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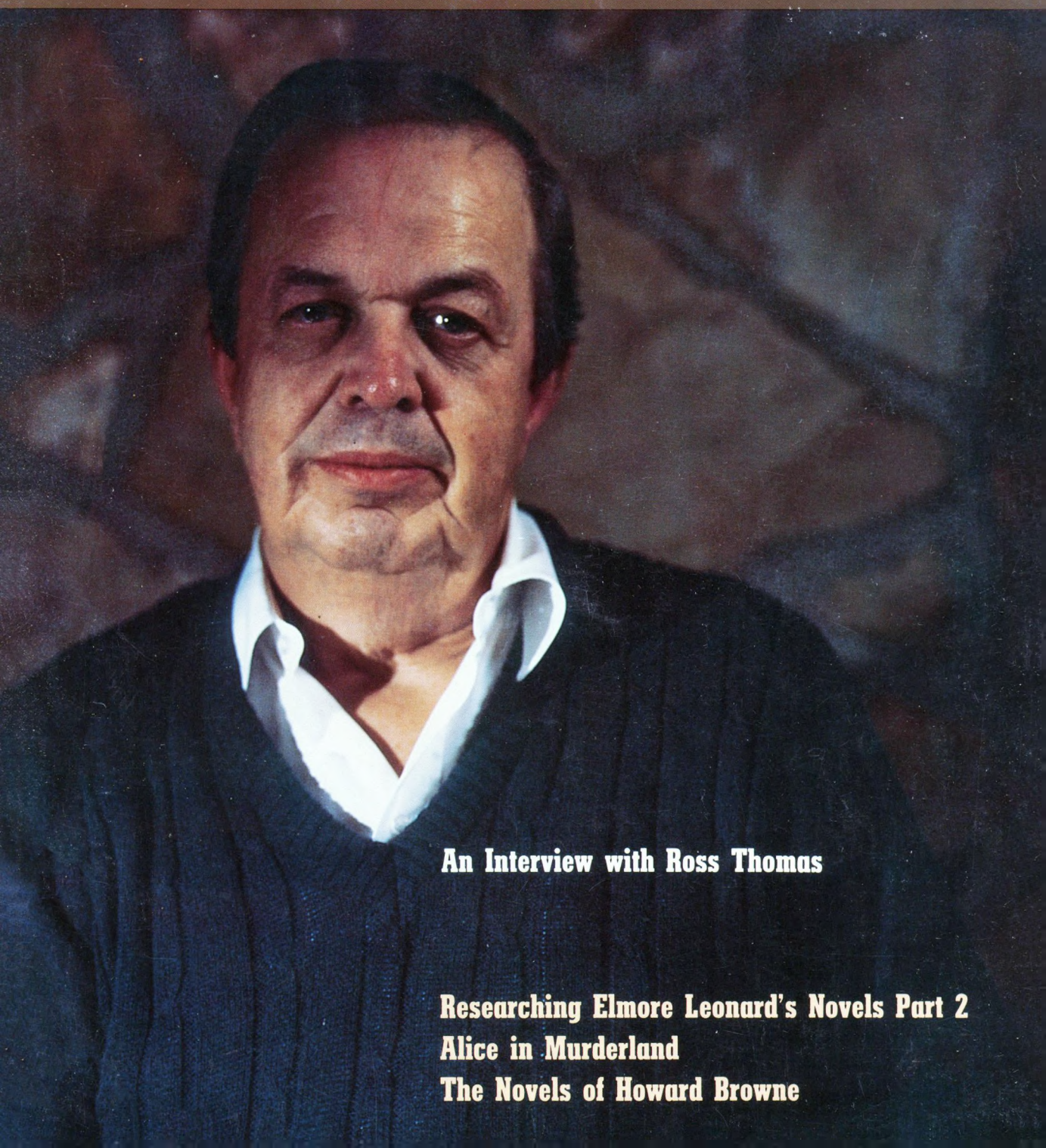
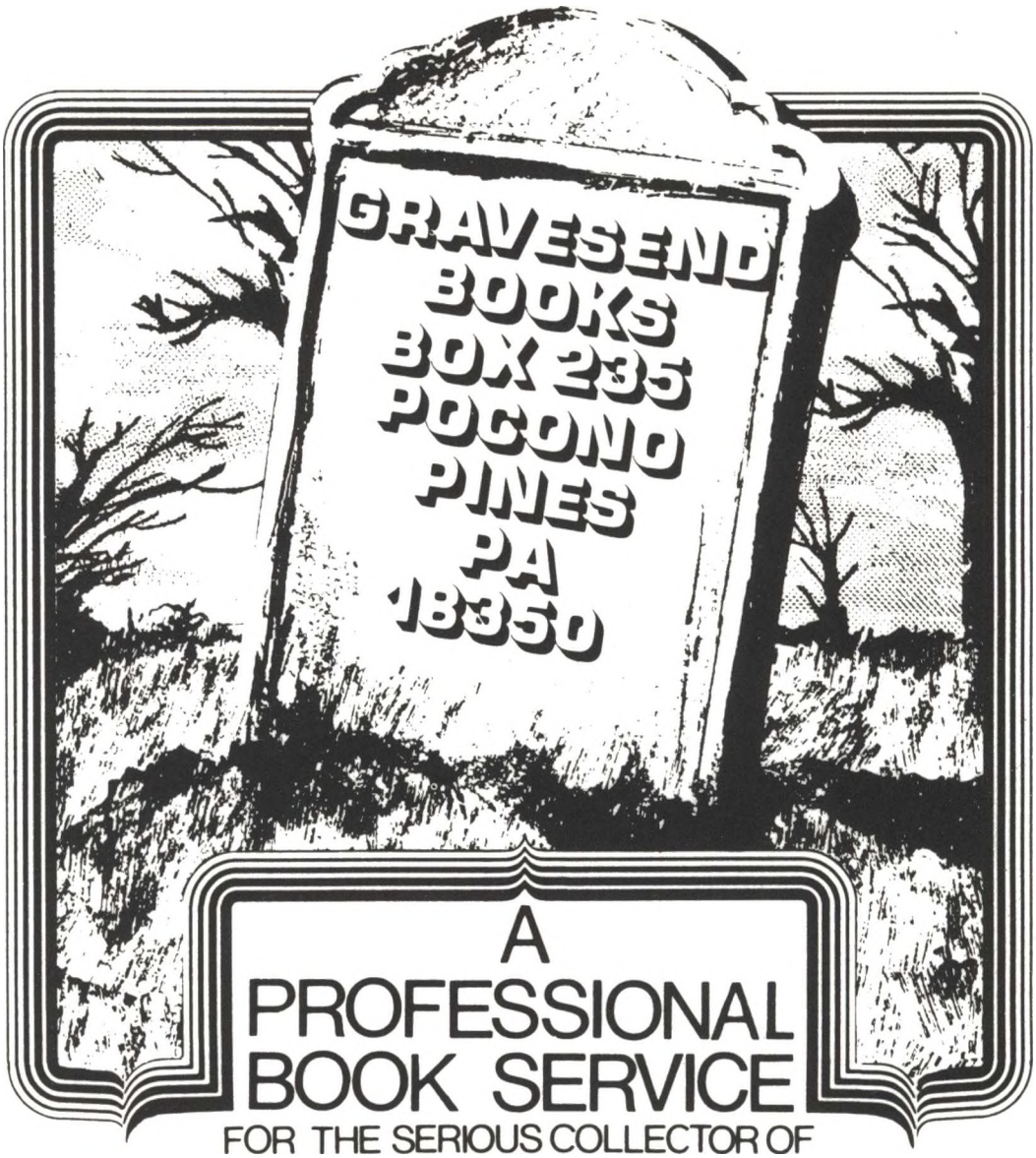


An Interview with Ross Thomas

Researching Elmore Leonard's Novels Part 2

Alice in Murderland

The Novels of Howard Browne



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THE UNEASY CHAIR

Dear TADian:

A toast, at least, is due Bryan Barrett, Bruce Taylor, and the dozens of other people whose efforts were repaid on the weekend of October 25–27, 1985, when Bouchercon XVI was held in San Francisco. The guest of honor this year was not a person, but the California mystery novel itself, and three writers —Collin Wilcox, Joe Gores, and Joseph Hansen— were chosen to represent the genre. Also attending as honored guests were Tony Hillerman, Ross Thomas, and Howard Browne, along with Fan Guests of Honor, June and Len Moffatt, whose *JDM Bibliophile* is in itself reason enough for the honor, but who should also be remembered as among the founders of Bouchercon itself.

As it happens, many of those expected to attend could not for various reasons, and they were missed. None, I think, was more missed, though, than Chris Steinbrunner, whose convivial presence has been a fixture through the years. Chris's illness kept him away and saddened his friends, and we wish him a speedy and full recovery, and look forward to seeing him next year in Baltimore.

That will be the site of Bouchercon XVII, and Gail Larsen, owner of the popular mid-Atlantic area bookstore, The Butler Did It, will be putting the event together. In light of the success of San Francisco's offering, it will be an awesome task; unfortunately, we tend to compare the current to the past, and the only complaint one might make about XVI is that it was *too* rich, offered *too* much. After all, when people start scalping tickets to the Banquet, you know that something special is going on!

Did he say that too much was offered? Well, yes. In one instance, it took almost thirty minutes to introduce the panelists! But what can you do when the panel consists of Jack Lynch, Kenn Davis, Sue Dunlap, Julie Smith, Collin Wilcox, and Joe Gores? Moderator Dennis Lynds (Michael Collins) wisely only highlighted their careers and accomplishments as he introduced the people who were going to discuss The California Crime Novel—North, but the depth and richness of the offering made it a time-consuming job. (Fortunately, the programming allowed for the panels to run ninety minutes, rather than the more usual sixty.)

There was a panel on Crime in Southern California (with Sue Grafton, Joseph Hansen, Geoff Miller, Roger L. Simon, and Nan Hamilton; Bill Pronzini moderating), two on crime novels east of the Rockies (Jim Lamb with Linda Barnes, John Lutz, Carolyn Wheat and Mickey Friedman on one; the other with Max Allan Collins with Bob Randisi, Teri White, and Sara Paretsky). Cops Who Write included John Ball, Paul Bishop, Joseph McNamara, Gerald Petievich, and David Scannell.

Ric Meyers, Bill DeAndrea and Raymond Obstfeld —whose columns we hope entertain you regularly in these pages—were on panels, as were Mark Schorr, Warren Murphy, and...well, I think you get the idea. I've left people off the list; I didn't get to all the panels. Still, the point is made: Bouchercon XVI had something for everyone, the city itself treated us kindly, with clear, comfortable weather, and the people who planned the event seemed to be in control.

The theme of the convention, of course, was the special. Cantankerous as I am, I don't know that I buy the thought that there is any special, inherent difference. It is enough for me to know that the writers are there and producing a body of literature which entertains and informs and excites. Those writers helped see to it that the Bouchercon, too, did that.

Our thanks, ladies and gentlemen of the planning committees and panels. You gave us something memorable.

Best mysterious wishes,

Michael Seidman

MICHAEL SEIDMAN

A NOTE TO THE READER:

Some good news, and some bad news. First the good. Many readers have requested that we run more current reviews. We are pleased to say that in this issue there are 17 pages of current reviews. Now to the bad news. In order to make room for these additional reviews, we have dropped *Classic Corner* from this issue. If we continue to receive a large number of current reviews, we may eliminate *Classic Corner*. If you feel that we have made the wrong decision, please write and let us know.

AN INTERVIEW ROSS THOMAS The Art of Writing

Raymond Obstfeld is a mystery writer and a regular columnist for TAD. His current suspense novel, NAKED DOG, *will be published in August 1986 by Gold/Eagle, Harlequin.*

By

TAD: I've talked to other writers about the painful births of their writing careers, tales of rejection slips, etc., but your experience was refreshingly different. Can you describe how you first got into novel writing?

Thomas: Yes, I was in Pittsburgh running a political campaign. I came back to Washington, D.C., and I had three or four months before my next assignment. So I sat down and wrote *The Cold War Swap.* Having written the novel, I wasn't at all sure what to do with it. I called up a friend of mine, and he said, first you get yourself some brown paper and string, which I did. I sent it to William Morrow, and they wrote me back a letter about two months later that said: Dear Mr. Thomas, We would very much like to publish your novel. It was probably the happiest day of my life. And that was as simple as it was.

TAD: Why William Morrow?

Thomas: Because that's where my friend had published a novel, his one and only novel. He was the only novelist I knew, so I had to ask him for advice.

WITH

Photo: Dave Hollander © 1985

Raymond Obstfeld

TAD: Why did you write that first novel?

Thomas: Because I wanted to.

TAD: But you told me about your Southern girlfriend...

Thomas: Oh, she said: Why don't I write a novel and sell it to the movin' pictures and then I won't have to put up with all this crap. And that turned out to be true.

TAD: How would you describe your basic training as a writer—schooling and work experience?

Thomas: Well, I think my basic training starts with being a reader first, and I think I am a reader first before I am a writer. And I heartily recommend to anybody that if they're going to be a writer, they should also be a reader. Otherwise, I think it's rather hopeless. Perhaps not. And I started as a professional writer when I was seventeen. I was on a newspaper. I've either written for newspapers, magazines, radio, or television ever since then—or until I started writing novels. I was in the newspaper business both as a foreign correspondent and also a public relations executive. So I've had all sorts of experience writing other than fiction. I've had no formal training in fiction writing.

TAD: Had you always wanted to do that, then?

Thomas: Yes, I think really in the back of my mind I thought, Well, you can always sit down and write a novel and you don't have to do these unpleasant tasks that you're doing today. You can sit down and write novels and be happy. (*Laughs*)

TAD: That's different from starting with the idea that, I want to be a novelist.

Thomas: Well, everybody starts with the idea that they want to be a novelist, but then you have to pay the rent. That's why so many budding novelists get sidetracked: because they go into something else and they have families to support and mortgages to pay off and no time. At least, they think they have no time.

TAD: So that's what happened to you?

Thomas: I don't know if that's what happened to me or not. I just never did try it. I kept postponing and postponing it, and in the postponing I also gained a great deal of experience which was more or less a cumulative background which could be used later. Which I did. I know one writer who knew early on he wanted to be a novelist. But he had nothing to write about, so he enlisted in the Navy for four years. And then he had plenty to write about. Very successfully.

TAD: When you were younger and in school, did you write poetry and short stories?

Thomas: I wrote a short story in my senior year in high school which won the senior essay prize—five dollars and a plaque—and that was it as far as my fiction writing was concerned.

TAD: Still have the plaque?

Thomas: No. I don't have the five dollars either.

TAD: What was your family's attitude about your writing?

Thomas: Well, it was indifference, mostly. I mean, both of my parents were great readers, but they didn't encourage me to be a writer. They encouraged me to be an architect—to have a steady job, that's what they encouraged me to do. That's what most families did at that time. Having just come out of the Depression, it was thought that a steady job was probably the salvation of all of the world's problems. I was neither discouraged nor encouraged. I went into the Army when I was eighteen. After that, there was very little parental guidance, and precious little before that.

TAD: Can you recall what it was like when you wrote your first novel?

Thomas: Yes, it was an interesting experience because I never was so fascinated by doing anything. Never so interested in doing it. Possessed by it, I think. I actually liked it. I really did like the writing process. Since then, I don't like it quite as well, perhaps because it's sort of familiar now. But the first time you actually see the manuscript rising on your desk, and see this is going to be something. You don't know what it is going to be, but it is going to have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

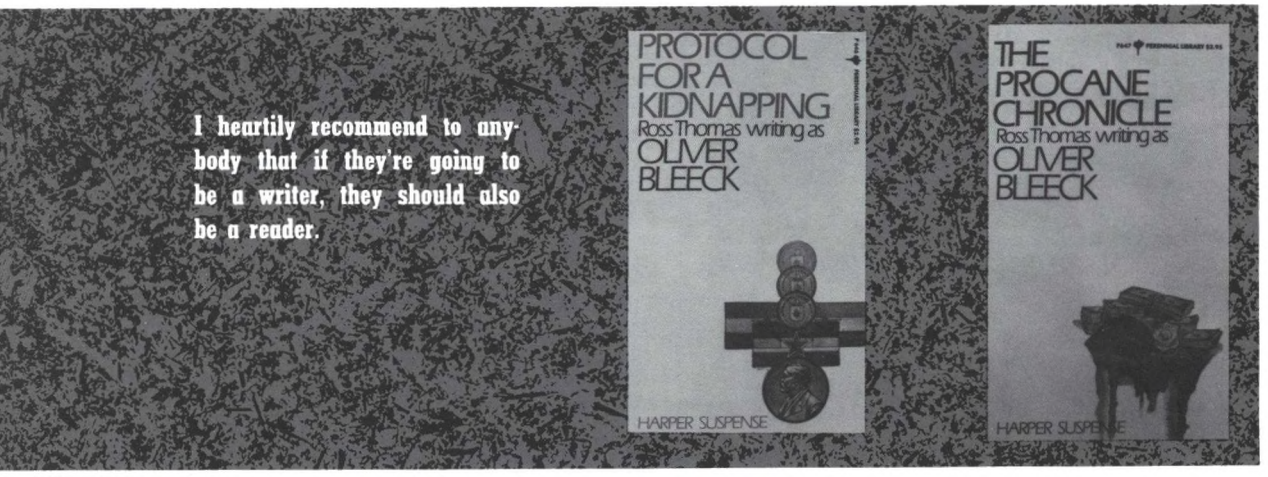
TAD: How do you compare it with the way it is now?

Thomas: Well, you learn a lot of tricks as you go along. Sometimes you use them consciously, and sometimes you don't. You know a lot more about technique, and you don't have the flow you had then because it's more written, more contrived. I don't mean contrived in the bad sense of the word. But it's more formalized—the process—because when you sit down there and roll a piece of paper in your typewriter and write, Chapter One, Page One, you know what's ahead of you. The first time you do it, you haven't the slightest idea what's going to happen. It's an adventure. Perhaps that's the best way to say it. A very pleasant one. Somebody buys it, and that's the difference between one and twenty.

TAD: You've not had much trouble, or any trouble, selling your books since the first one. I mean, they've all sold. It's interesting because Brian Garfield was saying that the latest book he's done, *Necessity*, was rejected five times before he sold it.

Thomas: I am surprised to hear that. I wouldn't know why. I don't know. I write them and they buy them and they don't do anything with them. I mean, there's no editing. They don't have to edit. Not much copy editing, and no formal editing at all. Once in a while, they'll ask me to put in a little more about what the characters are thinking. I don't know what they're thinking, but I go back and make something up. Plaster it in. Dab it in.

TAD: How would you compare what you thought being a writer would be like with the reality of being a full-time writer?



Thomas: It's exactly the same. Because what I thought being a full-time writer would be—that's what I've made my life to be. I stay at home.

TAD: Is that the attraction?

Thomas: Yes, that's the attraction. Really, I don't think I could work in a structured organization any more. I tried it a couple of years ago for a brief period of time on a motion picture. I was down working with the producer, directors, actors, and so forth. I found it a rather boring, dull, frustrating experience. A few more adjectives in there. It was awful. So I enjoy this self-discipline kick. You get up

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Marilu Henner, who portrays Hammett's girlfriend, and Frederic Forrest.

in the morning and you don't have to go in there. But if you don't go in there and do the work, you don't pay the rent. But there is also the feeling that you can go in and stay as long or as short as you want. It's your life.

TAD: At this point, what do you consider more important—fame, or fortune, or a combination thereof?

