin to pay off the guard and pick up the counterfeit money. They probably got into an argument and George shot him and came back here to get rid of the money. If you look carefully you'll probably find traces of the money having been burned in the barbeque.

George said, "I'll admit to trying to pull a fast one over on the IRS but I never went out there, I sent Tiger to pay the other man off and pick up the phoney money. The sight of all that money must have been too much for him. He must have shot him and buried the money somewhere where he could pick it up later."

Tiger made a sudden movement and there was a gun in his hand. I grabbed the suntan lotion and threw it in his face at the same time as the uniformed cop rapped him over the head with his nightstick. He subsided gracefully and the cop put handcuffs on him.

I said, "That's too bad. I was looking forward to stomping on Tiger's face. I still have a loose cap that he owes me for."

"The only real money in this scam," George told me, "was the thousand I gave you and I didn't dare give you counterfeit. That should buy you a whole new set of caps."

I followed them all the way downtown gnashing my teeth. I could afford to.

MYSTERY

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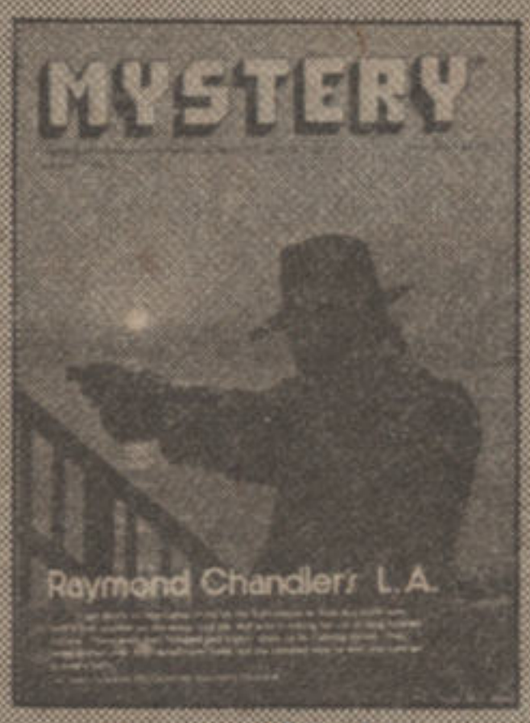

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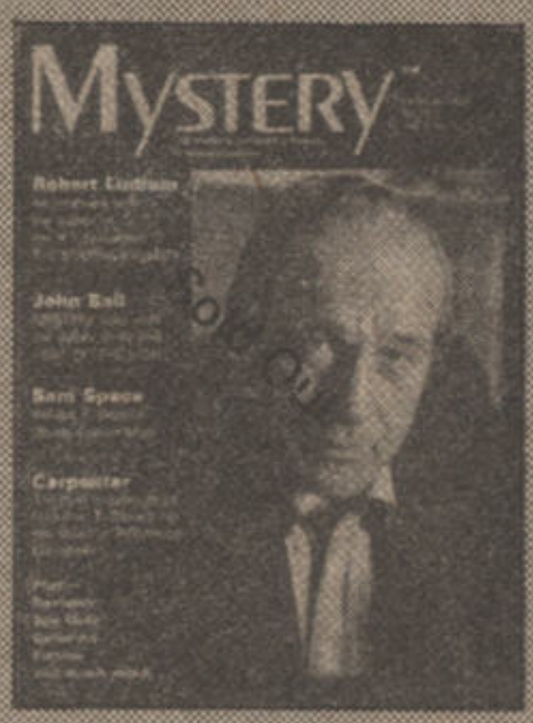

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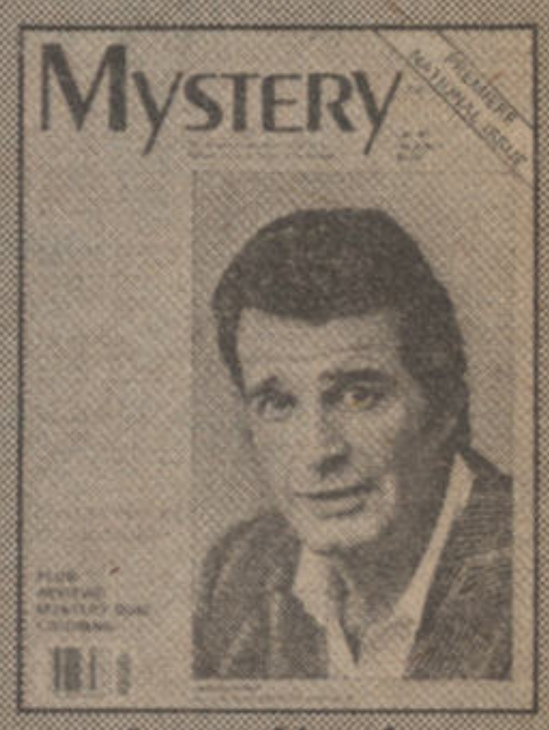