Thomas: I suppose that over the years I've been writing I have made about as much as a United States Senator. That is as much fortune as I ever expected to make. Some years have been much better, some years have been worse, of course. As for fame, I get my name in the *New York Times, The New Yorker, The Times* in London. That's as much fame as I ever expected—having been in the public relations business for many years. I'm not much interested in fame. But what I *do* like is the fact that I have written twenty books. And that occasionally somebody will call me up at 11:30 at night from someplace like Anchorage, Alaska and ask me when I am going to bring back McCorkle and Padillo. I mean, I like that. I don't mind at all.

TAD: What are some of your daily writing habits? You said you like the discipline of getting up . . .

Thomas: I don't like the discipline—I just get up. There's no discipline to it anymore. What I do is drink a lot of coffee and brood a lot, and then I go out and sit at the typewriter. I stay at the typewriter for approximately four hours. And that's from can until can't, because I can't write much longer than four hours any more. I don't want to. I used to work five days a week, but now I usually work six, for some reason. Sometimes it goes well, and sometimes it goes very badly indeed. And there is a great deal of rewriting. Almost a constant process of rewriting.

TAD: Do you think you're doing more rewriting with each book?

Thomas: I think so.

TAD: Why?

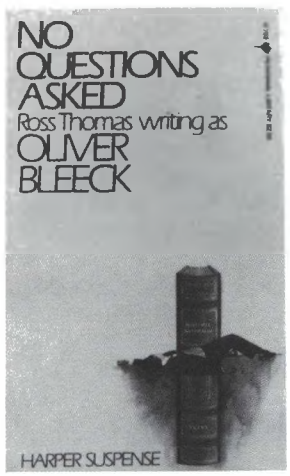
Thomas: I think I know more. I mean, I know more about what's wrong with what I've written. That is, I think I know how to improve it. And of course, sometimes changing six commas isn't going to make it better, but it can always be improved. And I have the time to do it. No deadlines or anything.

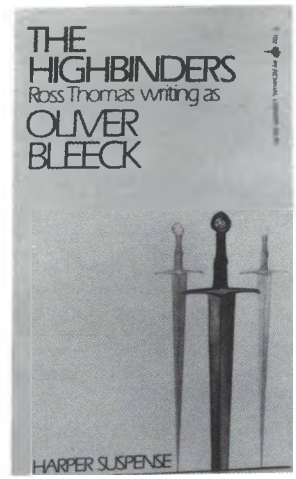
TAD: What's the emotional pattern of writing a book?

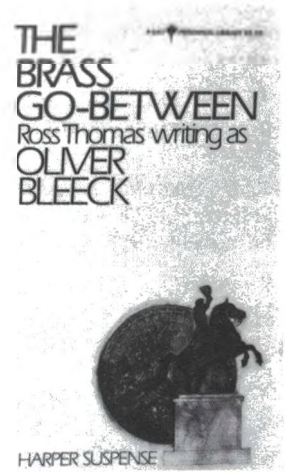
Thomas: The emotional pattern is: first—God, I don't want to do another one. Then you think, well, why not? An idea comes to you. You don't know where an idea will come from. Once, I was sitting on the beach and I saw a man walking down the beach with six greyhounds. I didn't know the man, or where he came from, but I started thinking about him. Out of that came a book.

TAD: *Chinaman's Chance.*

Frederick Forrest stars as *Hammett*, the famed detective-turned-mystery-novelist.







Thomas: Yes. And you'll get a germ of an idea, which might be good for a two- or three-paragraph newspaper story. Something will stick in your mind, and it will grow and develop. The next thing you know, you've got a character out of it. And from the character comes the plot. I think it's always been that way for me—the characters denote plot.

TAD: Okay, but that's not the emotional pattern. Now you're talking about the process of writing a book. What is your attitude as you go along?

Thomas: My emotional involvement with the characters? Is that what you're getting at?

TAD: No. With the whole book. I mean, there's a point at which you like the book. There's a point at which you kind of pull away, you want to throw it out.

Thomas: Yeah, about page fifty. When nothing has happened—(*Laughs*)—and you decide to just junk it. And then you say, Well, maybe I can make something happen on page fifty-two and nobody will notice! (*Laughs.*) Then you keep on going, and at about page two hundred—if you're writing a three hundred-page book—you say, Aha! Now I know why he did all those things in the first place! If you write the way I do. I am an intuitive writer. I don't outline, but somehow it all comes together. If it doesn't quite come together by page two hundred, I go back and fix little things so it will work out in the end. I think all writers do that.

The emotional involvement? You might grow fond of one character whom you introduced as what might be called a walk-on. Then suddenly he takes hold of a chapter or two. He becomes a principal character, and there's nothing you can do about it because he's just there. You don't know where he comes from, but you can write about him—or her, as the case may be—better than any of the others. So that's how it works. You never know what your emotional involvement is going to be. Sometimes it's high, sometimes it's low.

TAD: Do you hope your books will accomplish or achieve anything when you're done? Or is that too lofty?

Thomas: Oh, I think they are principally to entertain people, certainly not to educate them.

TAD: Do you ever feel a sort of twinge that maybe you ought to be making some mainstream attempt to be more literary?

Thomas: No, I don't think so. What is known as a "straight novel" is, I think, what you're talking about.

TAD: Well, you're known as a genre writer.

Thomas: Yeah. Does that bother me?

TAD: Are you strait-jacketed by that?

Thomas: No. It doesn't strait-jacket me because I write about anything I want to, any situation that exists. I sometimes wonder what the distinction is between a straight writer and a genre writer. I mean, good writing is good writing, bad writing is bad writing. One is about sex and profit, and the other is about profit and death. Which is the straight book and which is the crime novel? I'm not sure.

somehow. Toward redemption, I guess. That may be overstating it. But they're on top of their professions, and they throw it all away through a realization, I think, that whatever values they have been following are somehow false. Is that a conscious theme of yours?

Thomas: Or they accumulate enough money. No, what you'll find in them is essentially the loner whose particular skills, abilities, or whatever he possesses will be called back into service. For that reason, most of my characters are around thirty-eight, thirty-nine, or forty. Not all of them follow this pattern. For instance, in *Missionary Stew,* one of them did, but the protagonist, Draper Hare, did not. He was very active in his chosen profession.

TAD: That's interesting, because I don't consider him the protagonist.

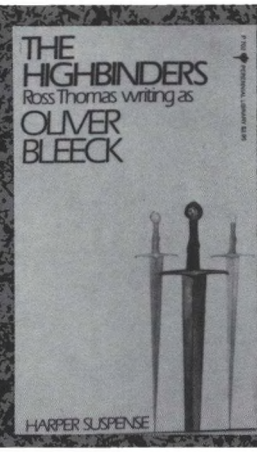
Thomas: Nobody does except me.

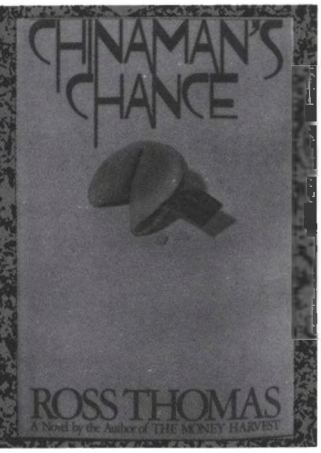
TAD: Right. That's why everybody's always so curious about why you end the book with him rather than the other character that you started with... what's his name?

Thomas: Morgan Citron.

TAD: Yes.

I thought Bronson was terribly miscast as St. Ives. But then, the picture wouldn't have been made unless Bronson had done it.





TAD: It's a bookstore category. They don't know where to put your book to sell it.

Thomas: Yeah. My first book was called *The Cold War Swap.* That wasn't my title. That was the publisher's title. My title was *The Christmas Help,* but the publishers were afraid they'd put it with the Christmas books. Who knows?

TAD: In many of your novels—*Mordida Man, Chinaman's Chance, The Fools in Town Are On Our Side, Missionary Stew*—you have protagonists who have fallen from grace and must work out of that

Thomas: Morgan Citron was a secondary character. I'm sorry.

TAD: You're wrong. (*Laughs.*)

Thomas: Well, he was to me. I only wrote the book.

TAD: Yeah, but he won't be in the movie.

Thomas: That's true.

TAD: This is a technique, then?

Thomas: It's a technique, it's a convention. I think the first time I did it was in *The Fools in Town Are On Our Side.* What I set out to do then, in 1969, was

try to show what happens to an intelligence agent. How does he make a living after he's no longer an intelligence agent? And that was the theme of the book—the germ of the idea. I've used that, and other devices too. Not always, but... What I have not done, or very rarely done, is to put my protagonist or hero in a work situation in which he goes to a steady job from nine to five and things happen to him. I don't care to write about that. Also, I don't have too much experience in that lately.

TAD: Well then, you're not concerning yourself with any particular motif that...

Thomas: Not redemption or anything like that. Just...

TAD: Just an aspect of the genre. Your early books, most of them, anyway, are written in the first person. Not as much lately. Any particular reason?

Thomas: Well, I think I wrote the first books in first person singular because you're not supposed to, so I thought I'd be perverse. Then I switched to third person. This last one, I've written in third person with one viewpoint, which I've never done before. Just to see what would happen. If you don't amuse yourself while you're writing, then there's no sense in writing. So I wanted to try a different technique. I suppose it's easier to write in the first person because you only have to give one viewpoint: what you see, what the character sees, and that's all you know about. To use several viewpoints, you have to think a little more.

TAD: So it's mostly for your own amusement.

Thomas: Yeah.

TAD: Under your pseudonym, Oliver Bleeck, you wrote what I consider the wittiest detective series—"detective" being kind of a broad term here—with your St. Ives go-between character. But you haven't done any of them in a long time. Why?

Thomas: I got tired of writing them. I found St. Ives very—charming—but I didn't think I was going any place with him, so I just didn't do any more.

TAD: His character wasn't growing, and so you just lost interest?

Thomas: Yeah.

TAD: I watched the Bronson version of your St. Ives, which, of course, is nothing like the book, but that's not really a consideration.

Thomas: No, I mean, the book is still there. If people want to read the book, they can still read it. If they want to look at the movie, they can look at the movie. One has nothing to do with the other.

TAD: What was your impression of the film?

Thomas: I thought Bronson was terribly miscast as St. Ives. But then, the picture wouldn't have been made unless Bronson had done it. So what can I say? What is there to say?

TAD: I think that *The Fools in Town Are On Our Side* is your most complex work. You've just said that you purposefully started out to write about what happens to an intelligence agent after he's no longer in the business. Were you purposefully trying to do a reversal on *Red Harvest?*

Thomas: I don't think so. My interest in city corruption goes back to when I was public relations director for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees—AFSME—the second largest union in the country now. I spent three or four very interesting years going from city to city, talking to people who knew where the bodies were buried in various city administrations. And from that I gathered background information that I later used in *The Fools in Town Are On Our Side.* But what I was trying to do there was to write about corruption—civic corruption, and perhaps moral corruption. And to use an ex-intelligence agent who had corrupted his agents, and to see how he could use those talents in civilian life. So I invented the character of the professional—corrupter of towns—who hires him to corrupt a whole town.

TAD: One of the reasons it's more complex is because you seem to take a lot more time on the background of this character than you have with any other characters you've written about.

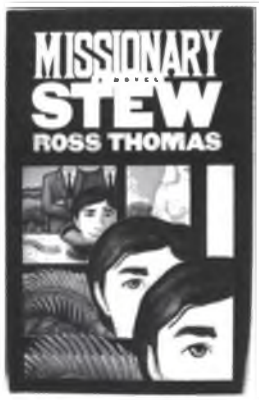
Thomas: Yes, but I was also writing about his youth —how he was brought up and how he came to be an intelligence agent. What brought him into the business, and what kind of persons would go into it. That's what I was trying to show. That, and what happens to him afterwards.

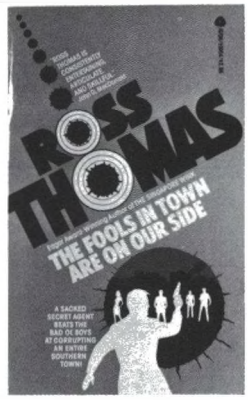
TAD: But you've never repeated that kind of investigation into motivation with other characters.

Thomas: No.

TAD: Once you'd done it, you'd...

Thomas: Yes. I mean, it's a rather exotic background to have: to be orphaned in Shanghai in the '30s at the age of seven, to grow up in a house of prostitution, to





be thrown into a Bridge House prison by the Japanese, to be repatriated, and so forth, and to grow up speaking Chinese and thinking in Chinese. It was a device...

TAD: Hard to top. Your books are always described with the same adjectives: witty, humorous, sophisticated, wry. Do you think this is a case in which the praise is limiting your audience? That because your style is unique, it's appreciated by fewer readers...

Thomas: I don't know what's limiting the audience. People who read the books seem to like them. I guess not enough people are reading them. What is enough people?

TAD: I thought you wanted a larger audience?

Thomas: Oh, well, everybody wants a larger audience, to make a lot of money. I'm not content with the number of books I sell, but then I'm not despairing either. I guess my attitude over the years has come to be indifference. It's getting that way. Because I don't have any high hope of becoming a bestselling author. I don't know if I'd be any happier if I were.

TAD: Maybe not happier...

Thomas: Richer?

TAD: More content. There could be more pressure, too.

Thomas: Yeah, I'm not looking for more pressure. I write the books, I send them to the publisher, they print them and attempt to sell them. And whether they do a good job is their business.

TAD: Yeah, but you get excellent reviews constantly.

Thomas: Well, then, I'll ask you a question: Whose fault is it? Should I change my style of writing? Should I change the kind of books I write? These are rhetorical questions.

TAD: That's kind of what I'm getting at. You must...

Thomas: I write the kind of books I like to read. I write the kind of books I like to write. Now, if I wrote the kind of books I don't like to read or write, then I wouldn't be too happy, would I?

TAD: No, but I think I sensed some discontent about the way your publishers handle the books.

Thomas: I think all writers are discontent about the way their publishers handle their books. Perhaps I'm more discontent than anyone else. With good reason? The publisher said they don't advertise my books because word of mouth sells books. But, unfortunately, my readers were intellectual recluses without friends and...they had nobody to tell, hence no word of mouth.

TAD: No point in advertising.

Thomas: No. That was the most tortured and ingenuous explanation I've ever heard.

TAD: You've been published by a lot of different houses. Two hardback houses, Avon, Pocket Books, Penguin, Berkeley/Jove... Any explanation?

Thomas: Whoever offers the most money.

TAD: How would you describe your prose style in tone? What conscious techniques do you use?

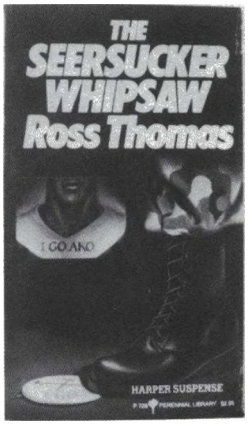
Thomas: Limpid. (*Laughs.*) Techniques? I don't know. I try to write in a not too mannered style with a bit of irony, a modicum of wit, active verbs, concrete images.

TAD: What writers do you like?

Thomas: The usual ones. When I grew up, one grew up on Hemingway, Chandler. I admired them both. John O'Hara. Dickens.

TAD: Do you still feel the same about them now, rereading them?

Thomas: Yes, I still think that Hemingway wrote some of the best exposition that there is. Chandler had some of the best dialogue and similes, which are very difficult to write. And I think that one book with a synthesis of both Hammett and Chandler—which I don't think the author was intending it to be, but the style is there—is *All The King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren. He never matched that particular style again in anything he wrote, but it was really a unique style. I liked that book very much. Other writers... O'Hara wrote good dialogue when he wanted to; he had a good ear. I don't know if anybody is influenced by Norman Mailer; I don't think they are.



TAD: How about some of your contemporaries or peers within the genre, that you still like?

Thomas: I like Ambler. I think he's educated half of America about the Balkans. I like W. T. Tyler. I like Le Carré. Elmore Leonard is very good—his later books—

TAD: Which do you consider your best novels?

Thomas: The last three.

TAD: Why those over the others?

Thomas: I don't know. I just hope I get better. If I said the first was my best novel, then I must have been going downhill since then. But I like the last three. I never go back and read them, but sometimes I go back just to check something and I'll read a passage that will occasionally make me wince. So it's better, I think, that I don't go back and read them. Oh, I should add that I like John D. MacDonald. I think he is, if not the best thriller writer going, close to it.

TAD: What is it about his writing that makes him, perhaps, the best?

Thomas: I got back from Spain about a year ago, and I had nothing to do, nothing to write. So I went to the garage, looking for something to read. I came across eighteen or nineteen Travis McGee novels which I had accumulated in paperback, and I re-read them one after another, like eating potato chips. He has a very clear, lucid style. He has a wonderful ear. The plots are serviceable. He also has an observant eye. And he's put all this into sixty books, which must be some kind of record. And I think he's quite good. If there ever was a journeyman novelist, it must be MacDonald.

TAD: What do you consider your own strengths and weaknesses in your writing?

Thomas: Plot is my weakness. I don't like to plot. It isn't any fun.

TAD: Probably why you don't outline.

Thomas: And my strength is dialogue, maybe. And character—at least I hope so. All the plots have been written already. All the hooks and crooks and various channels you can go into and come out of. I'm interested in surprise and suspense.

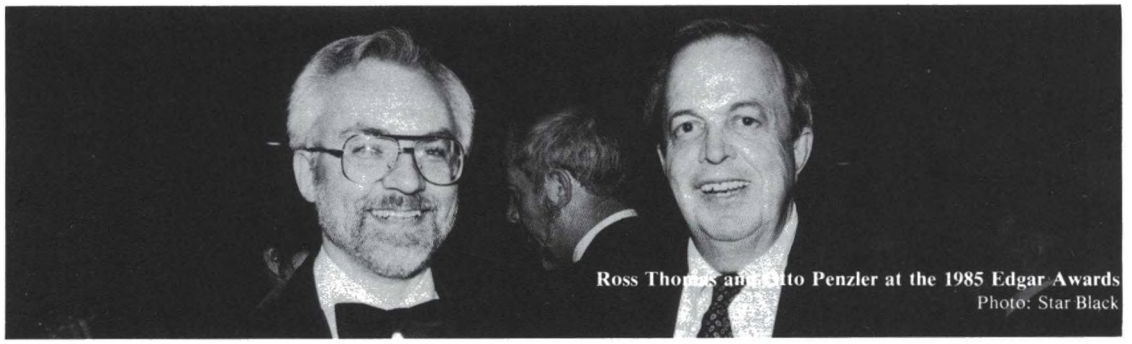
TAD: You said during my interview with you for *Writer's Digest* that one of the reasons you didn't outline beforehand is that you like to go into a story and discover things, and be surprised. You like to walk into the room *with* the character.

Thomas: Yes, that's true.

TAD: After all your books and success, doing a lot of screenplays, etc., do you have any idea where you want your career to go from here?

Thomas: Yes. I want to retire.

TAD: Retire from writing?



Ross Thomas and Otto Penzler at the 1985 Edgar Awards
Photo: Star Black

Thomas: No, but why not? You can retire from writing, go into the commodities market.

TAD: Politics?

Thomas: No, I would prefer to write some more novels. I'm not enamored of screenplay writing. It's like being a draftsman. Not an architect, but a draftsman. With a novel, you're not only the draftsman and architect, but also the carpenter, bricklayer, and everything else. Which is perhaps why I like to write novels. I think group anything is suspect. Motion pictures are a group activity. Whether it's an art form or not, I'm not sure.

TAD: How would you say being a writer has affected your personal life, for better or worse?

Thomas: For better. I don't have to listen to as much inane chatter as I used to have to listen to. I don't have to talk to anybody that I don't want to. I can live where I want to live, travel where I want to travel. I don't have to check in with anybody. It's given me a certain sense of freedom. I will revise that: the money I earn has given me a certain sense of freedom.

TAD: Do you feel economic pressure because you are self-employed?

Thomas: I hope so. Either that, or I'm living in a fool's paradise. The bills have to be paid, put a roof over my head...

TAD: Is that an explanation for your forays into screen writing?

Thomas: That's one of them. Actually, much of my income from all the years I've been writing has come from motion pictures, in the form of options and outright purchases. I have made a great deal of money from motion pictures, for which I will be eternally grateful.

TAD: How did you get involved in the film industry?

Thomas: Well, Hilly Elkins, who is the producer of *Golden Boy,* optioned my first book. He optioned my second book; he wanted me to write the screenplay, but he decided to make it a musical comedy, so he asked me to write the book for a musical comedy.

TAD: Which book was this?

Thomas: The Seersucker Whip Saw. And from there, things got better. And then one day Billy Friedkin bought *The Brass Go-Between* and went to his partner Phil Dantoni and said, This is our next project. Dantoni said he would check and found that Milton Berle had optioned it already. And Friedkin said: Go do a deal with them. So Berle went into a partnership with Friedkin and Dantoni, and they had me do the screenplay. They didn't like my screenplay, so Friedkin did one of his own. Warner Bros. didn't like *that,* so the picture never got made. And instead they made some clinker called *The French Connection,* which made about ninety-two million dollars. (LAUGHS.) And then Dantoni said: Why don't we do a TV movie about this go-between? And I had to threaten to sue them.

TAD: You mean the TV movie with Charles Durning? That was a pretty good movie, for a TV movie.

Thomas: I didn't mind it.

TAD: It's too bad you didn't get any credit. You were recently asked to do a rewrite on the script for *Hammett.* You even had a small part – a degenerate.

Thomas: A pervert. That film was a learning experience. Here they had spent nine million dollars and

they had about one hour of film. And from that I managed to salvage twenty or thirty minutes. And, taking these unconnected parts, which [Francis Ford] Coppola thought were serviceable—could be used here or there—I had to create a story. With unconnected parts, mind you. So I created the story, and they brought in the same director. He wasn't too happy with not having his film the way he directed it. There was a certain amount of tension between the producer and the director and writers and actors. But still they brought it in with what money they had, about 2.3 million dollars. And if it is a mish-mash, it was destined to be such. I think what I learned mostly was how *not* to make a motion picture. I mean, *first* you get a story, a script, that everyone agrees upon. And then you go from there. And then if the picture is a failure, you can blame it on the writer, or the director, or both. But to have fifteen writers on a script and then shoot it and decide you've made a mistake—it shows a certain lack of foresight.

TAD: Have you seen *Hammett?*

Thomas: Oh, yes.

TAD: What did you think?

Thomas: I thought it has a few moments that aren't bad, but the acting is not what I would like because some of the time the actors were inventing the dialogue as they went along. The story is not much because it was hard to connect all those disparate pieces. But it has a certain mood and tone and it is fairly good, I'd say.

TAD: I enjoyed it. It got good critical response.

wrote some more scripts, and nothing happened to them either. So they brought in another writer or two, and then they shot it. And then they junked it. And so that's the...

TAD: Sordid history. Well, considering the relative smoothness of your career, comparatively... You wrote your first book in six weeks, sent it off in some brown wrapping and string, and sold it, and had the film rights sold. That's pretty much the way it's happened with every book since then. And now here you are in a hillside Malibu...

Thomas: High above the Pacific Ocean in my palatial Malibu home, that's what you should say.

TAD: Book-lined study—I haven't seen it, but I'll assume that, with your fans calling you at 11:30 from Anchorage wanting to quit their jobs and write full time...

Thomas: That's right. Of course, I always suspect they've had a little to drink.

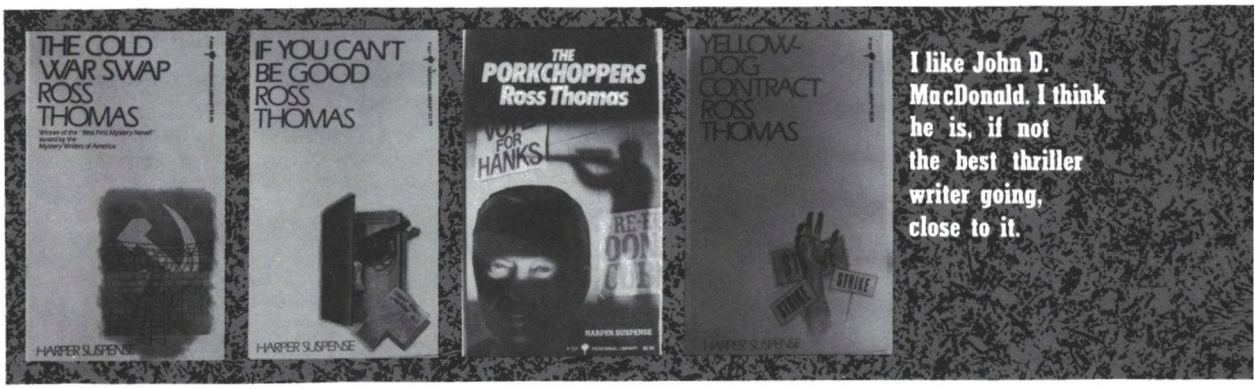
TAD: What more do you want?

Thomas: A long and happy life.

TAD: Money?

Thomas: More money, of course. Rapidly approaching my golden years, so I can check into Rossmore or something like that—a community where I won't be raped and pillaged and can just keep on writing.

TAD: Can you really see yourself retiring?



Thomas: It's gaining a cult following for some reason or another, but it could have been much better.

TAD: Brian Garfield interviewed you and Joe Gores, who wrote the novel, for TAD.

Thomas: Joe also wrote about five screenplays of his own, and finally he threw up his hands in despair. And then they brought in some more writers who

Thomas: Even if I did retire from writing, I'd still keep on writing in my head. I'd just not put it down on paper.

TAD: You'd have to put it down.

Thomas: Why?

TAD: So you can edit it.

Thomas: (*laughs*): I can edit it in my head. □

ALICE IN

By Frank D. McSherry

"LIFE," the Master once commented to his friend and colleague Dr. Watson in "A Case of Identity," "is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things . . . which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes . . . working through generations, and leading to the most *outré* results . . ."

Prophetic words. Within four years, Sherlock Holmes's investigation of some strange coincidences in seemingly unrelated criminal cases would lead him to the discovery of a secret criminal organization so vast and dangerous that he would be forced to flee for his life. He would be fated, finally, to a hand-to-hand struggle to the death with the group's sinister leader, on a mountain ledge in the Alps, high above the roaring falls of the Reichenbach. The "strange coincidences," it turned out, were not coincidences at all, but parts of a regular and recurring pattern.

Some of the mysteries of history, past and present, may never be solved. Who was Jack the Ripper, who slashed to red ribbons the pitiful prostitutes of fog-shrouded Whitechapel, and ceased his operations as mysteriously as he had begun?

Where is the lost sepulcher of the Scourge of God, containing the corpse of Attila in a huge gold coffin surrounded by the splendor of a continent's loot, buried deep below the confluence of two rivers whose courses were changed to hide the site from man for half a thousand years?

Who was the Man in the Iron Mask? In July 1669, a troop of the King's cavalry escorted a man in a black silk mask to the mountain prison of Pignerol and, later, to the Bastille in Paris. The instructions of the Minister of War regarding the prisoner were clear: "It is of the first importance that he is not allowed to tell what he knows to any living person."[1]

Oddly, the prisoner lived in the greatest luxury, being given the best food, served, it is said, on plates of gold, with silent servants waiting hand and foot. But he wore the mask constantly—eating, sleeping, being shaved, taking Communion—until his death 34 years later.

Why was he kept alive, if his knowledge were so dangerous to the King? Louis XIV and his ministers were no respecters of anyone's rights. If he had to be kept alive, why was all the luxury necessary? Napoleon, upon his accession to the throne, had all the records of France and most of the courts of Europe searched for the answer—and found nothing. Time, it seems, kept these secrets well.[2]

Pilots, man your planes! What happened to the famous flight of five Avenger torpedo bombers that took off from Fort Lauderdale Naval Air Station on a training flight on December 5, 1945? Flight 19 left at 2:10 that afternoon, 25 minutes behind schedule, for a navigational training and bombing practice flight over some uninhabited islands of the Grand Bahamas group to the east. About an hour and a half later, the flight commander, Lieutenant Charles C. Taylor, an experienced pilot, combat veteran, and winner of the Air Medal, radioed to base that he

MURDERLAND

PART 1

When Mystery Writers Allude to the White Rabbit, Is It Just a Red Herring?

seemed to be lost and could not find Fort Lauderdale. It was some time before the authorities realized that the situation was serious. How could Taylor, or anyone, be lost in broad daylight and good weather, when all he had to do was fly west, into the afternoon sun, until he reached the U.S. coast, turn, and fly along it until he reached either identifying landmarks or an airport? This was the usual emergency procedure, known to Taylor and the other pilots, all four of whom were in the final stages of their training.

No trace of the flight was ever found. A Martin Mariner search plane sent after them also disappeared without a trace.

The Lieutenant Taylor incident shares many of the characteristics of such famous Vanisher cases as those of Judge Crater, Dorothy Arnold, and Aimee Semple McPherson. The typical Vanisher loves to walk, is in superb physical condition, is a teacher or student, and disappears after an Altered Vacation (coming back early or not going at all) or after watching or participating in a Theatrical Performance of some kind. He carries little or no money, dressing in an attention-getting manner that permits quick identification at a distance.[3] Finally, the Vanisher receives a letter or note, a Ticket to Nowhere, just before he vanishes.[4] Taylor was a teacher—a flight instructor—and as a pilot he was obviously in good physical condition. He had an Altered Holiday, according to researcher Larry Kusche in *The Disappearance of Flight 19* (1980): "Charles Taylor, while stationed in Miami, was originally scheduled to go on leave the first week of December, but when some of his students were released from the service, he was transferred to Fort Lauderdale and the leave was postponed."[5] The Ticket to Nowhere characteristic is also present. According to Taylor's roommate, Clark Miller, Taylor "received a letter, a report, or a message of some kind that 'considerably agitated him' not long before he was due to leave. Taylor did not say anything about it, and Miller did not ask. Taylor placed it in his pocket and took it with him to sea"[6] on that last flight.

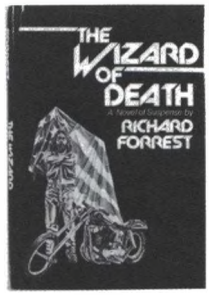
And whatever happened to West Point cadet Richard Colvin Cox, who disappeared from the grim gray citadel on the Hudson on the night of January 14, 1950? In January, Cox had returned to the Point to begin his second year, coming back from a Christmas vacation he apparently wanted to alter. His mother said Cox "had not been anxious to return," and he had discussed an elopement with his girl, which would have meant instant dismissal. On the 7th, Cox had a visitor, a man who claimed—falsely—to be a former Ranger who had known Cox when they were stationed in Germany. Returning to barracks that night after dinner with "George" (Cox gave no last name), Cox claimed the man was a sadistic braggart who had mutilated German soldiers he had killed in the war and had murdered a German girl he had gotten pregnant after the war.

Cox then startled his roommates. He was dozing briefly over his books when the evening tattoo sounded. Jerking awake, Cox raced out of the room

to the head of the barracks stairs and called down them, "Is Alice down there?"[8] He refused to answer his roommates' question about who "Alice" was.

On the evening of the 14th, Cox, a sports fan (his hobby was cross-country running), went to the Army-Rutgers basketball game, got a pass to go to the Hotel Thayer, and left for dinner with "George." He left his money behind. Cox wore his striking full-dress West Point gray uniform with caped gray overcoat, the most conspicuous military uniform in America. He did not reach the hotel and was never seen again.

The "nonsense" words in "Alice" are created by a mechanism frequently found in dreams: "beamish," for example, means anyone who is beaming and of Flemish extraction.



His worried roommates covered for the late Cox until morning and then informed the authorities. The search that followed was perhaps the most intense, widespread, and thorough in history. A former Ranger of Cox's old company was found, but he had an ironclad alibi. Someone had impersonated him. There was no trace of anyone named Alice anywhere in Cox's past life.

Cox himself had disappeared as completely as if he had never existed.

Darkness, mystery...

Cox's call for some unknown and unfindable Alice brings to mind the most famous Alice of all, the heroine of Lewis Carroll's masterpiece of children's literature, *Alice in Wonderland* (1863) and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). The little girl who was the model for her, Alice Pleasance Liddell, daughter of Henry George Liddell, Dean of Christ Church College, insisted that the shy, stuttering former teacher and clergyman write down the entertaining tales he had told her and her little friends, and thus made him immortal.

And surely this sunny fantasy, about a little girl who walks through mirrors into another world, or falls down a huge rabbit hole to elsewhere, meeting cards that come alive, a man-sized blue caterpillar sitting on a huge mushroom, a big cat which slowly fades into invisibility until only the smile is left, and hedgehogs that act as croquet balls, all told to little girls "all on a golden afternoon" boating down the Thames in Victoria's England, is a more cheerful and happy theme than vanished torpedo bombers and missing West Point cadets.

Yet, outside of the Bible and, of course, the Sherlock Homes stories, there is probably no work of literature that appears so often in tales of crime and detection as *Alice in Wonderland*. Not only that, it also appears *only* in connection with a certain *type* of crime.

"Strange coincidences..."

Is this true? Let us examine mysteries in which Carroll and *Alice* appear, starting with the stories in which the Alice themes are major plot devices.

Maybe it's the fog, or maybe the monstrous night outside, pressing against the window panes and trying to get in, or maybe it's the booze that makes Doc Blagden, editor of the *Carmel City Courier,* listen to the jolly little fat man in "The Jabberwocky Murders," a novelette, though billed as a novel, by Frederic Brown in *Thrilling Mystery,* (Summer 1944). Doc drinks a little too much, always has, ever since his girl died years ago and took with her all his hopes and ambition and purpose in life. He's been content, or resigned, to stay a small-town newspaper editor ever since, drinking a little too much every Thursday night after the weekend edition has been put to bed—and talking about his favorite work of literature, *Alice in Wonderland,* and its author, to anyone available.

So he listens to the little fat man, Yehudi Smith, that Thursday night. Who's Yehudi?

Yehudi belongs to the Vorpal Blades—"An organization, Doctor. A very small one, but just possibly a very important one." It believes that the Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, the mathematician of some note who wrote the Alice books under the Lewis Carroll pen name, discovered another world, an alternate plane of existence, and a way to enter it physically. The Alice books are based on fact, describing a real, fantastic world in disguised and guarded words. There are other hints in his *Symbolic Logic,* published in 1896, two years before his death.

Hints—because the things in that other world are real and dangerous: the huge, invisible cats, the intelligent caterpillar-like beings, and that creature of nightmare Dodgson called the "Jabberwock"—"the jaws that bite, the claws that catch..."

"We have checked our findings very thoroughly," Smith says. "One of us...checked them too thoroughly, without taking proper precautions. That is why there is a vacancy in our small group."

Smith hands Doc a newspaper clipping Doc recalls crossing his desk a couple of days ago, about a recluse found slain in the woods not so many miles away, literally torn to pieces as if by some savage, unknown beast—and suddenly Carroll's lines about the Jabberwock, which, "with eyes of flame, came whiffling through tulgey wood and burbled as it came," aren't so funny any more.

We'd like you to take his place, Smith says, and meet the organization at tonight's meeting.

Through the fog of the night and the fog of whiskey in his mind, Doc sets out with Smith toward the old abandoned house in the woods outside town that he feared as a haunted house when a boy, toward a table with a gold key and a bottle labeled "Drink Me"—through a night of multiple murders, missing men in a car that enters one end of a dark forest road and doesn't come out the other, and a hate-filled sheriff as dangerous to him as the criminals.

Moody and tense and ingenious, this is a suspenseful and effective thriller. Brown expanded it into novel form later, as *Night of the Jabberwock* (1950), lightening the mood a bit and changing a few names, to produce one of his most successful works.

Carroll and *Alice* provide clues as well as themes in *Death Through the Looking Glass* by Richard Forrest (1978). Lyon Wentworth, a former Army captain who did intelligence work in Korea and who is now the author of a phenomenally successful series of children's books, meets the impossible one lovely summer evening at the seashore. Wentworth's hobby is an unusual one—amateur ballooning—and he's up for a ride that evening when he sights a small plane the wild paint job of which makes it easily identifiable even at a distance. It's a Piper Cub belonging to his old friend, lawyer Tom Giles. Suddenly, black smoke pours from the plane. It dives, apparently under power and control, more and more steeply toward the sea. A moment later, it is gone.

Wentworth takes bearings and heads for shore to contact the Coast Guard rescue ship, which finds no trace of the plane.

The next night, Wentworth's phone rings. He recognizes the voice: it's the dead man. Giles says he needs help, desperately. Someone is trying to kill him.

The next day, the Coast Guard finds the missing plane on the seabed—but miles away from the area where Wentworth saw it go down. In the cabin is Giles, dead from a gunshot wound. Beside him is a woman's purse, with a driver's license made out to one Carol Dodgson.

The mysteries grow. Wentworth is certain of the bearings he took yesterday—the plane couldn't have

drifted *that* far. And surely dead men cannot phone their friends. But the coroner's report suggests that, while immersion in cold salt water makes determination of the time of death difficult, Giles could have been dead for several hours before that phone call woke Wentworth at midnight.

And who is the missing "Carol Dodgson"? Whomever she is, she doesn't seem to have voted, gone to school, applied for a phone or electricity—or even to have been born, at least not in this state. Is there any "Carol" at all? Unfindable Carol. . .

Using his Army training, Wentworth investigates, aided by his wife Bea, a professional politician and former State Representative, and currently Secretary of State. He gets additional help from big, tough Rocco Herbert, former Ranger Captain and now the town's police chief, who worked with Lyon in Korea. The case involves an airport manager badly in need of money; Giles's unhappy wife, living a lie to help her husband's career; a gangster karate expert who has the misfortune to have a run-in with Rocco; and a liquor-loving toymaker with a factory full of Alice dolls looking into mirrors with innocent blue eyes, and long golden hair trailing down to their waists. Finally, there's the People of the Blossom, a religious cult of beggars with bowls, whose leader teaches that the human race is about to destroy itself in atomic fire, leaving an Earth empty of human life—except for his people, who will survive in the mines he's been buying and who will come forth to repopulate the world.

Entertaining, moderately hardboiled, and fast-moving, the novel builds up to some genuine suspense near the end, when Bea suddenly realizes that the friend with whom she's alone in the house is the killer, and comes to an exciting climax with two badly wounded men in a runaway balloon high over the Atlantic.

This novel is the second in a solid series featuring Wentworth, Bea, and Rocco. It was preceded by *A Child's Garden of Death* (1974) and followed by *The Wizard of Death* (1977). The latter has a striking deductive exploit by Wentworth. Knowing absolutely nothing about a political assassin, except that he used a stolen hunting rifle and rode a motorcycle, in a state full of deer hunters and motorcyclists, Wentworth finds the man's name and address in a matter of minutes.

One of the finest deductive hours of amateur criminologist Ellery Queen occurs in "The Adventure of the Mad Tea Party." When Ellery arrives during a thunderstorm at the isolated Long Island mansion of wealthy Richard Owens, he steps—literally—right into the midst of a scene from *Alice in Wonderland.* There in the living room, he sees a dormouse nearly six feet tall, a white rabbit also the size of a human being, a man in a tall beaver hat buttering toast, and a lovely, willowy girl in a child's dress of Victorian days, with long white stockings, black pumps, and blonde hair to her waist. All are seated around a tea table.