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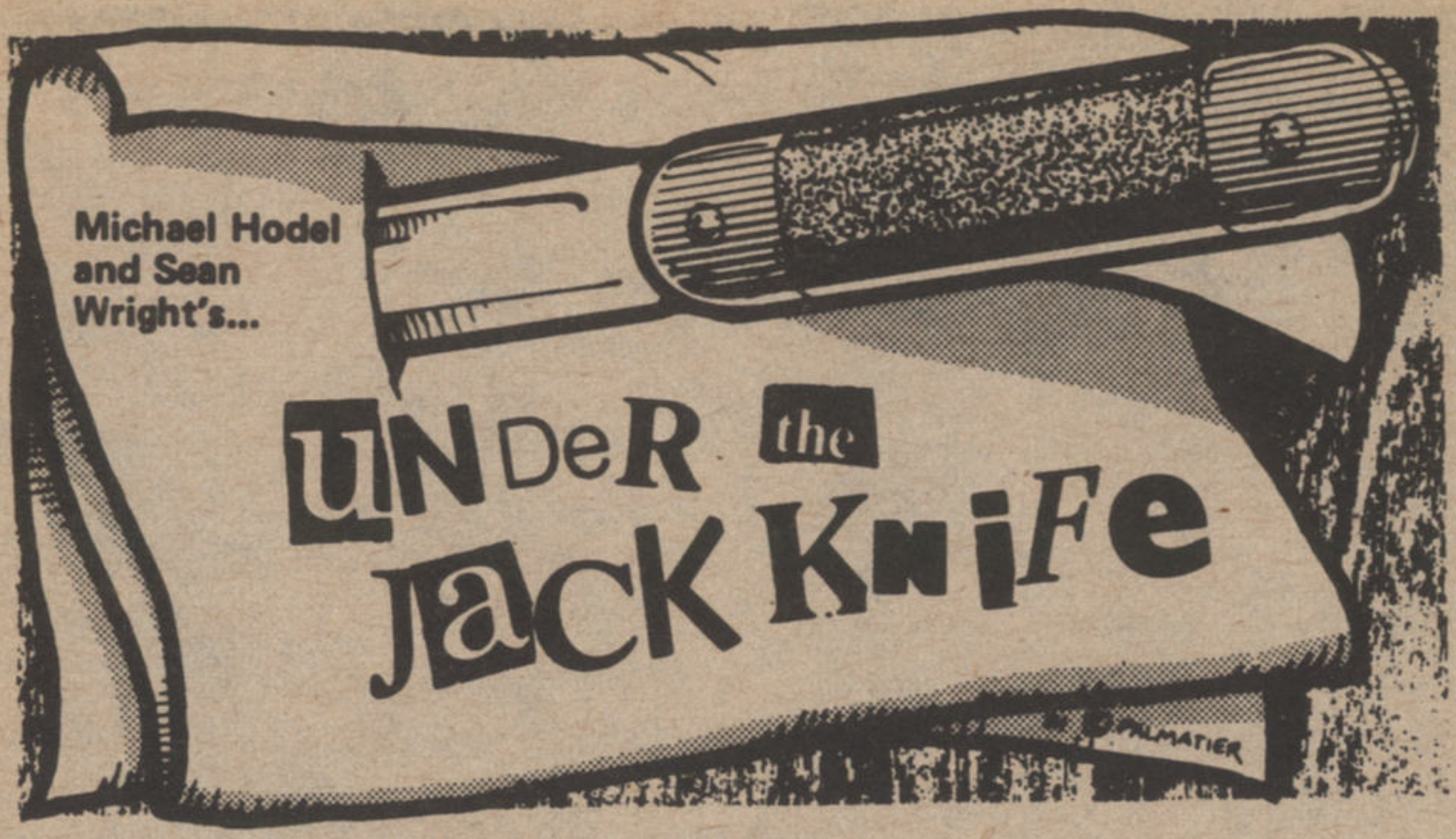
SPECIAL NOTE: In our last issue (Volume 3 No. 2, our San Francisco issue) the back issues were incorrectly numbered. The ad above is correct. To avoid confusion when ordering, please refer to the issue ordered in the following manner: #2: Chandler's L.A. #4: Garner cover. #5: Sherlock Holmes. #6: Hitchcock. #7: Women's issue.



A REPORT ON THINGS SHERLOCKIAN

BY SEAN MICHAEL WRIGHT, BSI "THE MANOR HOUSE CASE"
FOUNDER OF THE NON-CANONICAL CALABASHES, THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LOS ANGELES.

"I am inclined to think ---"

– Dr. Watson to Sherlock Holmes in *The Valley Of Fear*

While at the Sherlock Holmes Symposium at Stanford, my friend, Dr. Robert Bisio of the Knights of the Gnomon (the Holmes Society of Redwood City-Menlo Park-Palo Alto, or wherever else it wishes), asked me to name the books that were, in my opinion, the nucleus of a Holmes library. In so doing, he also laid two restrictions on me: I could name but ten and they had to be reasonably available. Both of these limitations are well-nigh impossible to a Sherlockian such as I who has been exposed to so much Canonical lore.

"Let it be a challenge," said Bob, chortling into his Stilton and Ritz Crackers.

Challenge it is. There is just *so much* to choose from! So, in answer to Dr. Bisio, and as a starting point for many of my readers, I am going to hedge just a bit. No, I'm going to cheat. I shall not name ten volumes; I will, where it is warranted, describe catagories and list whatever volumes fall into a particular catagory. Deviousness is also part of a Sherlockian's make-up.

I should hope that my choices provoke controversy. I will leave out some cherished titles. I may step on toes. It won't be the first time. I would appreciate hearing from you, in care of MYSTERY MAGAZINE, as to the worthiness of my selections. Whaddaya say? Write in and let's have a dialogue. I'll be happy to discuss your thoughts in a future column.

1. THE ANNOTATED SHERLOCK HOLMES, edited by William S. Baring-Gould (2 vols.)

If you never obtain, if you never look at another Sherlock Holmes book you will have done just fine. You can stop right here. This edition of the Canon is authoritative, taken from the pages of *The Strand Magazine*, without the errors that have perniciously slipped into the American (Doubleday Complete) edition. Not only do we find the Canon in an unsullied state, there are introductory chapters on Conan Doyle, the life of Sherlock, Watson, Moriarty; the furnishings of the sitting-room and the actors who have impersonated Holmes; how the Baker Street Irregulars began and who they are. Then there are the handily-placed notations, situated where they do not interfere with the text, should you want to ignore them. They include all the scholarship (up to 1965) that has been given the stories, by the finest minds. There are maps, diagrams and the illustrations of Paget and Steele.

This distillation of the best of the Irregular studies is the one book every dedicated Sherlockian should own. Never mind the price: it is the best investment you will ever make.

2. PROFILE BY GASLIGHT and THE INCUNABULAR SHERLOCK HOLMES, edited by Edgar W. Smith

All right, get *absolutely anything* that has Edgar W. Smith's name on it. His imprimature on any Baker Street study ensure the reader of sound scholarship and all-out fun. PROFILE is a compendium of some of the earlier works by the original people involved in the Baker Street Irregulars. The reader can be entertained by the likes of Robert Keith Leavitt, Christopher Morley and the rest of the crew who first brought wit and fun to the "higher criticism" in the pages of the *The Baker Street Journal.* INCUNABULAR antedates the *Journal's* early works, presenting the works of Msgr Ronald Knox (whose paper started it all), S. C. Roberts , who answered Knox' paper in the same spirit, A.A. Milne (on vacation from Pooh Corners) as well as Christopher Morley, Dorothy Sayers, Dr. Frank Baxter, and even one of Conan Doyle's little parodies on Holmes. For a look at whence we have come, this is invaluable. Together with PROFILE, INCUNABULAR is a fine job, edited by the man once described as the possessor of "humble omniscience" regarding all things Sherlockian. Both are difficult to find. Perhaps someone out there who has a publishing house at his disposal will be inspired to get Smith's works reprinted.

3. THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, by Vincent Starrett

Again, get anything you can find with Starrett's name on it. This present volume has been recently reprinted in paperback and can be easily found. His other works are less likely prevalent, unless you've wired a used book shop.

PRIVATE LIFE has nothing to do with the Holmes film of that name; it originally appeared in 1932. It was re-vamped in 1960 by Starrett. If you can find the earlier work, even if you have the newest edition, get it, because there are many points that were excluded. It is also of interest to see Starrett's progression of thought. PRIVATE LIFE is less a "biography" of Holmes, as it is widely touted, as an in-depth look at the entre Sherlockian experience. Starrett discusses the era, the Agent, the cases, the actors, the merits of the movies, plays and so on. It should not be passed up.

4. A SHERLOCK HOLMES COMMENTARY by D. Martin Dakin and,
MONARCH NOTES - SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE NOVELS
SHERLOCK HOMES: THE SHORT STORIES
by Sister Mary P. De Camera and Stephen Hayes

The COMMENTARY is an outstanding study of the Canon, case by case. Dakin presupposes that the reader has read, or is referring to, the Holmes Saga. He has absolutely no qualms about tearing apart the stories, the plots, the style, the inconsistencies — he even has the temerity to doubt the 'canonicity' of certain cases such as "The Mazarin Stone", and "The Creeping Man". No matter whether you agree or not with Dakin, you will find his critiques incisive.

I was introduced to the MONARCH NOTES only recently, but found them brilliant in their brevity, conciseness and clarity. Sister Mary and Mr. Hayes have performed a commendable job in bringing the best of canonical study to this series. Once more, it is taken for granted that you know the cases. The synopses are handled with authority and good humour. The commentators, it can be seen, are having a good time demonstrating the skill — and folly — of the Writings. They point up unusual clients (such as Horace Harker in "The Six Napoleons" who could not pull himself together to write an eyewitness account of his own story for his newspaper), how realism is built into the cases and much more than I have room to list. These are pretty easy to find in college bookstores. Or have your neighbourhood bookseller order for you. They do that.

5. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES
THE LONDON OF SHERLOCK HOLMES — all by Michael Harrison
THE WORLD OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

All three books should be treated as one book in three volumes. You may even wish to include the same author's I, SHERLOCK HOLMES, a purported

"autobiography". Actually all are travelogues of the city, the country and the world inhabited by Holmes and Watson, fairly reeking of the authentic atmosphere of a world now long departed. Each book has a photo section containing pictures of the people and places that made up Holmes's time. This too is done with good humour and insight. Harrison fleshes out the unrecorded cases and brings to light other speculations. He has encompassed the Canon round and presents it to the reader with love. They are of recent vintage and should be found within your local bookshop. Or have them order it (They really don't mind doing that!). If all else fails, they MUST be in the local library. If not, complain.

6. ANY COPY OF THE STRAND MAGAZINE YOU CAN LAY YOUR HANDS ON.

This is not as difficult as one might believe. Many can be found in used bookstores, either with or without Sherlock. Whatever ones you find, take hold of it and immerse yourself in it. Together with the reprint edition of BEETON'S CHRISTMAS ANNUAL, THE STRAND has a lot of Victoriana that one should know about to understand more of the times in which Holmes lived. If you find a Beeton's reprint (the originals are well-nigh impossible to find) or a *single* copy of Strand Magazine, do take the time to peruse the advertisements, unfortunately cut out of the bound volumes although there are six issues in each volume. Not only will you find them informative and enlightening, but they are sometimes downright hilarious. The adverts for cure-all elixers, hair-restorers, foundation garments and laxatives prove that we have not progressed all that much after all. There are also short stories and articles by H. G. Wells, Winston Churchill and other writers of the time. In all, the Strand is a jolly way to while away your time.

7. SHERLOCK HOLMES ON THE SCREEN, by Robert W. Pohle, Jr. and Douglas C. Hart

It is with difficulty that I selected this title from all the many Holmes film and media books that hve appeared in the last decade. I have to mention DEERSTALKER! by Ron Haydock as well as THE PUBLIC LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES and THE SHERLOCK HOLMES FILE, both by Michael Pointer. Although all the film and media books have mistakes, these have fewer than the others and are more thorough than the others in their researches. They are also the most enjoyable to read. ON THE SCREEN appeals to me because the authors took the time to dig out old reviews of the films, allowing the reader to see what the critics thought of the films at the time of their release.

This is straying from the Canon per se, but it has been my experience for over a decade of leading the Los Angeles Holmes Society that most of the new Sherlockians have had their first glimpse of the Master by way of films,

old radio shows and whatnot. The informed Baker Street student should thus be conversant with Holmes in these forms so as to lead the fledgling Sherlockian to the enjoyment of the Canon itself.

8. THE FINAL ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES,
edited by Peter Haining and,
THE APOCRYPHAL SHERLOCK HOLMES,
edited by Jack Tracy.

Admittedly, these two books overlap. I prefer Haining's over Tracy's for content. But the reader is warned to take a grain of salt with the editors' commentary. Neither of them are reliable, although Haining's ideas that Conan Doyle really wrote the Gillette play and his curtain warmer "The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes" and his other thoughts regarding his collection, are tenuous, if not shoddy scholarship.

The reason to own these books are not for what the editors say, but for what they have compiled: the complete texts of the Gillette play, the cases written by Conan Doyle that evoke Holmes, the Arthur Whitaker pastiche "The Man Who was Wanted" and the unfinished Holmes story that was left in outline form. Tracy has some items that Haining hasn't got and vice-versa. All are of interest. For the sake of completeness, do try to get them. They are both published within the last year and should be readily available.