Ellery is a bit taken aback—but it's just a rehearsal for a play skit planned as a present by Owens for his son's ninth birthday tomorrow. The costumes have been borrowed from the Broadway hit *Alice* by its charming star Emily Willowes, who plays Alice to Owens's Mad Hatter.

A fun idea for a weekend house party, but tensions that aren't funny at all begin to flow between Owens, who gets meaner with each drink, and his bullied wife Laura, and between Gardner, the architect who built Owens's mansion, and his red-headed, hot-eyed, restless wife and Owens's shrewd mother-in-law. Ellery goes to bed early.

In the morning, he is greeted with startling news: sometime during the night, Owens has disappeared. Apparently, Owens is still wearing his eye-catching Mad Hatter's costume; his other clothes are neatly in place, his bed unslept in. Ellery suggests waiting before notifying the police. Perhaps Owens has merely gone for an early morning walk—but the day wears on into evening and still there is no trace of Owens anywhere—and then the mad gifts begin to arrive at the door. . . .

Ellery sets to work, amid puzzling clues that are Carrollesque in all their aspects, including a carefully hand-delivered letter which turns out to be absolutely empty and an electric clock that "has a disappearing quality, like the Chesire cat"—now you see it, now you don't. Queen himself calls this "one of the most remarkable cases in my experience."

This frequently reprinted short story is one of the finest—indeed, perhaps the finest—of all Queen's shorter exploits. It is no wonder that "Ellery Queen"—authors Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee—chose this story for inclusion in their majestic anthology of the classic tales of crime and detection, *101 Years Entertainment* (1941).

" 'Twas brillig and the slithy toves. . . " A murdered man is found, slumped over a first edition of *Alice in Wonderland,* finger pointing to that famous line of Carroll's poetry, the tip covering the last word. Accident or dying message? Amateur criminologist Lamont Cranston, in actuality that dreaded, black-cloaked crimefighter known as The Shadow, is faced with that question in "Jabberwocky Thrust," a novelette billed as a novel by Bruce Elliott, writing under the house name "Maxwell Grant," in *Shadow Mystery* for October-November 1947.

The Lewis Carroll Association, which is to *Alice* what the Baker Street Irregulars and their Scion Societies are to Sherlock Holmes, is holding its 21st annual masked ball at the Long Island estate of millionaire financier Ten Eyk. Guests are costumed as characters from *Alice in Wonderland.* Eyk is a strong Carroll fan; his confidential secretary, Alice Anstruther, who's costumed as Alice, believes he hired her largely because she resembles the heroine of the books. Indeed, Eyk has left the Association a cool million dollars in his will.

Eyk suspects that several near-fatal "accidents" with speeding cars and falling bricks may have been murder attempts. Fearful of more, he invites Cranston and Inspector Joe Cardonna of New York's Homicide Squad to the party. On the crowded ballroom floor, Eyk is stabbed with such violence that he goes sprawling. But Eyk, dressed as the White Knight, has prudently worn real armor, and the blow merely breaks the dagger. Neither Cranston nor Cardonna can tell who struck the blow, though Association treasurer Marshall, dressed as the White Rabbit, was nearby.

Only a few minutes later, the murderer strikes again, this time successfully, in a way which brings a new and ghastly reality to the popular phrase from *Alice* that the guests have been merrily quoting: " 'Off with his head!' the Duchess said."

Police actually saw the murderer entering the library with the victim, but that's no help. He was masked and wore a newspaper costume, removed after the crime and thrown in the fireplace to smoulder. Now he moves among them, still masked, in his original costume.

And more puzzling still, Marshall has somehow disappeared, apparently still in his striking White Rabbit apparel.

Clad in black, The Shadow moves silently through the nighted mansion to prevent another vicious killing and solve the clue from Carroll, in a weak and generally unsatisfactory novelette which has many similarities with the much superior Queen short story. And the solution to the Carroll clue is, to put it kindly, hard to believe.

In Edward D. Hoch's ingenious short story "The Theft of the Venetian Window," the emphasis is on Carroll himself rather than Alice. I want you to steal a mirror for me, fat Milo Mason tells professional thief Nick Velvet, who charges $20,000 each to steal only utterly worthless objects but who gets a surprising amount of business.

It's made of cheap glass, set in a plain wooden frame—but, Mason says, "this mirror is the most valuable object on the face of the earth." It's a gateway to other worlds, alternate universes where history took a different turn, where Napoleon won in Russia, and the Soviet Union never existed; where the North lost the Civil War, and the Confederate States

of America became a new nation, where the Vikings colonized North America centuries before Columbus, and the United States is unknown. . . .

"These. . .universes touch at only one point on earth. That mirror in Venice is more than a mirror—it is a window connecting those alternates. We live in one world, but a step through that mirror would put us in another, far different world. . . .Don't scoff, Mr. Velvet! There's some evidence that the story of this very mirror might have inspired *Through the Looking-Glass*."

Obviously, Mason's elevator doesn't reach the top floor, but his money's good. Nick takes the job and the next plane to Venice, an exotic city set on 118 islands and linked by 400 bridges, where you phone for gondolas instead of taxis.

At the apartment of Giorgi Lambazi, dealer in rare tapestries, one of which, an eighteenth-century work entitled "The Indian Discovery of Europe," shows American Indians stepping ashore from canoes at a European fishing village, Nick views the strangely clouded mirror. He drops sleeping pills secretly into Lambazi's coffee, leaves, waits outside the locked room for fifteen minutes for the pills to take effect, and breaks in—to find Lambazi slumped in a chair facing the mirror—with his throat cut from ear to ear!

It's murder, all right. There's no trace of the weapon, and there's no one in sight, either in the room or the adjoining kitchen, where the faucets are covered with blood washed from the unseen killer's hands. But the only window is shuttered and bolted on the inside.

How did the killer get in? And once in, how did he get out? Milo Mason knows—through the Venetian mirror, into another world. . . .

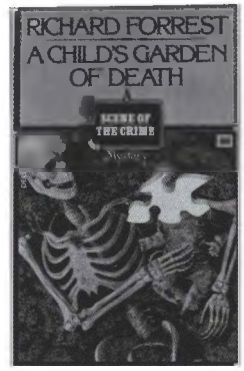
Nick investigates, learning that a lot of people want that seemingly worthless mirror—a pretty girl tour guide, an Italian gangster, an American businessman—and finally solves the case by solving the clue of the bloodstains on the faucets. This is one of the better stories by one of the most clever and prolific writers in the field of short mystery fiction. It was first published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* for November 1975.

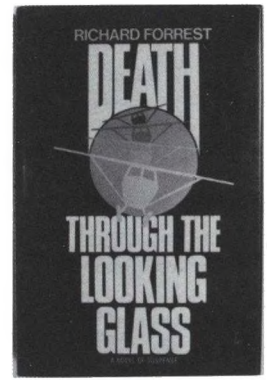
Nick encounters another mystery connected with *Alice* in "The Theft of the White Queen's Menu," a short story in EQMM for March 1983. Here Nick meets the White Queen, a lovely, innocent-looking platinum blonde named Sandra Paris, who takes not only her professional name but her methods of operation from Carroll.

"Remember the White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*? Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast! Well, I don't believe them, but I do them" she tells Nick.

For Sandra Paris steals only before breakfast, and only in ways that seemingly couldn't possibly happen. One morning, criminal lawyer Douglas Shelton glances into his furniture-filled study as he passes it to fix breakfast. A few moments later, the kitchen phone rings and a feminine voice tells him to look into the study. Shelton does and finds that all the furniture has vanished—the heavy filing cabinets full of his confidential papers, the big desk, the rug, the pictures on the walls, and even the window curtains and shades. They disappeared without a sound, all within the time it took him to make a glass of orange juice.

To prevent a murder, Nick must solve not only this but another impossible crime committed by Sandra, devise some slick tricks of his own, and win the bet he has made with the White Queen—that he can commit a crime as impossible as any of her own. He has to steal a menu right out of her hands, in broad daylight, without her even knowing it's gone until he tells her!





The result is one of Hoch's cleverest short stories, packed with no fewer than three impossible crimes, all slickly done and neatly solved.

The White Queen returns, this time in a head-on clash with Nick, in "The Theft of the Overdue Library Book," a short story in EQMM for March 1984. Nick discovers she's taking on a job he turned down, the kidnapping of his childhood friend, restaurateur Tony Wilde. Don't worry about it, Wilde tells him; I take a walk through the city park every morning before breakfast, sure, but I've got a loyal and dangerous bodyguard with me—Bruno, my big German shepherd.

Nevertheless, Nick asks his girl Gloria to shadow Wilde on the next morning's walk. Wilde enters a small concrete-walled men's room, leaving the dog outside on guard. He's in there a long time. Worried, Gloria phones Nick from a public phone booth twenty steps away. "Nicky, he walked through the door—that one and only door—and he never came out."

When Nick arrives, he finds the windowless concrete box empty except for a small business card with a neat legend: "The White Queen: Impossible Things Before Breakfast."

Bewildered, Nick sets out to find his missing friend, crack a library computer code (with a startlingly simple technique), find and steal a seemingly valueless book, and solve the crime of the White Queen and the vanishing man. The solution isn't up to the problem, but the story as a whole is vintage Hoch, ingenious and filled with clever tricks.

Detective novelist George Bagby is strolling in Central Park late one day—it's that kind of a spring day—when he sees a small boy playing with a dragon under a giant granite mushroom with a huge stone caterpillar on top. All around them are statues of characters from *Alice in Wonderland.*

With twilight coming on fast, it's a little late for a kid to be alone in the park. Where's your mommy, kid? asks Bagby.

Four-year-old Alexander Brown looks up from his dragon—well, his stuffed toy dinosaur, but to Alexander it's a dragon—and calmly replies he isn't out with his mommy, he's out with Alice, his nursemaid.

Okay, Bagby says patiently, where's this Alice?

She went down the rabbit hole, Alexander replies.

The situation gets *Mysteriouser and Mysteriouser* (by George Bagby, 1965). A well-dressed, hard-looking giant of a man named Gordon, who claims to be a friend of the Brown family, shows up, yanks Alexander from under the mushroom, and says he'll take him home—but Alexander yells that he's never seen Gordon before and starts to scream like a fire siren.

Could this be a kidnapping?

Nervously—the much bigger Gordon looks as if he's been made from melted sledgehammers, and Bagby is under no illusions about which of them will end up in the hospital if push comes to shove—Bagby stands his ground and insists Gordon take the kid to the police station. Fortunately, the kid's friend, patrolman Clancy, happens to arrive, and that settles that. (No one argues with Clancy; Clancy is a peaceful man, if you know what I mean.) A visit with the Brown family confirms that Gordon is a family friend who saw Alexander only when the boy was asleep. Alice, who finally shows up hours late, is fired for spending time in the park with her boyfriend. The grateful young Browns invite Bagby to their apartment for dinner.

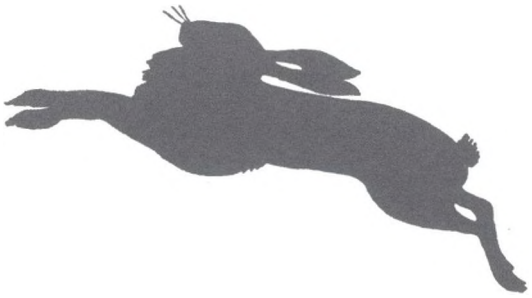
All's well that ends well—but why does Bagby feel such tension at the Brown apartment? Why does a hit-and-run driver try to kill him as he leaves? And when Alice's boyfriend is tossed over a bridge onto a concrete roadway forty feet below in the middle of rush-hour traffic, Inspector Schmidt of Homicide enters the case.

The chase speeds up when Brown, a massively strong man who recently interrupted a vacation on the West Coast with his wife's parents, suddenly steps out of his apartment and disappears—without a word to his wife, without packing, taking just the clothes he's wearing. It's like that scene in *Lohengrin*, his wife says: "I can't stop being afraid...that the swan boat has come for Richard and I'll never see him again." The chase climaxes with confrontation and gunfire in Central Park at night.

The novel is flawed by a long, dragging scene—Bagby's dinner with the Browns—that takes up a tenth of the book, but it picks up speed to rush toward an exciting and suspenseful ending. About half the book is merely competent, medium-boiled, but it comes alive when Inspector Schmidt steps onstage. Schmitty is a remarkably capable detective, whose rapid rise from patrolman to plain-clothes ranks was influenced by the fact that his feet hurt—detectives, Schmitty had noted, do a lot less walking

than beat cops—and his interrogations of the Browns—a patient, courteous, but relentless searching for the truth—are the best parts of the book.

A touch of horror pervades Gahan Wilson's "The



Sea Was Wet As Wet Could Be," a short story that can be considered either borderline crime or borderline fantasy, depending on the point of view. After an all-night drinking party, five neurotic losers go to a long, lonely stretch of empty beach for a picnic. Here they meet two peculiar men dressed as characters right out of Carroll—a short man wearing a hat of folded newspaper and an apron, who carries a saw, and his bigger companion, sporting a bushy mustache and a lovable smile that cancels the feeling of fear which Phil, the public relations man, feels at the sight of them. Farr and Tweedy are the Walrus and the Carpenter to the life—they're even looking for oysters—and they're superb companions. The others—the bullying boss, the groveling subordinate and his domineering wife, the suicidal girl—become alive and happy for the first time in years. They willingly go for a walk with Farr and Tweedy, down the beach and around a dune and out of sight.

"O oysters come and walk with us!"
The Walrus did beseech...

They're a long time coming back, and suddenly Phil realizes that beneath the charming lines of that children's poem lies a sinister possible meaning:

And then I realized it had grown cold...and that there wasn't a bird or a cloud in the sky.

The sea was wet as wet could be,
The sands were dry as dry.
You could not see a cloud, because
No cloud was in the sky;
No birds were flying overhead—
There were no birds to fly.

That part of the poem was, after all, a perfect description of a lifeless earth. It sounded beautiful at first, it sounded benign. But then you read it and you realize that Carroll was describing barrenness and desolation.

Frightened, Phil remembers what the Walrus and the Carpenter did in *Through the Looking Glass* when they went for a walk on the beach with their "oysters." He heads for the dune—and horror.

The story, first published in *Playboy* for May 1967, is half-funny, half-scarey, and very much in the vein of the macabre cartoons which have brought Wilson well-deserved fame.

The many amusing and clever "nonsense" words Carroll created in *Alice* actually have quite specific meanings, as Humpty-Dumpty (and Carroll) pointed out. The words are created by a mechanism frequently found in dreams, parts of two words being combined to form a third which carries the meaning of both—a portmanteau word, as Humpty-Dumpty puts it. "Beamish," for example, means anyone who is beaming and of Flemish extraction; "brillig" means four o'clock in the afternoon, time to start broiling things for dinner. Lieutenant Carter Leigh of the cryptographic department, aboard the flagship of Earth's far-future space navy, puts this fact to good use in "Communications," a novelette by Edwin James (James A. Gunn) in *Startling Stories* (September 1949), set in a time when advanced computer technology, instead of speeding up war, creates a massive stalemate.

The development of a faster-than-light drive lets humanity break out of the confines of the Solar System and into contact with and conflict against the Procyons, an alien race, outwardly much like humans, who have no emotions and cold-bloodedly destroy any intelligent race they find, to prevent any future competition with them. Their treatment of the Sirians, an intelligent race still in the pre-atomic, chemical stage of civilization, is typical as shown on film taken by an espionage agent.

After removing suitable specimens, Procyon eliminated all animal life by the simple expedient of dusting the planet with a short-lived radioactive powder. Quick, efficient, harming practically nothing. Watch the death agonies of a race. . . .

There were mad riots, crumbling cities, a few last gasps and wriggles, and then quiet.

The camera revolved about a planet where nothing moved.

The Earth fleet succeeds in pushing the Procyons back halfway to their own world when war breaks out, but here the war deadlocks, for the superfast computers of each side can break any code used by the other. Each knows the battle plans of the other as soon as they are issued and can as quickly counter them. In order to win, Earth's cryptographic branch must find an unbreakable code.

And find it fast, for the Procyons have a slight advantage. They have a dozen worlds to draw on for fuel and supplies, humanity but one—and Earth is almost out of fossil fuels and has only a two-years' supply of fissionables left. . . .

Worse, humanity is breaking politically under the strain of the long war. War-weariness, high casualties, and massive taxation have produced a growing demand for peace at any price—a peace the fleet knows will mean Earth's eventual destruction. "Consider," the Admiral says, "the attitude of Procyon toward [Sirius] . . . And then decide if peace is worth so much . . . when there is nobody left to enjoy it."

As the moment of decision approaches, Lieutenant Leigh finds himself facing another problem besides finding an unbreakable code. He is under arrest for using military channels of communications for personal messages. One has just come in from a boyhood friend now in the cryptographic department back on Earth: "Alice is wonderful. Why don't you answer? Don."

Since the computers state unequivocally that it isn't a code, the authorities believe it must be a personal message. But the message makes absolutely no sense to Leigh. Alice? Who's Alice? He doesn't even *know* anyone named Alice.

But, at the last hour, Leigh recalls a children's book he and his friend loved and almost memorized and realizes that the answer to one of his problems is the answer to the other.

Stylistically just average, this code story has some ingenious ideas and is an early forecast of the use of computers in combat and for code-cracking.

A much superior code story, E. C. Bentley's "The Ministering Angel," takes its clues right out of Carroll. Wealthy, aging, gentlemanly Gregory Landell, an enthusiastic creator of rock gardens and a fan of Lewis Carroll's books, has been seriously ill for some time and has asked his solicitor to visit him. His solicitor, an old friend and fellow Carroll fan, thinks he knows why: Landell wants to change his will.

A few years ago, Landell married an attractive, if a bit domineering, woman twenty years his junior. Landell soon learned that what his friends had long suspected was true—she had married him solely for his money. Mrs. Landell soon drives away all her husband's old friends, subtly making them realize they're not wanted. So far, Landell's well-bred dislike of scenes has prevented an open break, but surely now he's ready to leave his fortune to a poor-but-brilliant nephew doing vital medical research.

Yet, during the visit, Landell talks only about routine business matters, for which neither the solicitor's presence nor advice is needed. And, throughout the entire visit, Mrs. Landell never leaves them alone for a moment, is never more than a few feet away. . . .

Landell dies soon afterward, and the solicitor wonders: Did he miss something in the conversation during that visit, something Landell was trying desperately to tell him? If so, what?

You like these puzzle things, don't you? the solicitor asks his friend, Philip Trent, an artist who writes about—and sometimes solves—crimes for the London papers. Would you go down there and look around a bit, see what you can see? Perhaps there was a second will, hidden somewhere in the house, and he was trying to tell me where. . . .

Trent goes, and his careful observation of Landell's rock garden combines with his knowledge of Carroll's books to bring vengeance, as civilized and polite as it is merciless and cruel, upon a person who has it coming. "The Ministering Angel," first published in the U.S. in EQMM for September 1943, is one of the finest short stories in the detective field.

Scenes and symbols from Carroll's *Alice* form not the clues but the crimes in *Malice in Wonderland*, a novel by Nicholas Blake (1940; also published in the U.S. as *The Summer Camp Mystery*, 1940, and as *Malice with Murder*, paperback 1964).

Young sociologist Paul Perry hopes to practice his profession by discovering how the great British public behaves on its summer holidays, in this case at a resort camp called Wonderland on the coast—but the sly tricks of a prankster calling himself the Mad Hatter makes this impossible. For, while some of his tricks are funny—an amateur concert singer finds his purity of tone flawed by some so-and-so having poured bucketsful of molasses into the piano—some are a bit upsetting; for instance, when strong, masculine hands grab the ankles of pretty girl swimmers, dragging them deep, deep under the sea and nearly drowning them.

A mocking note promptly appears on the camp bulletin board: "How did you like the duckings? Watch out for my next bit of fun. The Mad Hatter."

But it's a particularly nasty trick involving poison—that agonizingly painful poison, strychnine—that starts the holiday makers scurrying home in panic. The camp management calls in private investigator Nigel Strangeways to find the Mad Hatter before Wonderland is destroyed.

The investigation involves a gray-bearded hermit known only as Ishmael, dressed in black tatters and lurking in the woods, furious because most of his beloved wilderness of forest and fern was wiped out to build Wonderland, who mysteriously disappeared last year and just as strangely reappeared several months later. There are aerial photos of a nearby navy base off limits to overflights; a pretty, highly intelligent girl down on her luck after her rich father kills himself when his financial empire crashes; a master tailor of Cambridge; and a criminal scheme taken directly from the pages of Carroll and *Alice*.

Who and what, Strangeways wonders, is the Mad Hatter? Is he merely a practical joker who's gone too far, an agent of a conspiracy of rival business firms to destroy a successful competitor, or is he a clever killer hoping to mask a coming murder as the unplanned result of a crackpot prank? The answer comes when Strangeways confronts the gathered suspects at a dinner right out of *Alice*, where a white mouse pokes his pink nose out of the teapot and the dishes hold a bottle labeled "STRYCHNINE" and a .22 bullet in a piece of wood.

Malice in Wonderland is a good, solid, early Strangeways and late Golden Age novel, realistically and believably complicated by accident and coincidence, in which the actions of some four hundred possible suspects hamper not only Strangeway's investigation but the criminal's schemes. As a bonus, Perry's failure notwithstanding, the American reader will get an interesting look at the English public on holiday in the 1940s, the last holiday for all too many of them, just before the Phony War became real and the casualty lists started to come in.

Notes

1. Hugh Ross Williamson, *Enigmas of History* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 212.
2. But see the brilliant, if speculative and unproven, theory of Lord Quickswood, discussed in detail in Williamson, "The Man in the Iron Mask," This one neatly meets all objections and is, I believe, probably the correct identification of the mysterious individual.
3. The Flight 19 planes could be easily identified at a distance, bearing a dark-and-light-blue pattern unlike any other naval aircraft at Lauderdale, whose other planes were a solid blue.
4. For further information on the pattern characteristic of Vanisher cases, see "Judge Crater and His Fellow Travellers" by Frank McSherry, Jr., (*The Armchair Detective*, July 1971).
5. Larry Kusche, *The Disappearance of Flight 19* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 157.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
7. Allen Churchill, *They Never Came Back* (New York: Ace, n.d.), p. 139.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
9. Kusche, p. 134.

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This article will be continued in the next issue.

AJH REVIEWS

Allen J. Hubin, Consulting Editor

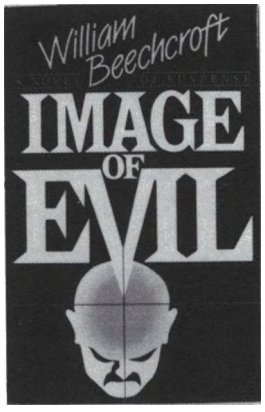
Short notes...

William Beechcroft's ***Image of Evil*** (Dodd, Mead, $14.95) represents a rather uneasy merger of science fiction and espionage. A marvelous thing has been discovered at a Maryland think-tank, the chief of security of which is a failed Chicago cop. A master spy sends his minions, including a miracle of medical technology, to steal said marvelous thing for a despicable foreign power. Can failed cop overcome deficiencies in think-tank defenses and defeat implacable foes? Stay tuned... This is hard to take seriously; it might have played better as farce.

Steven Bosak, who lives in Illinois and teaches in a graduate writing program, debuts with ***Gammon*** (St. Martin's, $13.95). Vernon Bradlusky, a Chicago backgammon champion whose syndicated column is fading fast, has little else left: he's lost his girlfriend, his car—and his partner, murdered. Toby Kale was just back from Portugal when he died, evidently in possession of something worth killing for. Vernon follows the trial back to Portugal, where his former mistress wants his help on a problem having to do with a backgammon tournament and, it seems, with Angolans looking for lost property. If this sounds like a muddled plot, it is, but Bosak still makes a lively and interesting tale out of it.

I wonder what we're supposed to make of a series about a nurse who's an unrepentant and undetected multiple murderess. The victims are either repulsive or disruptive, so Nurse Carmichael finds them guilty and carries out capital sentences. The fourth of this curious series is ***Guardian Angel*** (Doubleday, $12.95) by Anthea Cohen. Not only do I find the chief character and her amoral homicides repulsive, but I also can't accept the picture of a hospital here—helpless in the face of equipment failures, threatening young visitors and patients. The prose is competent and a few interesting character twists appear; better that the author direct her talents elsewhere.

Middle East intrigues are the subject of Daniel Easterman's long (421 pp.) novel ***The Last Assassin*** (Doubleday, $16.95). U.S. agent



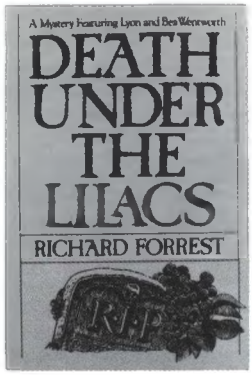
Peter Randall, driven mostly by a thirst for revenge, seeks the heart of a plot to assassinate world leaders and advance the cause of a fanatic Iranian sect. Hardly anyone, even colleagues, can be trusted, and World War III is at risk. This is readable stuff, but not memorable.

Howard Engel's private dick, Benny Cooperman, travels to a Northern Ontario forest preserve in ***Murder Sees the Light*** (St. Martin's, $13.95). Benny has been asked to keep an eye on a devoutly devious TV evangelist, who's hiding out under an alias at a resort while the U.S. courts determine his fate. Cooperman settles in to fish and to watch and listen. We get to know the locals, and their intrigues bubble to the surface. Benny finds murder both past and present on his plate. Good, light entertainment, nice setting.

Richard Forrest attends again to the affairs of Lyon Wentworth, author of children's books, and his wife Bea, state senator in Connecticut, in ***Death Under the Lilacs*** (St. Martin's, $13.95). I have had special regard for this series, for its freshness and wit and its engaging characters, and, although the mood of *Lilacs* is grim and the usual humor absent, it did not disappoint me. Bea is kidnapped, chained in a forgotten mausoleum somewhere, and half a million in ransom is demanded. Lyon is half out of his mind trying to decipher the single clue he has and to raise the money, while the kidnapper realizes he's made a small mistake for which Bea will have to pay with her life. Excellent suspense with vivid portrayals.

Flowers from Berlin by Noel Hynd (Dial, $16.95) is another World War II espionage story, this one set largely in the U.S. in 1939. A German spy, code-named Siegfried, is merrily setting off bombs around the east coast. The FBI, with a fulminating and egocentric Hoover at its helm, hasn't a clue. Tom

Cochrane, fresh from covert triumphs in Nazi territory, is asked to trace Siegfried. So Cochrane sifts the evidence, narrowing his search and wondering why his masters refuse his requests for help from a certain German refugee... If Siegfried were a more credible character, if a minor political theme had more fully developed, *Flowers* could have been far above the average it is.



Chains of Gold by Margaret Lamb (St. Martin's, $13.95) is a fuzzily recounted tale of a New York reporter sent to the bastion of Society, Newport, Connecticut. There she is asked to do a story on the Wentworth dynasty by its surviving dowager, the ferocious Victoria Wentworth, and in the course of it figures out (circumstantially, at least) who really killed Victoria's father in a turn-of-the-century *cause célèbre*. The narrative sometimes dives without warning or clarity into 1901, and the whole affair barely has enough substance to sustain its weight.

Marcia Muller's second novel about Elena Oliverez is ***The Legend of the Slain Soldiers*** (Walker, $13.95). While this is unlikely to raise much notice, it's a competent interweaving of California settings and Hispanic culture. Oliverez is a museum director in Santa Barbara. She's trying to sort out her ethnic identity and her relationships, both personal and professional. Lt. Dave Kirk represents a little of each again here, for murder strikes at the largely Hispanic trailer court where her mother lives, and Kirk asks for help. Who would kill an elderly historian, and why?

Agents of Sympathy (Putnam, $18.95) is the novelistic debut of Frank O'Neill, a magazine writer who lives in Charleston, South Carolina. I have a soft spot for spy stories, but this one—despite no obvious faults—failed to capture my interest, and I lasted only 25% of the way. The focus is terrorism and efforts by sundry ungodly to overthrow a pro-Western monarch in North Africa.

Asset in Black (Arbor House, $16.95) by Casey Prescott is a long intrigue novel seen as through a clouded glass, which renders the plot, the people, and their emotions and actions only partly knowable. The result frustrates as much as it captivates. Cordell Hunt, an intelligence agent, is caught in the toils of various U.S. agencies and a private organization, Innotech, which seems to have its resident mole. As a result, Hunt is entertained at length by the Russians and pumped full of chemicals to stimulate volubility. After Moscow is done with him, he's back in the West, burdened by guilt, being manipulated by his American friends, seeking to engineer the release of a sometime lover held by said friends, falling into sex with a female mercenary whose clients include Moscow. And voluntarily frying his brains with doses of cocaine. It will be the dedicated reader who follows all this to the end.

Murder at the FBI (Arbor House, $15.95) is the sixth mystery set in Washington, D.C. by Margaret Truman (though I've a couple of indications that a ghost or two has been helpfully at work in the lady's *oeuvre*). An agent is killed, spectacularly and publicly, right in FBI headquarters. Ross Lizenby is put in charge of the investigation, the overriding objective of which is to ensure that the Bureau avoids embarrassment. Christine Saksis, fellow agent and American Indian, not to mention Lizenby's current bedwarmer, is the prime focus of the tale. She's on Lizenby's team, and increasingly curious about the directions the inquiry is taking. So she sets out on her own, courting embarrassment of the holy FBI and endangering her health. Interesting but not convincing.

David Williams's eighth about his banker-sleuth Mark Treasure is ***Wedding Treasure*** (St. Martin's, $10.95), a gently humorous and tranquil account of death at a wedding celebration in the West of England. Jack Figgle's company is floundering, and the marriage of his step-daughter to a wheeler-dealer Italian seems to offer help for corporate survival. The girl's father, however, notorious for a host of evils, arrives armed with spokes and an apparent disposition to put them in the wheels. His most substantial role proves to be that of corpse. Mark suspects that apparent accident is not so, that behind façades other things are also not what they seem, and so comes in time to identify a killer.

I was so disgusted by the revoltingly graphic descriptions in the first chapter of ***Rampage*** (St. Martin's, $13.95) by William Wood that I read no further. But fanciers of courtroom drama may want to stick longer with this book (I reckon that the first chapter can be omitted without penalty), the author of which is a former assistant district attorney in California. □

THE MURDER OF MRS. GRESH

Real Life Cases

CRIME HUNT

By T. M. McDade

The interest in real murder cases springs from several sources. In some, there is a puzzle as to who did it; in others, how it was done. Motivation, particularly in those cases in which murder is done for unusual or bizarre reasons, turns to a study of the criminal. In some cases, we ask ourselves, "How could he do that?" Here we are merely expressing wonder that people are so constituted psychologically that they can perform acts impossible to most of us. And, strangely, there is often nothing in the person's background to suggest such behavior. The murder of Anna Gresh and what followed is such a case, for the behavior of the participants seems to ignore the simplest rules of self-preservation.

Theresa Gresh grew up in New York City, where she had been born in January 1939. She never knew her real father, and her stepfather had moved out two years before the events to be related. She was fifteen years old in February 1954, when, through school chums, she met Billy Snyder, a seventeen-year-old. Despite her size and figure—she was five-foot-six and weighed 175 pounds, and had orange-dyed hair—Billy was attracted to her, and within a week the two were spending their days together in her bed while her mother was at work. The three-room flat at 199 Avenue B was poorly furnished, cost $32 per month, and had one odd feature: the bathtub was in the kitchen.

Mrs. Gresh was a hard-working mother who held down jobs in a shoe factory by day and cleaning offices at night. Even on weekends, she often took on other tasks to provide for herself and her daughter. Despite the assurance that Mrs. Gresh would be out of the flat all of the day and part of the night, she returned one evening to find the youngsters in bed and ordered Billy out of the flat. Very embarrassed by this episode, the two began to talk about how they might get married. They even forced Mrs. Gresh to make loud noises when she returned so as not to surprise them. By now, Terry, or Teddy as the boy sometimes called her, was no longer attending classes, and both spent their days in the raptures of new love.

Billy Snyder, who lived with his mother in a flat not too distant, had been an average high-school student. Average described much in Billy—height, appearance, intelligence. He had applied to enlist in the Marines and was awaiting notice of his induction. They continued to talk of marriage, but, when the subject was broached with Mrs. Gresh, she objected because of their ages. In the course of a conversation on how they might be able to marry, Snyder jokingly remarked that they could "get rid of her mother." Though no specific plan was made, nonetheless the two often talked of marrying after they had disposed of Mrs. Gresh.

The speed with which their affair progressed is surprising. They met on February 18, and by the first of March they were already plotting her death. The two spent the day of March 4 in her apartment, making love and also waiting for Mrs. Gresh to come home. At 9:45 P.M., Billy heard her key in the door and waited for her in the kitchen. Mrs. Gresh went instead to the bedroom and argued with her daughter. When she then went into the kitchen, the youth attacked her with a hammer. Struck several times on the head, she fell to the floor, and he ran into the bedroom to tell Terry, "I did it."

But when he returned to the kitchen, Billy found that the woman had risen and was trying to get out the door. He wrestled her to the floor, and the girl now joined him. Billy told her to get the hammer, which lay on the floor, but Terry could not bring herself to pick it up because it was covered with blood. "Give me a knife or something," Billy said. Terry passed him a long kitchen knife, which he used to stab Mrs. Gresh until she collapsed on the floor. The couple put the body in the bathtub, covered it with a sheet of tin, and wiped up the floor with rags. The hammer and knife were thrown into the tub, and the youngsters went to bed.

During the next few days, they shuttled between Billy's apartment, where Terry helped his mother with the housework, and Mrs. Gresh's. In his statement, Billy described their first return to the murdered woman's apartment:

"We straightened up the apartment. I lifted the lid and looked at Mother and took her out of the tub and measured her with a cardboard box I wanted to place her in. I saw that she wouldn't fit. I wrapped her in a crimson blanket and placed her back in the tub. One shoe fell off and I replaced the cover." He also purchased some plaster of Paris and tried to cover the body with it.

Terry told her friends that her mother had gone to Florida with a man friend, and soon a group of their friends came to the flat for a party. The body was still in the kitchen tub, covered by a cloth and the tin lid over the tub.

There is a macabre touch to the party of eight or so youngsters, drinking beer and soft drinks and dancing to a radio with the body of Mrs. Gresh still in the kitchen tub. The girl may have been under the impression that Billy had removed it; he never did explain to her just what he had done. For himself, he seems to have adopted a fatalistic attitude when he found that he could not manage the body by himself.

At this time, Billy was called to the Marine camp at Paris Island, South Carolina, for his induction. While there, he learned that he was illegitimate, and that Snyder was the name of his stepfather. As a result of this discovery, he changed his name from Snyder to Byers, his mother's maiden name.

With the passage of time, a strong odor began to permeate the flat at 199 Avenue B. By March 26, the complaints of the tenants had finally roused the superintendent, Leroy Williams, to investigate its source. Going through the halls and smelling at keyholes, he was led to the Gresh apartment. Unable to enter, he called the police, and with two officers he entered the flat from the fire escape. Inside, they were quickly led to the bathtub and its contents, and the place was soon filled with detectives.

Detective Saul Fuchs interviewed Terry in the Family Court, where she had been taken for absences from school. Fuchs let the girl tell him the usual lies about her mother going off to Florida with a man. Then his questions came a little closer to home. Did she notice the odor in the flat? Where did she bathe? And finally, when the detective told her about finding her mother's body in the tub, she broke down and told the whole story.

Fuchs followed up this interview with a trip to the Marine post in South Carolina, where he saw Billy Byers. Here also, he let the youth entangle himself in lies and then revealed the girl's statement describing how her mother was killed. Billy gave in, and his statement substantially agreed with Terry's. By April 7, both had been indicted for murder.

With the indictment and appointment of counsel for the two youngsters, it was clear that their stories would now change. Despite the statements each had made, it would be necessary now to renounce these, for they constituted an admission of first-degree murder.

When Billy learned that Theresa had been seeing his friend Richie Alyward while he was away, their relationship was sorely tested.

From the jail, he wrote a letter to her in the prison ward at Bellevue Hospital:

"My dearest Teddy, Hope you are all right. As far as things stand her I am making the best of the situation. Tell your lawyer I am going to plead guilty. Do you still not want a joint defense?

"I saw a psychiatrist (I still haven't learned how to spell it). He asked me why I didn't run and I told him because of you, and he asked me if it was worth it. I told him I hope so, but I guess only you can answer that question since it was for you I killed your mother. Do you think it was worth it? If you still love me, then it was. I told him that, but he asked me how I knew you still loved me, and again I couldn't answer, but I'm going by what you told me Monday.

"If it was me who was the one who failed to make our love last near the end, then I can do no more to prove to you that I love you now as I did at the beginning. It is up to you now to say who made this into the mess it is. Why in God's name did you give Richie the key to the apartment I'll never know and every time I think of him taking you to the dance and then to the movies, I could kill him. And if I ever prove that he had anything to do while I was away I would. Did you know that Richie broke off with Barbara because of you? That is why I do not know whether to trust you or not. But I have already said I will go with you till I learn the actual facts that you were fooling around behind my back.

"If you are or were, Teddy, you know that I killed your mother for nothing. I guess you are still leading me but do not get out of step. Tell the truth to the D.A. So if you have anything to say then tell me now and I will forget it or hide it and I'll bury you with me. There are so many uncertainties in this. I will not testify against you but if you want to call it all off, I suggest you do it now.

"I am hoping the D.A. will give me a manslaughter plea because I am cooperating. If he does I may not fare out too badly. But if I have to plead guilty to first degree murder things would be rough. If I do get the electric chair, I hope they do not burn me too badly. Maybe medium rare or well done, but not cooked to a crisp. It would never suit my disposition.

"Funny, I do not care anymore. They would really be doing me a favor. You should read the letters my mother is writing all of a sudden the whole family misses me and can't do without me. At first she had nothing but praises for you. But the minute I went away and you went out with Richie, she turned against you as you know. If only you had listened to me. All I ever made you promise was not to go out with him. I think she expected you to sit home the whole week and pine away. I didn't but neither did I think you would do as you have.

"But that's all in the past now. We need only think of the future. While there may not be too much more of it for me, you at least will have learned from the experience. I think that the one thing that really messed up everything was my going away. Well, Teddy, (I am still the only one who calls you that) I can say no more. You know how things stand, so I will wait now till you answer before I write again.

"Love
Always and only
Bill"

Their trial opened in the Court of General Sessions in Manhattan on January 4, 1955, before Judge Jonah J. Goldstein. Billy Byers was represented by J. M. Solomon and two assistant attorneys. Their first move was to ask for a severance, that is, a separate trial for each defendant. This was denied, and jury selection followed. The District Attorney stated that he would use peremptory challenges to reject any woman called for service, in line with a policy of keeping women off juries which had to pass on death sentences. It is doubtful if such a procedure would be allowed today.

The first witness, an engineer, described the layout of the apartment. Solomon, Billy's attorney, made a nit-picking cross-examination of this man, as well as the police officer who had photographed the rooms in the flat. Some lawyers seem unable to waive cross-examination when it cannot serve any purpose. It is more a demonstration that counsel is working hard for his client than a revelation of evidence for the defendant. The doctor from the medical examiner's office who saw the body in the tub, and who later performed an autopsy on it, described the three head wounds and twenty-one stab wounds in the body. Of these stab wounds, six had pierced the heart and were the direct cause of death.