9. THE INCREDIBLE SCHLOCK HOMES and THE RETURN OF SCHLOCK HOMES by Robert L. Fish

I admit to being compelled by whimsy here. Schlock is a lot of fun. These are absolute delightful parodies of the Holmes cases. One has the feeling that he is reading the Canon through a fun-house mirror. The distortions are just right and many scenes have a life of their own. ("Good Lord, Homes!" cries Dr. Watney. "I know you're a master of disguise, but you're fully a foot shorter. How do you do it?" Replies Homes: "Special shoes, Watney.") Do not miss picking these up. There should also be a final edition coming out soon with the last "Bagel Street dozen" left by the late Mr. Fish. He has left a fine heritage to Sherlockians and everyone who enjoys a well-realised send-up.

10. THE LIFE OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE by John Dickson Carr and THE ADVENTURES OF CONAN DOYLE, by Charles Higham

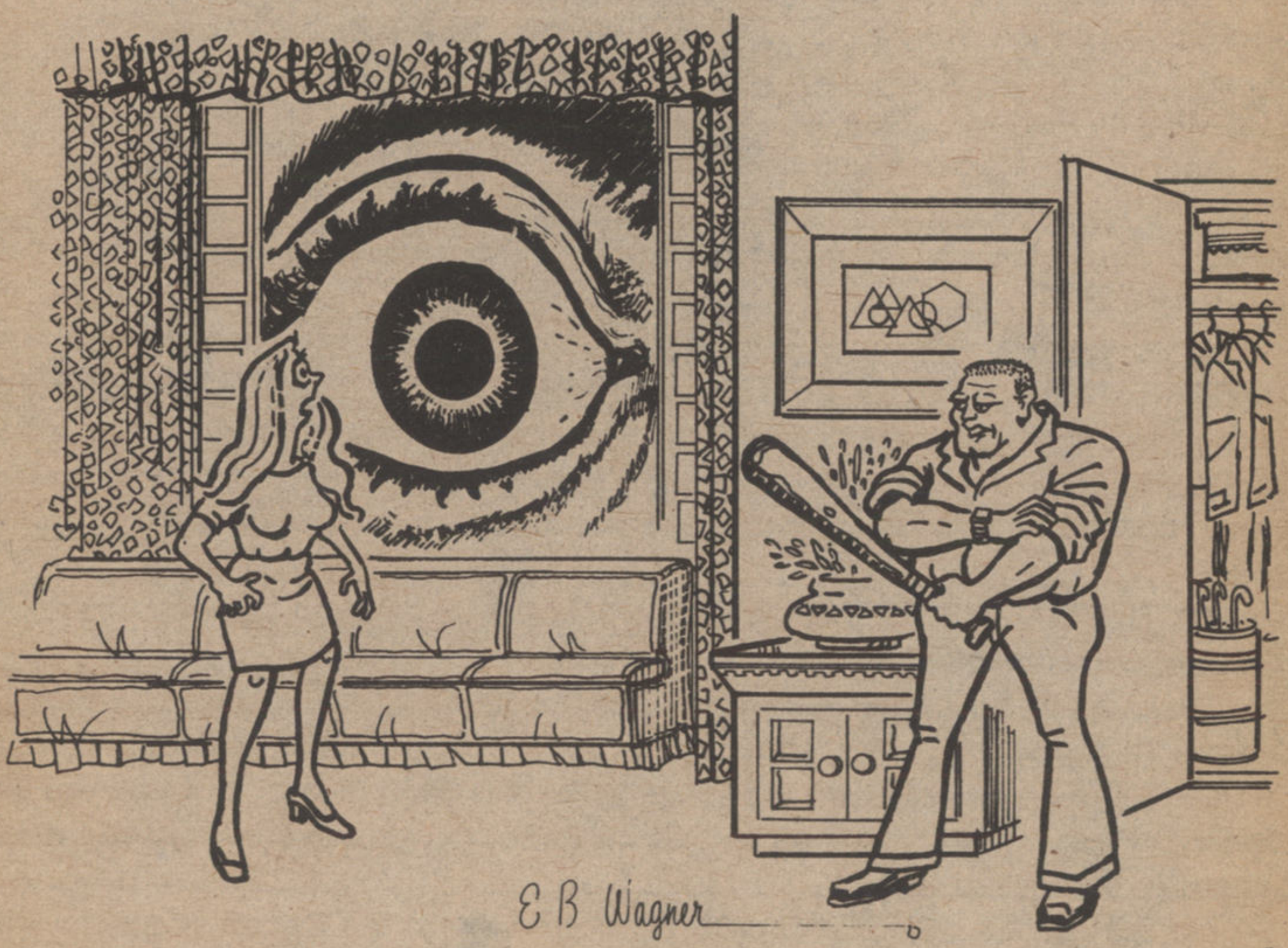
There have been several lives of Conan Doyle. I found these the best in terms of readability. One should also seek out MEMORIES AND ADVENTURES, Conan Doyle's own autobiography. It is hard to find, but reading the words of the Agent himself as he describes the genesis of the Holmes Canon is not to be passed up.

I know that we should limit ACD's involvement in the Canon simply to that of "literary agent for Dr. Watson", but one can't get away from the

prevalence of feeling that he really wrote the stories himself. Yet, as Dean Dickensheet, BSI told me back in 1971, "You cannot fully appreciate Sherlock Holmes if you don't know anything about Conan Doyle." There are many parallels in the lives of Holmes and Conan Doyle and to slight the "gentyl, parfait knight" would be a great injustice.

Carr's biography lists to the side of panagyric. He had to watch himself because he had ACD's obnoxious son, Adrian, breathing down his neck at every turn. Higham's book is less reverential and more devoted to the task of demonstrating the similarities of Holmes' life with Conan Doyle's. Yet, even he who has made a cottage industry of toppling idols from their pedestals (Errol Flynn, Charles Laughton, et al) could find no trace of dirt on Doyle's coattails. He seems a little surprised, in fact, that so public a man could have been so honourable and praiseworthy. Higham also traces the history of the Doyle family to 1975, a story in itself. If you read the two books together you get a balanced look at the man Conan Doyle was.