The next witness, Helen Fetko, the sister of the deceased, added little about the victim. She saw her sister very infrequently and gave her sister's weight at about 130 pounds. It seems remarkable that the body, when weighted by the medical examiner, had weighed a mere 85 pounds.

Murder trials are always assumed to be exciting and interesting events, but this is rarely the case. There is never a connected story, and the case is put together of such odd bits here and there that it is hard to follow. Billy's defense was mainly a claim of insanity.

A psychiatrist who had examined Billy in jail found the youth "of potentially superior intelligence." His I.Q. was 112. "His fund of information was adequate but uneven, probably reflecting disinterest in academic subjects. He attempts to give others the impression of learning by bland almost wild guessing at questions. This reckless guessing in an attempt to impress others is usually given by psychopathic individuals. Concentration and attention were rather poor. My findings were that this patient had a conspicuous defect of judgment, that his reasoning was faulty, that his effective emotional response was deficient. I found that he was shallow, indifferent, weak, and ambivalent. I found he was suffering from a thinking disorder with an emotional disharmony and the diagnosis was schizophrenia chronic."

Whatever favorable impression the witness may have had on the jury was vitiated by the cross-examination. The District Attorney drew from the doctor the statement that, when the youth was wielding the knife, he did not, in his opinion, know whether it was a banana or an ice cream cone.

The girl, in her testimony, tried to put all the blame on Billy, but her statements to the police showed her own involvement to have been substantial. The jury spent ten hours considering its verdict, but they convicted the two—the boy of first-degree murder and the girl of second-degree. He was sentenced to die in the electric chair; her sentence was twenty years to life.

Billy's appeal was not argued until October 1955. The decision of the Court of Appeals six weeks later, affirmed the sentence without an opinion.

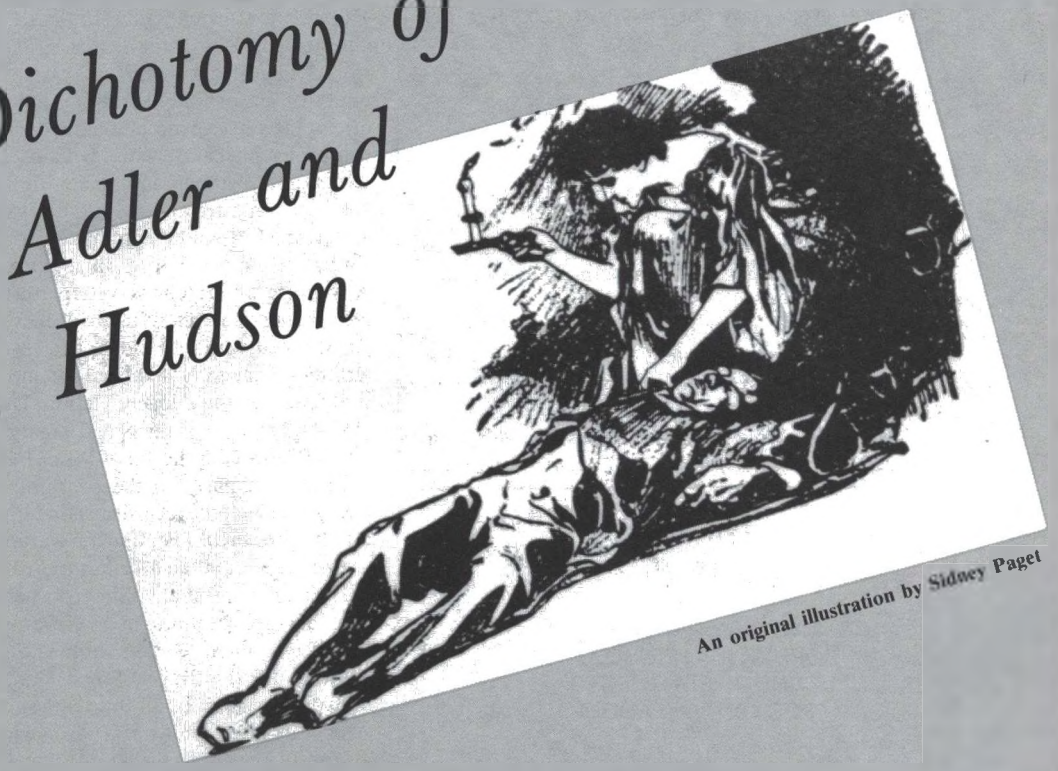
The bizarre behavior of the couple is difficult to understand, but not so inexplicable when we remember their ages. The boy, wrapped in his affair, never saw the full extent of his dilemma. He never looked ahead to the disposal of the body and, when that problem faced him, did nothing about it. During his questioning, he was asked if he had not thought of cutting up the body and disposing of the parts, as the whole was too much to handle. He replied that he could not do that as it was against his religion. He seems to have had some notion that the deceased could not be resurrected if dismembered.

Today with nearly 1,500 prisoners under sentence of death, some convicted five to ten years past, it is difficult to appreciate the speed with which executions were carried out only a few years ago. Two months after his sentence had been affirmed, Billy Byers, then nineteen years old, was executed in the Sing Sing death house. The news report of this event merely mentioned that fact and that he had been accompanied to the execution by Thomas J. Donovan, the Roman Catholic prison chaplain.

While I was writing this piece, Charles Rumbaugh awaited execution in Texas. When he killed an Amarillo jeweler in a holdup in 1975, he was only seventeen, the same age as Billy Byers had been when he killed Mrs. Gresh. Amnesty International, which opposes the death penalty, claims that the United States is bound by two conventions outlawing the execution of minors. One, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the United Nations, states: "Sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below 18 years of age and shall not be carried out on pregnant women." The other document, the American Convention on Human Rights, adopted by the Organization of American States in 1969, also bars death sentences for persons for crimes committed when under eighteen years of age. The U.S. Senate, however, has never ratified these conventions, and they are not legally binding in this country. Rumbaugh was executed.

As for the girl Theresa Gresh, she served some thirteen years in confinement, being paroled on November 15, 1967. Today, if she is still living, she is only 47 years old. □

Putting Women in Their Place
The Dichotomy of Irene Adler and Mrs. Hudson



An original illustration by Sidney Paget

By Barbara Lawrence

A decent BBC television comedy featured a none too intelligent present day Sherlock Holmes, followed about by an incredibly bungling Watson, surrounded by inept policemen, and challenged by a devious descendent of Moriarty—a woman. There is a certain justification for at least part of the BBC approach. Aside from Holmes himself, the men in Doyle's stories are a fairly stupid lot; the police are always arresting the wrong person, and Watson, after decades of observing Holmes' methods, still says that he "can make nothing of it." But the women are quite another matter. It is true that several helpless types seek Holmes' aid, but the women are not all helpless; the only persons to outwit or defeat Holmes are women, just as the only persons (aside from street urchins) to assist him in his

detecting are women. The importance of women in The Master's life has been overlooked too long; it is time to set the record straight.

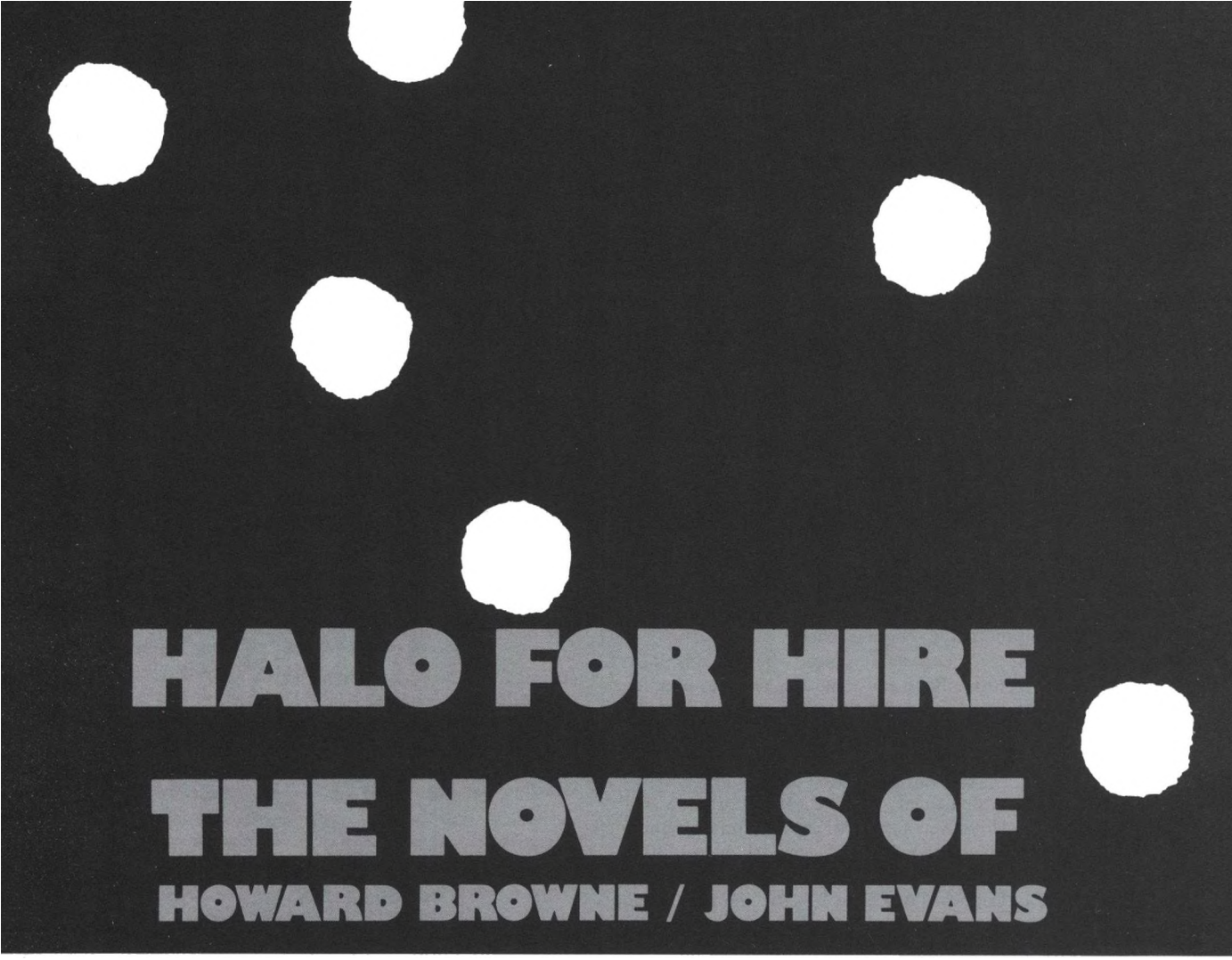
Irene Adler is, of course, the best known of the women in the Holmesian canon. Not only does she outwit Holmes, she has her secret joke at his expense, leaving a signed photograph of herself in the place of the one he seeks. On the evening Holmes first gains access to her home, she even has the audacity to follow him home and to wish him a good night, right on his own doorstep.

Effie Munro ("The Adventure of the Yellow Face") does not intentionally outwit Holmes; indeed, she does not even know of his existence. But her innocence and desire to protect her child lead both her husband and Holmes to assume there is another man in her life. Holmes rushes off to Norbury to surprise the bigamous wife in her sins, only to find a mother desperate to prevent the discovery of her mulatto child from her first marriage. Understandably humbled, Holmes tells Watson to mention Norbury if he ever again appears to be overconfident.

Women also prove very courageous and helpful in Holmes' cases. It is Elise ("The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb") who saves the life of the engineer, risking her own life to do so. By the time Holmes has discovered the counterfeiters' hide-out, their house has gone up in flames and there is no case left to solve. In "The Adventures of Charles Augustus Milverton" Holmes ingratiates himself with one of the blackmailer's maids, proposing marriage to her so that he can familiarize himself with the floorplan of the Milverton house. But he arrives at an unpropitious time to burgle the damaging letters of Lady Eva's. Indeed he arrives in time to stand idly by while another beautiful victim of the blackmailer shoots Milverton to death. We are never told how Holmes extricated himself from his pretended engagement. In still another case, "The Adventure of the Golden Prince-nez," a courageous woman is guilty of accidentally killing an innocent man in an attempt to retrieve incriminating documents from her traitorous husband whose villainy has caused his wife's and companions' exile to Siberia. Holmes solves the murder and, with the help of Anna, turns an escaped Russian criminal over to the Russian Embassy, but not before Anna poisons herself. "The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter" is ambiguous, but the ending leads us to believe that the two Englishmen who had kidnapped the wealthy Sophy Kratides escaped Holmes only to meet their death at the hands of their lovely victim. The Naval Treaty ("The Adventure of the Naval Treaty") is returned to Percy Phelps with the aid of Miss Harrison, and Mrs. Hudson is a party to the conspiracy to return the treaty to the gloomy, unsuspecting Phelps. She serves it to him for breakfast, under a warming cover.

But surely it is the ever faithful Mrs. Hudson who is Holmes' greatest ally. She risks her life turning the wax bust of Holmes every few minutes to trick Moriarty's man, Parker, into firing through the window of the Baker Street flat, attempting to destroy once and for all this fearless enemy of crime. And years later, it is Mrs. Hudson who pretends to be a faithful servant to the hated German spy Van Bork and who collaborates with Holmes and Watson in capturing Van Bork.

There are evil women in Holmes' adventures, vain, foolish, stupid, and weak women; but there are just as many—even more—vain, foolish, stupid, and weak men. No man except Moriarty was a real challenge, and Moriarty lies still at the foot of Reichenbach Falls. From the well-intentioned men, Holmes receives precious little aid. Watson does little more than play Boswell to Holmes' Johnson, and the police are worse than useless. It is the women who assist Holmes, defeat him, or make him appear foolish. The BBC comedy, then, outrageous as it was, was not completely without basis in the Holmes canon. □



HALO FOR HIRE
THE NOVELS OF
HOWARD BROWNE / JOHN EVANS

By David A. Bowman

In *Halo in Blood* by John Evans, an auburn-haired dame paws through Paul Pine's bookshelf, saying, "For a private detective, you certainly read some odd books." She reads the titles out loud: *Wilkinson's Flower Encyclopedia, Das Kapital,* and *Warrior of the Dawn* by Howard Browne—"Whoever he is," the jane remarks.

Howard Browne *is* John Evans. These two names are a confusing footnote in the history of hardboiled fiction. Browne's name first appears on *Warrior of the Dawn* (1943), a first novel written in the "caveman fantasy" genre. Three of the next four books, written under the pseudonym "John Evans," are traditional private eye novels staring the Chicago P.I. Paul Pine—*Halo in Blood* (1946), *Halo for Satan* (1948), and *Halo in Brass* (1949). Eight years passed before the fourth (and most recent) Pine novel, *The Taste of Ashes* (1957), appeared. The book didn't carry on the tradition of having "Halo" in the title, and, to further complicate things, Browne published it under his own name, not as "John Evans." Paul Pine became a series character with two "different" authors.

To further confuse categorization, Browne has a reputation in the suspense genre based on the strength of a single novel, *Thin Air* (1954). Browne stopped writing books in the late '50s to pursue a successful career writing for TV. His books lingered in out-of-print purgatory for almost two decades.

Now the four Paul Pine books have been reprinted. The three "Halo" titles are a treat to rediscover. They are quintessential 1940s private eye novels—crisply written and very Chandlereque. Yet Browne's detective, Paul Pine, is quirky enough to be more than just a Second City Marlowe. His "Halo" cases are among the most eccentric in the business

David Bowman is the author of "The Big Nap", a children's mystery published by SCHOLASTIC SOFTWARE.

(one involves a document hand-written by Jesus Christ). The books show the private eye tradition from a Midwestern perspective. Paul Pine works in Chicago, a tough town Browne lived in for twenty years; a place where the night clubs aren't quite as sophisticated as the ones in Nick Charles's New York; and the gamblers leaning over the roulette tables are closer to Grant Wood characters than the starlets and fake swamis of Marlowe's L.A.

But the real find is *The Taste of Ashes,* the last Paul Pine novel. Browne is like a bartender who can make a superb dry martini using bar gin. His book has all the standard P.I. novel ingredients—wisecracks, similes, saps, and gats—but Browne has made them his own. *The Taste of Ashes* is one of the finest private eye novels you'll ever read.

It's no wonder Browne's best books capture the essence of the Midwest. He lived there for 48 years. He was born on April 15, 1908 in Omaha, Nebraska. An only child whose father died before he was born, Browne grew up in Arapahoe and Lincoln, living with his mother, a school teacher.

When Browne was seventeen, he hitchhiked to Chicago to see Babe Ruth and the Yankees play the White Sox. He planned to return home, but as he walked up Michigan Avenue he was hooked. "I fell in love with that town the way you fall in love with a woman," he said during a recent interview.

Browne took to city life like a man born in a skyscraper. He scored an apartment and did everything from waiting tables at a T.B. sanitarium to putting eggs in cartons for a produce company. "In those days, Chicago was one hell of a city," he says. "You had the feeling that every corner you'd turn you'd either get rich or get shot."

Browne remembers the Valentine's Day he heard a radio newscast announce that seven men had been shot in a garage on North Clark Street. "Like the rest of Chicago, that's where I headed," Browne says.

Never before had so many gangsters been rubbed out at one time. The St. Valentine's Day Massacre became the Mob's most transcendental act—Al Capone Crossing the Delaware. Browne became fascinated with mobsters and would eventually write about the Massacre for both television and the movies.

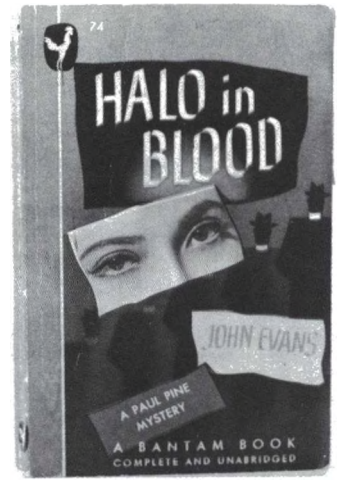
In 1929, he married his first wife, Esther. His son Allen was born in 1932, and his daughter Sue Ann arrived in 1939.

In 1936, he was a skip-tracer for a schlock furniture house. The money was good, but he hated the job. (Ten years later, the Paul Pine novels would be full of rooming houses decorated with cheap furniture doomed to fall apart when the last payment was made.)

Browne had always loved to read and decided that writing might be an easier way to make a living than chasing deadbeats. He sat down one weekend and write three short stories and sold them to the Chicago *Daily News* for $15 apiece. The editor suggested that he write for the pulps. Browne decided to go one step better and write a novel.

He started writing a book about a Cro-Magnon Man. As a boy, he had devoured the Tarzan books, so he reread Edgar Rice Burroughs, making lists of adjectives and verbs that described the primeval jungle. In 1943, when the book was finally published, he sent a copy to Burroughs, who wrote back, saying, "I just read *Warrior of the Dawn* and regard it as one of the finest books I ever wrote."

In 1941, while the book was bouncing from publisher to publisher, Browne tried his hand writing some *Black Mask*-style stories. He sent two of them to a new magazine called *Mammoth Detective,* published by Ziff-Davis, then located in Chicago.