Well, that's the lot. I hope to hear from you about what I have said and what I have left out. I shall be more than happy to discuss your opinons, as I mentioned, within a future installment of "Under the Jack-Knife". I promise that the correspondence shall not be left unanswered.



"A PEEPING TOM--- STAY COOL, I'LL SLIP OUT THE BACK AND TEACH HIM A LESSON HELL REMEMBER."

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KAMINSKY CRITIQUE

THE TOBY PETERS SERIES

By Jeff Pierce

The year is 1940, and a Munchkin is dead. Hi ho.

Nobody saw the dwarf get it, of course. Nobody admitted to ownership of the kitchen knife that now decorated his chest. One moment he was prancing around in his little soldier's uniform, the next he was taking a permanent siesta on the yellow brick road. It was only a matter of time until someone suspected foul play.

Naturally, the cops took the easy way out. They pinned the crime on the first convenient dwarf. But not everyone was satisfied with that solution. Judy Garland called in Toby Peters to help.

Peters isn't exactly the most well-known private eye in 1940's Los Angeles. A former security officer with Warner Brothers studios (he was fired after four years for breaking the arm of a Western star "who made the mistake of thinking he was as tough in person as he was on the screen"), he's a wise-cracking gumshoe with a terminal case of poverty. Even an optimist would find it difficult to think of much he has going for him.

"I totalled up my saleable qualities," Peters says at one point. "I was on my own, had my office rent paid till the end of the month, knew a dozen people I could hit for a few dollars, including an ex-wife who worked for an airline and liked me but long ago gave up loving me—with good reason. My health, except for an occasional sore back, was good, though it wouldn't be much longer if I had to keep living on nickel tacos and cokes.

"My face was in my favor. I badly needed a haircut, but sometimes the slightly wild look was just what a client wanted in a bodyguard. My nose had been broken at least three times, once by a baseball thrown by my brother, once by a windshield, and once by a fist thrown by my brother, in that order. But at five foot nine, the nose was a valuable asset. It announced that I had known violence."

In his mid-40s, and weighing in at about 165, Peters is a compulsive liar with a Yiddish grandfather and a persecution complex. He used to be called Tobias Leo Pevsner, but he felt the name was wrong for him. Though he periodically finds rewards in his job, he says it is meant for "a lazy man with muscles and not too many brains." He has little fondness for the people he meets ("welchers, petty thieves, angry husbands and runaway wives who try to belt you"), and the only continuing thrills in his life seem to be a hard-to-get waitress named Carmen and the challenge of surviving against the odds.

Despite his "wild" appearance and the fact that many people (notably the cops) would rather see him sipping carrot puree through a hospital straw than dishing out street justice, Peters rarely seems in need of clients. If it isn't Errol Flynn or Bela Lugosi, then it's Howard Hughes or Emmett Kelly. His adventures have taken him to Mob hangouts in Chicago and to a meeting of dyspeptic vampires in suburban L.A. Along the way he has joined Ian Fleming in a barroom brawl, shown Raymond Chandler the investigative ropes, and traded insults with Ernest Hemingway.

If it weren't for the fact that he's always running into thugs who want to remold his face and guns that long to write his obituary, anybody would be happy to trade places with Toby Peters. Not the least of whom might be Stuart Kaminsky.

An associate professor at Northwestern University's Department of Radio, Television and Film in Evanston, Ill., Kaminsky has written seven books featuring peeper Peters. They have been filled with clever twists of plot,

intriguing characterizations, and humorous dialogue. Though the author has occasionally weakened his novels by borrowing cliches from Chandler and Dash Hammett, and although the idea of including flesh-and-blood figures in blood-and-guns fiction has been done to death in recent years, for the most part Kaminsky's stories stand out among the crowd as admirably original detective works.

From the first, critics have appreciated Kaminsky's efforts, even if they couldn't take his plots seriously ("A murdered Munchkin? What have you been smoking?"). Though a Tacoma, Wash., reviewer called one of his early novels "manure," more influential publications have given his books appreciative send-offs.

What's funny about all this, of course, is that the author says he didn't begin the Peters series with such success in mind.

"I remember that I'd been working on an official biography of Charlton Heston," he says, pulling on his sparse semblance of black mustache and squinting into the sun over Lake Michigan. "I spent a year working on it, and then he [Heston] decided that he wanted to also publish his journals. He wanted to do both, and then my publisher backed out of doing the biography too. We had no animosity. He was very nice about it, but I'd spent the year on it, and I had a good chunk of summer left with nothing to do, and I hadn't contracted to teach.

"I was sort of frustrated, so I decided to sit down, with no thought that anybody would ever be interested in the novel—I was just writing it for myself—and wrote *Bullet for a Star,* compulsively. I just stayed up and wrote it, day after day. It took me about a week."

Kaminsky had tried writing fiction before, including some juvenile mysteries and a few pieces for *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* magazine, but had never sold any novels. He had published books of film history and criticism, and his agent advised him to concentrate on those forms.

But *Bullet for a Star* was different.

In *Bullet* (1977), Peters is hired by a Warner Brothers executive to protect Errol Flynn's reputation. It seems there are some rather . . . uh . . . *revealing* photos of the Australian actor playing bedtime duets with an underaged partner, and the studio wants to close the curtain on a blackmailer. For a first novel, the work is surprisingly fast-paced and imaginative. Flynn is an endearing innocent, and the final action scene, in which he swings down on a rope to subdue a killer, is easily one of the most fun in mystery fiction.

Bullet was followed in the same year by Kaminsky's *Murder on the Yellow Brick Road,* in which Peters tackles the case of the murdered Munchkin. Like all the books in the series, this is a fairly standard detective story. Kaminsky has some fun with it, creating parallels between his story and L.

Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (the ending of *Yellow Brick Road* is much the same, and Judy Garland in Kaminsky's book is helped by three characters whose names remind you of Dorothy's three deficient friends), but he also fills the tale with the usual grillings, sleazy characters, and casual drubbings in the street. Snappy dialogue, well-penned prose and the use of interesting historical figures make it special.

The Marx Brothers help Peters in *You Bet Your Life* (1978). This is probably the best of the early Kaminsky novels, for the simple reason that the Marxs are such interesting characters. The author is understandably fascinated by the bizarre behavior and dialogue that have made the comedians so famous, and has managed to duplicate their craziness in his novel.