Bernard Davis, the publisher, asked Browne up to his office and said, "You write very well, and I'd like you to edit *Mammoth Detective.*"

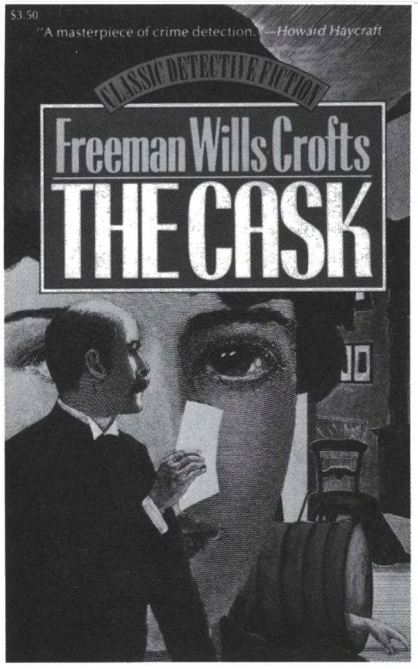
Browne protested, saying he didn't have experience. "I can teach a high school boy how to edit a magazine in two weeks," Davis said, "but I can't make a writer out of him. I will not have an editor on my staff who's not a writer himself. You're a writer, and I want to hire you."

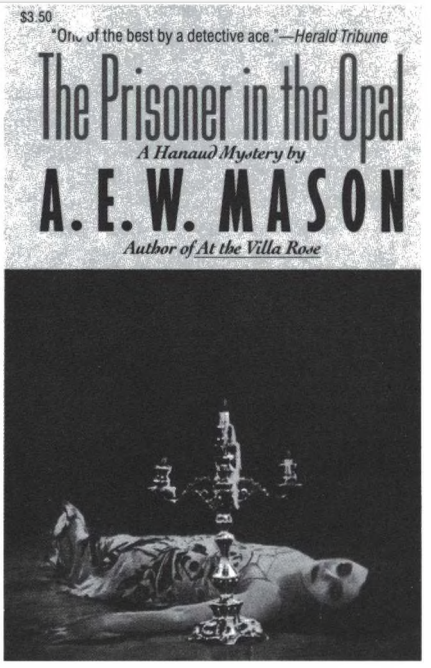
That was that. Browne would eventually edit *Amazing Stories, Fantastic Adventure, Mammoth Detective, Mammoth Mystery, Mammoth Western,* and *South Sea Stories.*

After work, he would come home and chase the family out of the apartment so he could write his own pulp stories. His entire concept of writing changed after he picked up a book called *Farewell My Lovely* by a Chicago-born author.

"Raymond Chandler wrote like I had been trying to write and didn't know how," Browne says.

NEW MYSTERIES FROM CARROLL & GRAF





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He created his own Marlowe and wrote a short story which he expanded into a novel called *Halo in Blood,* published in 1946 by Bobbs-Merrill. Since "Howard Browne" was a Ziff-Davis editor, and Bobbs-Merrill was a rival book company, Browne published the book under his regular pulp pseudonym, John Evans.

"*Halo in Blood* was pure imitation Chandler," Browne says. He's right, but the book has enough imagination and tight writing to make it a respectable introduction to the Windy City sleuth, Paul Pine. Pine is 32, owner of a dented nose, and an ex-employee of the state attorney's office. He has an office on Randolph Street, and his neighbor is a dentist. He'll have a Vargas pinup calendar on the wall for the next four years.

We meet Pine as he's driving to a prospective client's house. He gets stuck in a funeral procession and ends up at a cemetery. At the graveside, there are no mourners but twelve ministers of different faiths who take turns conducting a service for a stiff known only as "John Doe." Eventually, Pine gets around to visiting his client—a wealthy man who wants Pine to end the relationship between his daughter and a gambler. Eventually, bodies start falling, and the crazy funeral ties in with the first case.

Halo in Blood has characteristics that mark all the "Halo" books. The writing is crisp and the descriptions are quirky, as in the sketch of a thug who has "a lumpy face the color of fish bait." Chicago is relentlessly wet and windy, while Pine often stands at his window like some detached angel observing the pedestrians below:

> I watched the papers flutter on the newsstand under the el tracks at Wabash Avenue. Gusts whipped skirts under frantic fingers, but from eight floors up my interest was academic. (*Halo in Blood*)

Pine's patter is full of wisecracks and slang. Browne's inventiveness is so extensive that the "Halo" books are used repeatedly as examples in the *Dictionary of American Slang:*

> harp-polisher n. A clergyman, esp a priest. 1946. "I'm curious why it should take twelve harp-polishers to bury an unidentified victim." Evans, *Halo in Blood,* [p.] 71.

Pine has a healthy appetite for pretty ankles—although his judgment is lousy. Most women he messes around with point a gun at him one time or another. In *Halo in Blood,* a woman shoots herself after he slaps her. The "Halo" books are full of curt violence. Pine gets sapped at least once per case. When someone gets shot, he usually takes the bullet in the face.

Curiously, the endings of the "Halo" books are reminiscent of those in English drawing-room mysteries. All the suspects gather together in a room, and Pine reveals the killer. After the main mystery is solved, there's always a double twist in the last chapter—an additional murderer or secret identity revealed.

Halo in Blood suffers from a few genuine problems. The plot is over-complicated, a difficulty which eases up with each "Halo." At times the reader is force-fed wisecracks. It will take Pine another book or two to stop saying such lines as, "I'll feed you knuckles until you puke."

At his office, he would often put in an all-day writing shift, fall asleep on the couch, then wake up in the morning and continue writing. "This didn't sit well with my family," he says

Before *Halo in Blood* hit the stores, a man walked into Browne's office and said, "I just read a short story in *Mammoth Detective* called 'Halo 'Round My Dead' by John Evans. I want Evans to turn it into a book."

Browne told the man that he was Evans and said he couldn't do it. "You write a story as long as the story should be and then you stop."

The man handed Browne a check for a thousand dollars. "Can you get it to sixty thousand words?" he asked.

"Yes sir," Browne said. "I certainly can."

The expanded story was renamed *If You Have Tears* and published in 1947 by Mystery House. Paul Pine didn't appear in the second book written under the "John Evans" pseudonym. As Browne puts it (all in one breath): "The book is about a banker who hires a new secretary, ends up killing his wife to get

insurance money so he can cover a shortage in the bank of embezzled funds he gave to the secretary so she could pay off what proved to be a non-existent blackmail threat from her ex-husband."

While *Halo in Blood* was indebted to Chandler, *If You Have Tears* is imitation James Cain and doesn't work. The book is set in California, but Browne is more at home describing the familiar turf of Chicago then he is in Cain country. The illicit passion between the banker and his secretary never gets as steamy as good Cain. There is nice tension in the middle of the novel, however, when the banker carries out his murder plan and everything goes haywire. Unfortunately, the plot gets so convoluted that the story just derails.

If You Have Tears was only a detour, because *Halo in Blood* sold well and Bobbs-Merrill gave Browne a contract to do more Paul Pine books. In February of 1948, he took a two-years leave of absence from Ziff-Davis and moved his family out to California. He rented a house in Burbank and an office on Hollywood Boulevard. He was under the gun to write the new book in six weeks so that it could be included in Bobbs-Merrill's spring catalog. At his office, he would often put in an all-day writing shift, fall asleep on the couch, then wake up in morning and continue typing.

"This didn't sit well with my family," he says.

The genesis of the new book came when Browne remembered a night spent in a Chicago restaurant with a group of friends. "What would be the most valuable thing you could hold in one hand?" some-

Browne's inventiveness is so extensive that the "Halo" books are used repeatedly as examples in the "Dictionary of American Slang."

one asked. After everyone else had come up with possibilities such as diamonds or a Shakespeare folio, Browne said, "How about a manuscript written by Jesus Christ?"

In *Halo for Satan,* published in 1948, Paul Pine, who hasn't been to church in twenty years, is hired by a bishop to locate a document supposedly written in Christ's own hand. Into this plot come lost wives, a dying gangster who wants to present the document to the church to ensure his soul's salvation, and a mysterious international thief. Pine remarks that the whole thing sounds like "Eric Ambler with a hangover."

It rains relentlessly as Pine drives his Plymouth from one seedy rooming house to another. For 35 bucks a day, he is sapped on the head twice and is full of private eye angst:

> I loosened my tie and got out of my coat. I walked up and down the floor. I sat down. I stood up again and went over to the window. Nothing out there that wasn't there yesterday and wouldn't be there tomorrow. I walked up and down the floor. I kicked the wastebasket. I wished I had a bottle in my bottom drawer. I lighted a cigarette and stared long and hard at the calendar girl.

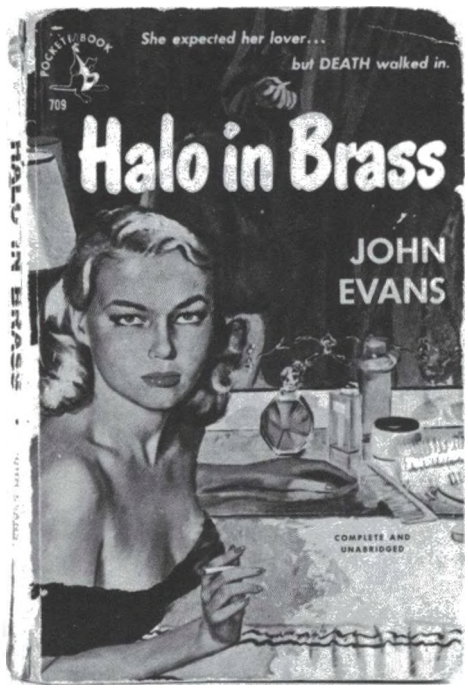
Something about being a shamus has started to bug Pine. He badgers a suspect into talking and when she breaks he says wearily, "Pour out the words. My spirits are low and my ears are numb, but I'll listen. Other people read books or go to the fights or walk in the sun or make love. But not poor old Pine. He just sits and listens." The broken girl reminds him, "This was your idea. You wanted to know these things."

Later, Pine muses: "I wonder what kind of reception private detectives get from St. Peter."

In *Halo for Satan,* Pine has continued to grow into a three-dimensional series character, although it

would have been interesting if he were moved by the religious significance of the case. After all, it's not every day the entire future of organized Christianity rests on the shoulders of a private investigator. Pine's faith (or lack of faith) doesn't cut deeper then a wisecrack or two. But all in all, the second "Halo" is stronger than the first. The writing is sharper, and the plot is tight.

After *Halo for Satan* was finished, Browne tried his hand at another writer's market – radio. He wrote a series called *Mike Mysteries.* As Browne explains:



"In *Mike Mysteries,* a murder is committed. The police arrive. The Lieutenant walks in and says, 'It was a perfect crime, Mr. Jones, but you overlooked one little detail.' The radio station then had three minutes of commercials which people listened to in order to find out what that one little detail was." He wrote ten radio scripts a week. "There are still dents in the office paneling where I'd pound my head trying to find ideas."

In 1949, *Halo in Brass,* the third Paul Pine book, was published. The novel is a homecoming for Browne – the first chapters are set in his boyhood home of Lincoln, Nebraska. Paul Pine is hired by an elderly couple who want him to find their daughter, who left for Chicago and then disappeared.

As Pine drives through Lincoln, he fantasizes that the houses are full of folks "who would know the people next door and go over and visit with them on evenings and talk in a leisurely way about things beside money." Yet all this wholesomeness annoys him. When a bellhop tells him about a local whorehouse, Pine sarcastically says, "And this seemed such a nice town. . . I ought to punch you one right in the nose."

Instead of a sock in the nose, the bellhop gets sapped to death by persons unknown. Within the space of a paragraph, Pine is back in the soot and traffic of Chicago, the only place he'll ever feel comfortable. For the rest of the story, he searches for the missing "Cornhusker" girl, who might be a murderess and a lesbian.

The book is filled with great settings, such as this Lincoln madam's office:

> This was a room to remember, to hurt your eyes, to make you open your veins for the sake of a little color. The all-over rug was a shaggy twist in pure white, the wall a pale cream, the windows hidden behind eggshell draperies and Venetian blinds in glistening white. One wall held a pair of snowscapes in frames of white pebbled leather that matched three pull-up chairs in the general vicinity of an executive-sized desk painted a warm ivory. Everything on the desk, from the blotter to the telephone, was a neutral shade.
>
> It was like stepping into a bottle of milk.

The whole feel of the book – from settings and characters to the plot itself – is as stylized as a Hollywood *film noir.* You see scenes shot in black and white, the

camera set at bizarre angels. The books is filled with real moral darkness. It's a world in which the only truly innocent character is bumped off and the most sympathetic one is an ex-whore. It's a world in which women don't need men and lesbianism turns out to be the key to the mystery. (Be warned, the book's view of homosexuality is not generous. It's 1949, and lesbianism is portrayed as a perversion.) Still, *Halo in Brass* is the most exciting and best-written of the "Halo" titles. This work alone reserves Paul Pine a place in private eye heaven.

In 1948, while Browne was in California finishing up *Halo in Brass,* Bernard Davis flew out. "Cut out this book-writing nonsense and come back where you belong," he said. Browne packed up his family and returned to Chicago. Then, in 1950, Ziff-Davis moved its headquarters to New York City. Browne moved his family again, this time to Larchmont, New York.

One day, Browne had lunch with Bill McGivern (*The Big Heat*) and told him an idea for a story he was itching to write: "Let's say a guy and his wife come home from a vacation with their kid. The wife goes into the house. She's gone when our hero gets in with the kid. The cops are called and the kid says, 'My mommy didn't come home with me last night.'"

"Jeeze," McGivern said, "that sounds like something. How will you ever make it work?"

Browne developed the idea into a novel called *Thin Air.* The work itself almost vanished into "thin air" when he left the only copy of the manuscript on the commuter train. He sweated out several hours of trying to track the train down by telephone.

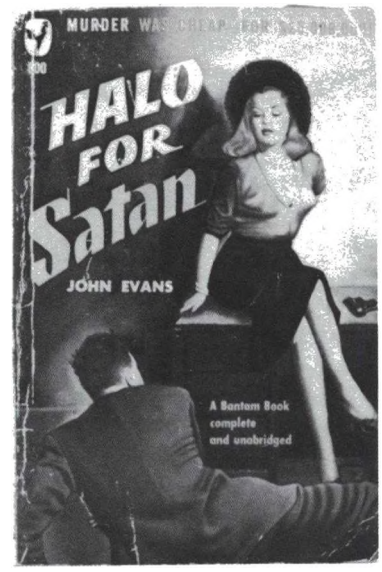
"My wife drove me all the way to the station at White Plains, and I picked up the manuscript," he says. "I slept with it under the pillow that night."

"Thin Air" almost vanished into "thin air" when he left the only copy of the manuscript on the commuter train.

Since Ziff-Davis had recently eliminated its book publishing division, Browne could finally abandon the "John Evans" pseudonym for good. *Thin Air* by Howard Browne was published by Simon & Schuster in 1954.

Thin Air has two hooks, and either one is enough to sustain a fill-length novel. The first is the bizarre disappearance of the wife of the narrator, Ames Coryell. The solution to this mystery is improbable but nifty. The second hook concerns Coryell's profession and is handled very nicely. He is an advertising V.P. who turns his Manhattan ad agency into a detective agency, deciding that the same ingenuity that sells soap can locate his wife.

In his second non-Pine thriller, James Cain's influence is more subtle and successful than it was in *If You Have Tears.* The main character, Coryell again, is a cross between a brooding private eye and



one of Cain's first-person killers. He sometimes sounds a little cracked. You start to wonder if he's murdered his wife and blacked out the memory. Coryell isn't a good family man. One of the first things he says is, "I managed to spend about as much time with my wife and daughter as I did with my barber." At work, he's a hardboiled ad man. "No weak-kneed crap this time," he snarls at a client. "We'll pay Miss America to take off her clothes and step into a bathtub with your soap. Only she'll do it in Madison Square Garden between rounds of a world's championship fight." By the end of the book, he has stood up to a cop trying to pin a murder rap on him, beaten up a punk, and challenged an underworld czar. He almost makes Paul Pine look soft.

Thin Air proved to be Browne's most profitable book, thanks to a booming market for detective fiction—television. *Armstrong Circle Theatre* and the CBS *Movie of the Week* did adaptations of *Thin Air.* The missing wife hook (minus the ad-man husband) was sold to TV detective shows such as *The Rockford Files* and *Simon & Simon.*

The year *Thin Air* came out, Browne met Raymond Chandler at the Overseas Press Club in New York. Browne shook Chandler's hand, saying,

"It's a pleasure to meet you, sir! I've made a living off you for years."

"Chandler was so delighted," Browne remembers. "He said, 'There's so many guys who try to use my style and said they never heard of me.'"

Bantam had reprinted the "Halo" books and they were selling so well that Lee Wright, his editor at Simon & Schuster, asked him to write another Paul Pine.

"I wanted to call the book 'Halo for Hire,'" Brown says. "But Wright said, 'I don't like the "Halo" title. People will pick it up and say, 'Halo Halo Halo. Yeah I must have already read this about Paul Pine.'"

So in 1957, Paul Pine lost his "halo" when *The Taste of Ashes* by Howard Browne was published. Years later, Browne would read a reprinted Raymond Chandler short story called "No Crime in the Mountains." The private eye's name was, coincidently, John Evans, who says at one point, "There was a taste of ashes in my mouth." Although the title of *The Taste of Ashes* was predestined, the content of the novel proves Browne is no longer standing in Chandler's or anyone else's shadow.

Pine calls on a client who lives in the ritzy Chicago suburb of "Olympic Heights." The client, a disagreeable old woman named Delastone, more or less expects Pine to murder a blackmailer for her. Pine scoops up his hat and walks off the case. Later, he finds the body of an acquaintance—another private detective—who was working for Delastone on the case he was offered. The victim has a "wife and no debts except the car and the TV set."

Pine then meets the college-educated cops of Olympic Heights, who can quote *Macbeth* and talk to him as if they were butlers. They rule the death a suicide, but Pine knows better. He soon discovers that these cops are as corrupt and vicious as their counterparts in Bay City, California.

The Taste of Ashes plays for keeps. Where the best of the "Halo" books—*Halo in Brass*—was full of a stylized hyper-reality, *The Taste of Ashes* is filled with a sense of real pain and moral darkness. Incredible corruption is referred to off stage, which makes it more chilling. There is incest that leads to murder. There are photos of a "respectable" family member which are probably as filthy as one could imagine. The novel doesn't end with a easy solution. Pine discovers that the murderers are more the victims than any of the murdered. He discovers the real human sadness at the heart of any murder.

Browne's writing was never better. The book is violent and surreal—a punch-drunk thug falls "in sections like a factory smokestack." An old man snoring in a drunken stupor makes a sound like "a boot coming out of the mud." In one scene, the book's title is invoked when ash from Pine's cigarette falls on a dead woman's lips.

Without being pretentious, the book is a meditation on what it is to be a private eye. Pine is an apostle of the creed that a private eye be a "proud and lonely" man, owning "nothing except a few books and a bottle or two." Other '50s men can father the baby boom generation, but a private eye is not a family man. Yet Pine finds himself investigating the murder of a private eye who seems to have been a good husband. Although Pine won't admit it, it eats away at his world view.

We see Pine on peripheral cases, the non-glamorous ones he must have spent most of his career taking—the missing husband who's found dead-drunk in a dive with a floozy, the client who won't pay Pine's bill, the college senior who wants information on "the place of the private investigator in our modern society."

In the end, Pine's romantic view of his profession is redeemed, but Paul Pine has also matured as a character. He's not just another wise-cracking shamus. He's earned the right to carry himself with Robert Mitchum-style world weariness. The '50s were a time when other private eyes, the ones who weren't just psychotic like Mike Hammer, re-examined themselves also. Philip Marlowe got married, and Lew Archer discovered Freud. In *The Taste of Ashes,* when Pine is called a "gumshoe," he remarks, "You don't hear them called that much any more."

A screenwriter is the guy who makes the paper dirty for directors to walk around on in their bare feet.