In one section of the book, Peters tries to get a hold of the Marxs at a Las Vegas hospital by telling a nurse that he's their brother, Gummo. But when he answers the phone call, Groucho Marx isn't so easily fooled.

"If you're Gummo," he says, "then I'm Andy Hardy. On second thought, maybe you're Andy Hardy and I'm Gummo. Whoever you are put the phone down and take a cold bath. I know it does wonders for my dog or my son Arthur, I can't remember which."

When Groucho's infamous "Dr. Hackenbush" crashes a convention of psychoanalysts, it's hard not to smile.

Kaminsky's fourth entry in the series, *The Howard Hughes Affair* (1979), is a weaker book. There are few really dramatic scenes in the novel, and the humor seems more forced than it had before. Though Basil Rathbone turns in a sterling performance as an amateur Sherlock Holmes, none of the other characters—even the eccentric Mr. Hughes—are memorable.

In *Howard Hughes,* someone has stolen aircraft plans from one of the billionaire's offices, and Toby is hired to find whodunit.

The most recent three Peters yarns are *Never Cross a Vampire* (1980), in which Toby is hired to protect Bela Lugosi from death threats and clear William Faulkner of a murder charge; *High Midnight* (1981), a slow-moving pastiche in which he-man Gary Cooper tries to fend off another blackmailer; and *Catch a Falling Clown* (1982), the story of clown Emmett Kelly and his efforts to save a circus from moral and financial ruin.

Kaminsky's greatest talent throughout the series has been in character creation. Through study and rewriting, the author has given us fine fictional facsimilies of famous people. Errol Flynn shines as the jolly ladies' man he wanted to be. William Faulkner is as defeated by Hollywood in *Never Cross a Vampire* as he was in real life. After reading Emmett Kelly's autobiography, Kaminsky created a profound portrait of a clown who thinks it funny that people should laugh at his simple antics. Finally, Hemingway, who Kaminsky feels was "unpleasant to humanity" in every way but as a writer, comes off

as an irreverent ass just waiting to pick fights.

In any instance where a book is filled with historical figures, there's a danger that they will overcome the rest of the characters. For the most part, that hasn't been the case with the Kaminsky books. Toby Peters has always stood out as the most important plot player, and he becomes more interesting with each new book. He began as just a klutz with bruises and few brains remaining. Now, seven books down the road, he's a klutz with bruises and a philosophical side.

Over the course of the series we've learned that he's an inveterate risk-taker. He relishes the defiance of death. The easy-going life style would be as intolerable to him as it was to Sherlock Holmes. He likes meeting each new day with a wary eye and a sap to the back of the neck. Masochistic, maybe, but he accepts the risks as part of life's course. "I would have felt uneasy if things came without a price," he says at one point in the series. A woman friend in *You Bet Your Life* describes his attitude more dramatically: "Life is like a movie to you. One day you'll get killed and won't get another role."

Needless to say, such a devil-may-care attitude about life doesn't appeal to everyone. His former wife, Ann, won't tolerate it. She had to leave him after she'd decided that he wouldn't ever grow up and stop trying to live past his luck.

Ann Peters, nee Mitzenmacher, reappears over and over again in the series. She may be Toby's only touch with reality. She represents many things that he's given up—a home life, a family, Christmas trees and a mutt to chew hell out of his undershorts. Every once in a while he'll look at a kid playing and remember that he's just a bachelor with a bad back and a '34 Buick with more problems than Jane Russell has inches.

Sometimes he fights back, making fun of his longing for Ann, or deriding her compulsive neatness to obscure her more positive points. "Don't you ever feel like throwing your bra on the floor and just leaving it there for a week or two?" he asks her once. At other times he'll simply absorb himself in a case and hope that his pains of loss will disappear.

Toby Peters is something of an emotional cripple. Until the last few books, he ignored his brother's children and didn't really call anybody a friend. Only on one occasion do I remember him being sickened by the sight of a bloody corpse—usually they're just part of the business. And he's always had trouble with women.

Women have typically been a problem for fictional detectives. For Phillip Marlowe and Lew Archer, they represent another world that they don't really understand and from which they have chosen to distance themselves. For Toby Peters, they are ego-soothers, pegs to fill up holes in his self-

confidence. He doesn't really *care* to understand them.

Kaminsky makes a cruel joke of all this, of course, when he lets women use Peters over and over. In *Bullet for a Star,* the detective is practically raped by an actress who wants to throw him off the murderer's trail. In *Murder on the Yellow Brick Road,* Judy Garland's costume designer coaxes him into bed with ulterior motives in mind. In *The Howard Hughes Affair,* a hardy German maiden seduces Toby in a dentist's chair, and he's completely bewildered by a heavily made-up vamp who takes our hero under her amorous wing in *Never Cross a Vampire.* In all but *Catch a Falling Clown,* a woman incites any lovemaking that Toby experiences.

At the same time that Toby's character has matured, so have some of Kaminsky's secondary players. Shelly Minck, the cheap-o dentist from whom Peters rents his office space, becomes more than a minor figure. He is given a few more funny lines and odd behaviors in the later books, and even horns in on Toby's private dick business in *High Midnight.* Gunther Wherthman, a dwarf who appeared in *Murder on the Yellow Brick Road,* re-emerges as Toby's neighbor and friend. Though it is only a small part (the pun was unavoidable, sort of), Peters needed at least one friend to make him look human. And Jeremy Butler, the ex-fighter who owns Toby's shabby office building, begins to develop in *The Howard Hughes Affair* as an interesting poet and philosopher.

Even Toby's brother, Phil Pevsner, has changed over the course of the series. He began as a cop with "close-cropped hair and the look of a lunatic who required super-human effort to hold in his rage." A born bully who takes each crime as a personal affront, Peters says "the only things he hated more than corpses and murderers was me." But by *Never Cross a Vampire,* Phil is willing to go to bat for his kid brother. At the end of *Catch a Falling Clown,* he even passes a job Toby's way.

Kaminsky has other assets as a writer, of course. He's a master of the catchy line ("I was driving down Hollywood Boulevard with an hour to kill when the hour decided it might prefer to kill me"). His dialogue is often disarming, sometimes wryly inane, and usually amusing ("Large weather we're having," Toby says to a bored desk clerk in *You Bet Your Life*). He makes ample and interesting use of Los Angeles locales, and adds a great deal of substance to his works by spicing them up with the history of that city.

I know a few writers who don't really worry about authenticity in their works. If they have to include an antique weapon in their story, they might just make up the details of its mechanism rather than do much research. Kaminsky does enough historical study to lend his writing authenticity, then drops world news and clothing prices of the period into his novels to set a proper scene.

"I usually set my novels over a period of a week, a week and a half, and I spend a lot of time reading the L.A. *Times* for that week," Kaminsky explains. "I like to read biographies of the people I deal with, and historical things that relate to them. One of my favorite books is the Chamber of Commerce guide to Los Angeles for 1941; I can read it over and over and over again."

There are, of course, several deficiencies in Kaminsky's books. For one, he's often given to too many periods of remorse, too many images that are supposed to pluck at our compassionate sides but don't. "I had a burger in the Carpenter's Drive-in sandwich stand on Sunset," he writes in *Bullet for a Star.* "The waitress was a skinny woman with a fake smile." And in *Never Cross a Vampire* he laments that, "I have no ambitions. I have no dreams money can buy. What I always need is just a little more than I've got, not a lot more, and I'm not about to be bought for a few hundred dollars. It's a bind, but it keeps my reputation clean and my suits old." Such comments belong to a disillusioned Raymond Chandler, they don't seem as suitable to the tongue-in-cheek adventures of Toby Peters.

The most serious criticism to be leveled against the Peters books, though, is that their author seems unable to decide whether he wants them to be simple whodunits or more complicated character and environmental studies. Like any Ellery Queen tale, Kaminsky leaves crimes unsolved until the last quarter of the book. Then something suddenly clicks, and Toby has figured out the solution. That would all be fine, except that the reader is still in the dark with his little notepad of unconnected clues and annoying red herrings. Kaminsky builds up his stories as whodunits, but doesn't give his readers enough information for them to play along in the game. In *Bullet for a Star,* for instance, Peters only reaches his solution when he sees a photograph of the murderer with one of the suspects—a photo that isn't described to the reader until the killer's name is given.

Overall, though Kaminsky has done well with Toby Peters. Any reader with an interest in detective fiction and history would find the books enjoyable, especially *You Bet Your Life, Never Cross a Vampire* and *Catch a Falling Clown.*

Kaminsky reports that he may soon be developing Peters stories for Viacom television productions. He has already contracted with St. Martin's Press to do another Toby tale, this one involving Mae West, Cecil B. DeMille "and a hospital for the criminally insane where Toby and Shelly are treated as unwilling patients."

After that, can we expect Albert Einstein, Spencer Tracy, Drew Pearson . . . and Toto, too?

THE MARLOWE MOVIES

By John Knoerle

Marlowe: "You've got a touch of class, but I don't know how you'd do over a stretch of ground."
Vivian: "A lot depends on who's in the saddle."

This snappy bit of dialogue took place between Humphry Bogart and Lauren Bacall in "The Big Sleep" (Warner's, 1946), undoubtedly Philip Marlowe's most famous filmic incarnation. Raymond Chandler's prototypical PI has been portrayed on the screen numerous times, yet only two, possibly three, of those films are generally recognized as successful attempts to bring Marlowe to life. All of those films were made in the 1940's.

"Murder, My Sweet" was Marlowe's first appearance on camera. (Two of Chandler's books had previously been used as the basis for films that were part of ongoing series featuring detectives other than Marlowe, i.e., *The High Window* was the basis for "Time to Kill" [20th Fox, 1942], one of the Mike Shayne series starring Lloyd Nolan; and *Farewell, My Lovely* was the basis for "The Falcon Takes Over" [RKO, 1942], one of the Falcon series starring George Sanders.) Dick Powell's portrayal in "Murder, My Sweet" is still considered by many as the best, and truest, screen depiction of Marlowe. No less an authority than Chandler himself is reported to have preferred Powell above all others.

In the 30's Dick Powell had been cast as a fresh-faced male ingenue, a singer and dancer in Hollywood musicals. When he outgrew that image his career stalled and he began to look around for a different kind of role. He sought the part of Walter Neff in "Double Indemnity," the James M. Cain story for which Chandler wrote the screenplay. But his entreaties were laughingly rejected by director Billy Wilder.

Powell had better luck with Edward Dmytryk, director of "Murder My Sweet." Said Dmytryk:

"Dick Powell was a hog farmer from Missouri. He fit the character, as far as I could see. After all, what is Marlowe? He's no Sam Spade. He's an Eagle Scout among the tough guys."

Powell was able to capture the persona of Marlowe more completely even than Bogart because he had no closely competing screen images, like Sam Spade and the various gangsters that Bogart played over the years. He was helped, of course, by Dmytryk's grasp of the *film noir* style and a finely crafted screenplay written in the first person, like the novel, which featured Powell as narrator, often quoting directly from the book.

"Murder, My Sweet" was a great success in many ways. It made money for RKO and helped to give credibility to the detective film, which previously

had been mostly a "B" genre. It gave Powell's career a shot in the arm and it boosted Chandler's stock in Hollywood, even though the screenplay was written by John Paxton.

"The Big Sleep," based on Chandler's first novel, is a better known film today with a strong cult following. The many notables who participated in its creation undoubtedly contribute to its favorable reputation. They include: Howard Hawks, director, William Faulkner, screenwriter, and Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall heading up an excellent cast. It was on the set of the film, in fact, that the celebrated romance of Bogart and Bacall began.

That romance was quite a hot item in the gossip columns and fan mags of the day. So much so that Jack Warner ordered rewrites of the script in order to further emphasize the on-screen *amour.* Indeed, purists have long complained that the romance was far more central to the movie than the book.

According to Howard Hawks, the Bogart-Bacall brouhaha almost never happened. He said his secretary originally sent Bacall a plance ticket by mistake, and that when she arrived her voice was high and nasal. Hawks told her he couldn't use her so she left and came back two weeks later, only this time her voice was deep and husky. When she finally won the part and the romance flowered, Hawks said:

"Bogie being in love with her helped Betty. He played all his scenes to her."

Bogart's portrayal of Marlowe is regarded as classic, although to some he was not as alienated and emotionally oppressed as Chandler's hero. Still, Chandler respected Bogart, saying:

"Bogart can be tough without a gun. Also, he has a sense of humor that contains that grating undertone of contempt. Alan Ladd (star of Chandler's "The Blue Dahlia") is hard, bitter and occasionally charmig, but he is after all a small boy's idea of a tough guy. Bogart is the genuine article."

The complexity and confusion of the plot in "The Big Sleep" has become legend. At one point when they were filming the scene where Owen Taylor's car is hoisted from the bay Bogart asked Hawks who killed Taylor. Hawks said he didn't know but would ask Faulkner. Faulkner didn't know and wired Chandler. Chandler wired back: "The butler did it." The question was never resolved in the film.

A contemporary to "The Big Sleep" was "Lady in the Lake" (MGM, 1946), directed by and starring Robert Montgomery. This film was the first (and as far as I know the last) to use the camera in the first person. In other words, the action is seen as the protagonist would see it, the camera acting as his eyes.

This is a very interesting, if not totally successful, film. The inability of the camera to approximate the breadth and quickness of human sight tends to

slow the pacing, but it remains a noble experiment. The technique *is* very audience involving since the action looks as if it is happening to the viewer himself. Because the cast had to act directly into the camera, Montgomery sat in a large wire basket hung right below the lens in order to give them someone to respond to.

"Lady in the Lake" is also notable for its nifty, hardboiled dialogue. For example, the vampish Audrey Totter says to Marlowe:

"Why don't we go somewhere and discuss this over a couple of ice cubes? (Marlowe laughs) What's so funny?"

"Imagine you needing ice cubes."

After these three films Marlowe suffers an unkind fate at the hands of Hollywood. "The Brasher Doubloon" (2oth-Fox, 1947) is a flat, one dimensional version of *The High Window* with George Montgomery as a flat, one dimensional Marlowe. His portrayal lacks any of the irony and sardonic humor of the character while the movie concerns itself exclusively with plot at the expense of characterization and visual style. Even the plot is botched with Marlowe producing a full 16mm film of the murder in question at the denouement, instead of a simple photograph as in the book.

Hollywood waited for more than twenty years to return Marlowe to the screen in a film called, appropriately enough, "Marlowe" (MGM, 1969) with James Garner in the title role. This was a doomed attempt to drag Chandler's creation, kicking and screaming, into the swinging sixties. Based on *The Little Sister,* one of Chandler's later, and weaker, efforts, this movie transformed Marlowe from "the single right man in a world gone wrong" to a swinging batchelor on the prowl. "Marlowe" and Robert Altman's "The Long Goodbye" (United Artists, 1973), pointed up the difficulty of transplanting Philip Marlowe to the modern era.

Altman summed up his conception of the character, played by Elliot Gould in his film, thusly:

"I see Marlowe the way Chandler saw him, a loser. But a *real* loser, not the fake winner Chandler made out of him. A loser all the way."

With an attitude like that it's not surprising that Chandler fans were nonplussed by Altman's film. Gould's Marlowe is a chainsmoking, aging adolescent without any of Bogart's toughness or Powell's understated charm. This is not to say that "The Long Goodbye" is a totally worthless film. Altman's offbeat opus had its moments but it is unable, finally, to overcome the obstacles inherent in trying to update what critics generally concede is Chandler's finest novel.

The commercial and critical failures of "Marlowe" and "The Long Goodbye" had an impact on the decision to shoot "Farewell, My Lovely" (Avco Embassy, 1975) as a period piece, although it was originally proposed in an updated version. In fact, such painstaking effort was put into recreating the 40's milieu that it got in the way of the film. Nevertheless, the

casting of Robert Mitchum as Marlowe transformed an adequate film into an enjoyable one. Mitchum's Marlowe is tired and laconic, but far more convincing than his more glib predecessors (Garner and Gould). Of the recent Marlowe films "Farewell, My Lovely" is clearly the winner. Yet it is only a pale approximation of the original, "Murder My Sweet".

The less said about the most recent Marlowe film, a 1978 remake of "The Big Sleep," the better. Produced by Sir Lew Grade (or Sir Low Grade as he is sometimes known) and starring Robert Mitchum, it transposes the story from LA in the 30's to modern day London. There is no attempt to tailor the story and characters to the new setting, they simply crossed out LA and wrote in London, with predictable results. Mitchum acts as if he has one eye on the time clock throughout the film.

In sum, then, it is obvious that the character of Philip Marlowe is timebound. The films that most accurately portray him are films that were written and produced in his era. Modern directors, writers and actors can attempt to recreate that period with varying degrees of success, but I think it is safe to say that the three films made in the 40's will remain the definitive Marlowe movies.

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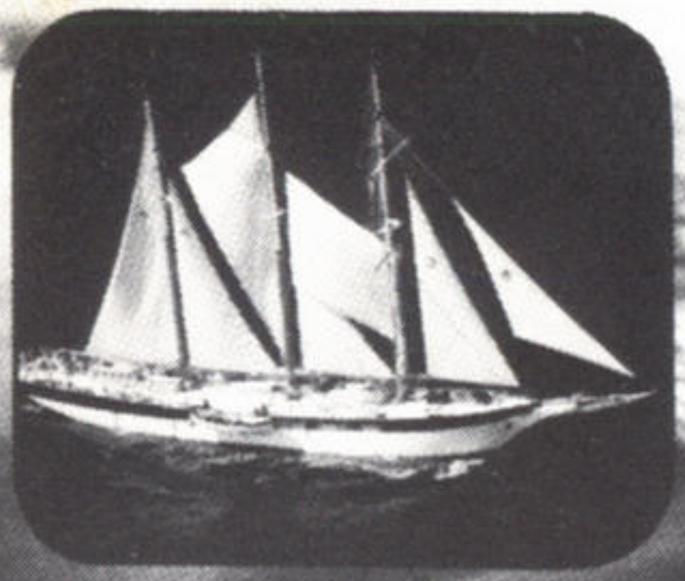

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