In 1956, while he was still working on *The Taste of Ashes,* Browne received a call from a friend, Roy Huggins, a TV producer for Warner Bros. He asked Browne to come to California and write for his Western series *Cheyenne.*

"I have not even seen a television script," Browne said. "I wouldn't know one if it bit me in the ankle."

Just like Bernard Davis, Huggins had to persuade

Browne that he was the man for the job. He flew out to Hollywood and wrote Huggins a script. Huggins liked it, but Browne had to return to his job back in New York.

"Three weeks later I got a big fat envelope in the mail. Inside were contracts for seven years at a figure that astonished me. I signed the contract, divorced my wife, and came to California."

There are still dents in the office paneling where I'd pound my head trying to find ideas.

He wrote for *Cheyenne* as well as for other Warner TV series, including *Playhouse 90,* where he had a script produced called "Seven Against the Wall"—a dramaatization of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

Browne got his first crack at writing for the movies when Jack Warner picked up a paperback in a drugstore because he liked the title. The book was called *Portrait of a Mobster* and was about the life of the Cotton Club gangster Dutch Schultz. One of Warner's aided remembered Browne's St. Valentine's Day Massacre TV script and spent hours on the phone trying to track him down. Since movie people refused to associate with TV people, he didn't realize that Browne was working for Warner Bros. Television just down the hall.

Eventually, Browne was located, and he wrote the script. In 1957, *Portrait of a Mobster,* starring Vic Morrow as Schultz, was released. Browne would write two more gangster screenplays, *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* (1967) and *Capone* (1975). His scriptwriting so impressed a member of the profession that Mickey Cohen, the protégé of Bugsy Siegel, asked Browne to ghost-write his autobiography. He declined.

In 1959, he married his second wife, Doris, and continued writing for television. He was a story editor for *Perry Mason* and wrote for *77 Sunset Strip, Maverick, Mannix,* and *Mission Impossible* (the latter, he says, was "the most fun I ever had writing for television.")

Considering that television gave pulps their death blow, Browne made the transition at the right time. He also played a part in TV's reshaping of the private eye from a lone wolf in a low-rent office to a two-fisted winner who drove a sports car.

Although scriptwriting paid more than publishing, it was never as satisfying to Browne as writing novels. "Scripts are just a blueprint for the director," he says. "I've seen things on the air that I wrote and didn't recognize." Then he adds: "A screenwriter is the guy who makes the paper dirty for them to walk around on in their bare feet." It's no wonder his favorite Chandler is the Hollywood novel *The Little Sister.*

Browne "retired" from Hollywood in the early '70s, spending his time teaching writing courses at the University of California in San Diego and script-doctoring for friends in the business. He is currently working on a new Paul Pine novel called *The Paper Gun.*

After being in suspended animation for 25 years, Paul Pine will awaken to a contemporary Chicago with both a Buck Rogers skyline and blocks of burned-out buildings. "I visit Chicago every couple of years," Browne says. "But it's no longer the city I used to love."

As the new Pine takes his place among hardcover private eyes of the '80s, he'll find the only change that has occurred is that they spend as much time moping about their girlfriends as they do pounding the mean streets.

"It's funny how you change," Browne says. "Raymond Chandler does not hold the great fascination for me that he used to. I guess that isn't surprising because I read some of his books thirty times. But he is out of step with today—as he should be. My God, he wrote those books forty years ago. I'll tell you, when I want to read somebody good, I go back and read James Cain."

Thin Air was reprinted by Carroll & Graf in 1983. In 1984 and 1985, the Quill Mysterious Classic series, edited by Otto Penzler, reprinted the four Paul Pine novels. In the new version of *Halo in Blood,* that dame is still pawing through Paul Pine's bookshelf, but *Warror of the Dawn* by Howard Browne is missing. Just before the books were reprinted, Browne removed the reference to his very first novel. ("For Christ's sake, take that precious thing out of there!")

Paul Pine now has a copy of a book by P. G. Wodehouse on his shelf. Fortunately for us, we have a shelf of books by Howard Browne to read, and can rediscover one of the snazziest private eye series in the genre. □

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COLLECTING MYSTERY FICTION

By Otto Penzler

Is it worse to fall into that unhappy category of forgotten authors, or to simply be among that throng which has never been recognized at all?

While neither fate is like going to the circus, Frederick Irving Anderson's minuscule reputation is that of a wonderful storyteller who is woefully unknown to even the true aficionado of mystery fiction.

If, on occasion, Anderson's name arises, it is invariably greeted with sighs of admiration and a shaking of the head that foreshadows the remark: "Why isn't he better known?" or, even more commonly, "Why aren't his books in print?"

As with so many others, Anderson's great strength was also his great weakness. He is one of the most distinguished short-story writers in the history of the American short story in general, and the short crime story in particular. His weakness, or his failing, is that he never wrote a full-length novel, and it is almost hopeless to build an enduring reputation on short fiction alone. There are exceptions a-plenty, of course, including the father of them all, Edgar Allan Poe, as well as O. Henry, but they are still exceptions. Anderson could not transcend that limitation.

To have created a single distinguished character with a place in the pantheon of crime fiction giants is a laudable achievement, especially when it is remembered how many authors have tried their hands at this most fascinating of all literary genres.

But to have created two, each a milestone in the history of crime fiction, is a remarkable level of performance achieved by very few authors, and by none who have been restricted to the short story. Only Melville Davisson Post comes close, with Uncle Abner and Randolph Mason, if we ignore his novels, upon which his reputation will not stand in any event.

The Infallible Godahl, the first of Anderson's creations, is the most perfect criminal mind ever devised. He does not rely on luck or daring to achieve his ends; he employs flawless logic. It is his belief that, if he thinks a problem through to its logical end, it will be impossible for him to get caught. He achieves his aims so impeccably that he has not only never been caught, but he has never even been suspected of a crime. He is the first great American criminal of crime fiction, towering over his challengers, just as Raffles towers over his British counterparts. While some British crooks preceded A. J. Raffles in print, and others appeared more frequently, none could ever challenge his pre-eminence.

And so, too, does The Infallible Godahl dominate the pages of crime fiction. The book in which his exploits are recorded, *Adventures of the Infallible Godahl,* is surely one of the great cornerstone volumes in the far-reaching world of mystery fiction. The omission of the book from *Queen's Quorum,* Ellery Queen's selection of the 125 most important volumes of detective short stories, is one of the few major flaws in that otherwise excellent work.

The other major flaw is the omission of Anderson's second book, *The Notorious Sophie Lang.* Here is the female equivalent of Raffles, more than of Godahl. Her great talent is her ability to use her beauty and charm to evade capture and punishment. Although she, too, is brilliant, she has close calls and must endure the consequences of her miscalculations, as Godahl never has to do.

There has never been a female crook on either side of the Atlantic to challenge the position of Sophie Lang. While Fidelity Dove, the heroine of Roy Vickers's splendid volume, and Edgar Wallace's Four-Square Jane have much to recommend them, it is Sophie who is so sophisticated, whose sights are so high, that she is clearly the leader. No American woman crook can be mentioned in the same breath.

Incredibly, the volume of her adventures has never been published in America, enduring today only in a single edition published in 1925 by Heinemann in London.

Queen did select the third of Anderson's books for inclusion in *Queen's Quorum,* probably because *The Book of Murder* falls most solidly in the category of detective fiction. In this collection of exquisite stories, Oliver Armiston, Godahl's foil, appears again, hired by Deputy Parr of the New York police department, the frustrated pursuer of Godahl and Lang. Together, and without the hopeless challenge of those two master criminals, Armiston and Parr solve ingenious crimes.

All three of Anderson's books of crime stories are scarce and expensive, with even reading copies fetching upward of a hundred dollars. He was a prolific writer of short fiction for the *Saturday Evening Post, McClure's,* and other slick magazines, but none of these stories has been collected. Anderson wrote two books on farming, both published by Macmillan: *The Farmer of Tomorrow* (1913) and *Electricity for the Farm* (1915).

Anderson was born in Aurora, Illinois, November 14, 1877, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1899, married Emma Helen de Zouche in 1908 (she died in 1937), and died on Christmas Eve 1947.

Three films were based on his Sophie Lang character: *The Notorious Sophie Lang* (1934), *The Return of Sophie Lang* (1936), and *Sophie Lang Goes West* (1937). All were produced by Paramount and starred Gertrude Michael.

For a mystery writer of such small output, it is unlikely that Anderson has an equal in this century. For collectors, it is unlikely that a greater challenge exists. Finding even moderate copies of his three books in first edition is difficult. To find all three in fine condition is an extraordinary achievement. To find all three in fine dust wrappers may elude a lifetime of search, even with a robust bank account.

Because of the slim, bleak possibility of locating the books in dust wrappers, values have not been ascribed to copies in dust wrapper. They have not been illustrated because no copies were available for that purpose. While several jacketed copies of *Adventures of the Infallible Godahl* have been sold in recent years, it is still an excruciatingly rare item. *The Book of Murder,* having had at least three printings, may be slightly less rare. I have never seen nor heard of a copy in dust wrapper of *The Notorious Sophie Lang.*

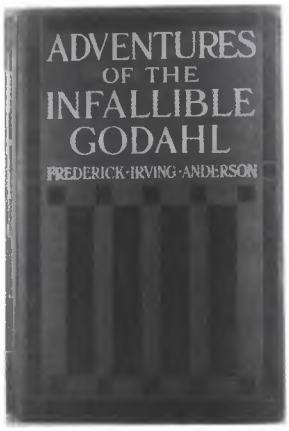
As a very rough estimate, it may be assumed that a dust wrapper in a condition that is approximately equivalent to the copy of the book on which it is found may enhance the value by a multiple of five.

No proof copies of any of the books have been recorded. Curiously, I have seen three inscribed copies of *The Notorious Sophie Lang* but no such copies of either of the other two books. I suspect this is happenstance, as it seems extraordinary that Anderson would have inscribed more copies of a book published exclusively in England than of those published in his native country.

Adventures of the Infallible Godahl

First Edition: New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, (1914). Blue cloth, front cover and spine printed with orange lettering and black ornamentation; rear cover blank. Issued in a pictorial dust wrapper.

Note: The copyright page bears the words "Published March, 1914." The first edition seems to be the only edition, no second printings of that edition being recorded, nor any subsequent reprints.



Most copies are bound in a deep, fairly dark, blue cloth, but I have seen two copies in a much lighter blue binding. No priority has been established.

Estimated retail value:

Good	$125.00
Fine	350.00
Very fine	425.00

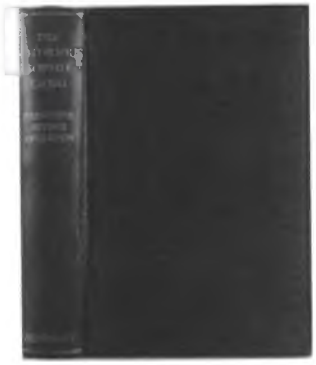
The Notorious Sophie Lang

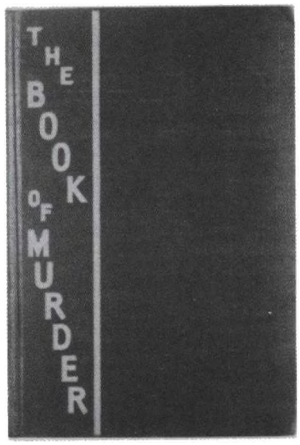
First Edition: London, William Heinemann, (1925). Red cloth, front cover blind-stamped with a rule along all edges; spine stamped with gilt lettering and rules at the top and bottom; rear cover has publisher's device blind-stamped.

Note: Copyright page bears the words "First Published. . . 1925." The first edition seems to be the only edition.

Estimated retail value:

Good	$200.00
Fine	600.00
Very fine	750.00





The Book of Murder

First Edition: New York, E. P. Dutton, (1930). Black cloth, front cover printed with red lettering and a rule running from the top to the bottom of the cover; spine printed with red lettering and a horizontal rule; rear cover blank. Issued in a printed dust wrapper.

Note: The copyright page bears the words "First Edition." Subsequent printings are so noted.

While the title carries the definite article on both the front cover and spine, the title page and the running heads drop it. Standard bibliographic practice is to regard the title page as the final word in determining the actual title of a book, in which case this one should be referred to as *Book of Murder*.

Estimated retail value:

Good	$ 75.00
Fine	250.00
Very fine	325.00

Part 2

GLITZ gave me the opportunity to significantly broaden the research I did for Dutch. Until that project got under way, with the exception of Hamtramck research for *Split Images* and the location work on the *Hang Tough* screenplay, my efforts had been largely two-dimensional; I was usually confined to the main Detroit Public Library or out scouring the clip morgues, chasing down old magazines and rudely commandeering the nearest copy machine. During *Glitz,* I would be moving into what was for me uncharted waters.

Dutch's greatest talent is the care and nurturing of inspiration and opportunity. *Glitz* is a classic example of this random-seed approach. What began, inconspicuously enough, as a movie-from-scratch ended up becoming *the book* that put him over the top.

LaBrava was finished in July 1983, and Dutch was working on the first draft of the screenplay for Walter Mirisch. The veteran producer sent him Ernest Tidyman's script for a sequel to *In the Heat of the Night,* which, it was hoped, would again team up Sidney Poitier and Rod Steiger to reprise their roles from the 1967 film in which redneck police chief (Steiger) and visiting black cop (Poitier) reluctantly join forces to solve a Mississippi murder case.

Mirisch and Poitier felt that Tidyman's treatment was too much like the original book and movie. They wanted Elmore Leonard to take a stab at it. Their idea was to reverse the roles of the two characters. Maybe this time, Steiger's daughter would be murdered in Philadelphia and Poitier would have to help him. Something like that.

At this point, Dutch asked me to look into Philadelphia as a location and throw in Atlantic City for good measure. After an introductory survey, I cut to the real meat of the matter: crime and criminals.

Through the New Jersey Film Commission, I secured a copy of the *1983 Pennsylvania Crime Commission Report,* a veritable yellow pages of East Coast mob activities, with graphic descriptions of violence as well as the conversations of mobsters taken from wire taps and testimony made before the commission. After going through this report and reviewing other research materials, it was clear to me that Dutch's attention was being drawn through Philadelphia and toward its decadent satellite, Atlantic City.

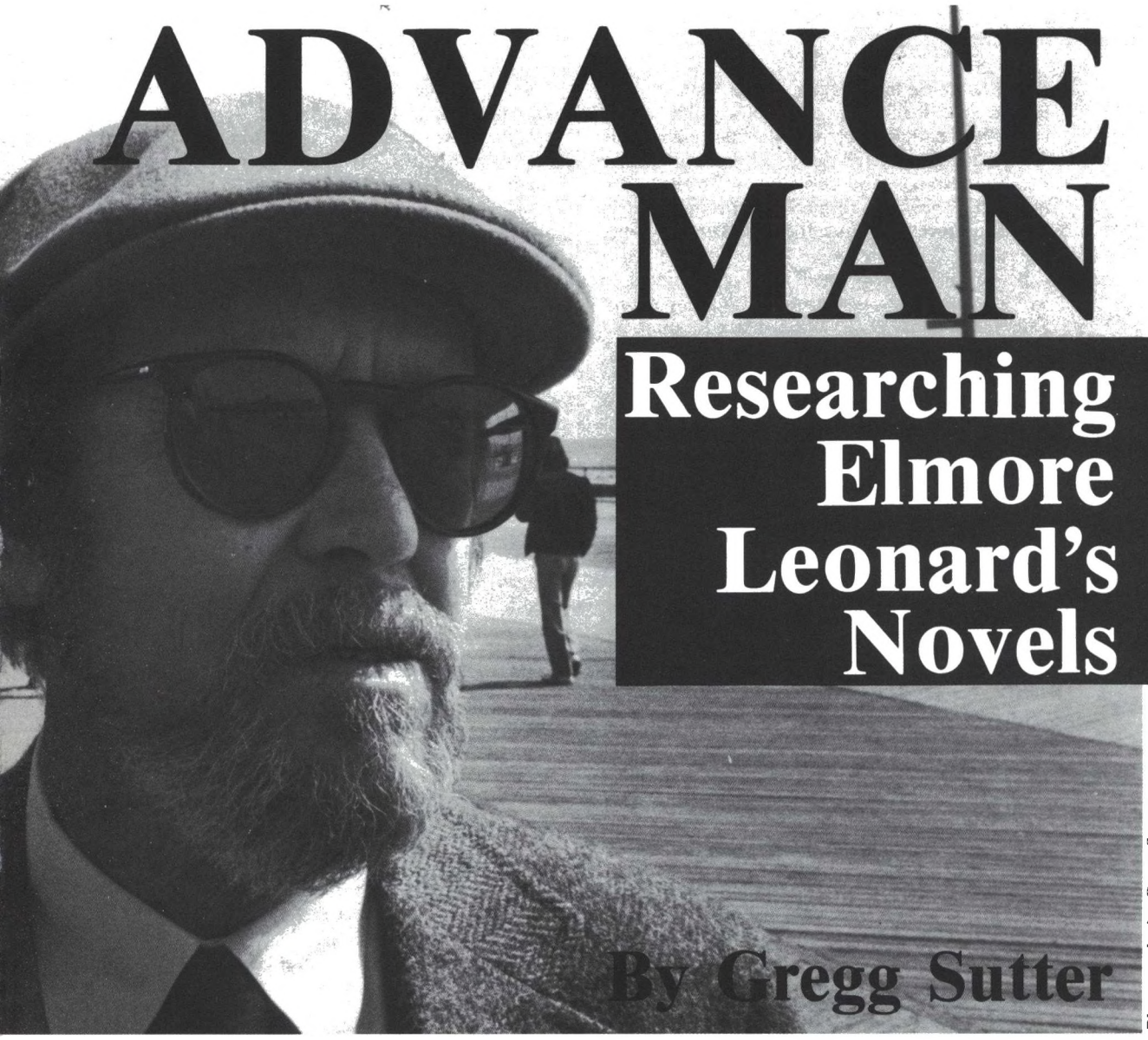
Dutch needed ideas for a "McGuffin" in the story. At his request, I looked into a couple juicy scandal cases that might apply: the Peter and Roxanne Pulitzer divorce and the murder of Arthur Bloomingdale's mistress, Vicki Morgan, over the so-called "sex tapes." Maybe, he thought out loud, some wealthy Philadelphian, who likes to party with Atlantic City girls, becomes involved in a Chappaquiddick-like incident that results in murder. He'd think of something.

In October 1983, Dutch flew out to Hollywood to meet with Poitier and Mirisch. He was satisfied that the project was moving forward and wrote Mirisch: "The meeting with Sidney Poitier was a good one, especially encouraging to me because we discussed the story from the standpoint of people, the characters, rather than straining to come up with a bizarre plot situation."

It was obvious that, with all these minds clicking, the sequel idea was out the window—too confining. Now, Sidney's character would be a homicide detective drawn into a conflict with people in high places—Philadelphia bluebloods who believe they can buy and sell him because of his easy-going,

ADVANCE MAN

Researching Elmore Leonard's Novels



By Gregg Sutter

Photographs by Gregg Sutter

non-threatening manner. But, as Dutch reassured Mirisch: "By the time they realize their mistake, somebody is going to be looking down the impersonal barrel of Sidney's .38 Special. With variations, that's been the basic structure of nearly all my novels."

Despite the emphasis on character, location would be equally important if the story were going to work. Palm Beach was discussed first because of the Pulitzer business: "Murder among the affluent," wrote Dutch. "Not in the English drawing-room manner, but in a contemporary style, with characters and situations that bear at least a hint of resemblance to fairly recent news headlines."

But his mind was not on Palm Beach, as he told Mirisch: "[I]n no time at all we left Palm Beach and moved the show to Main Line Philadelphia for the old-money atmosphere we need, and gained another location for high contrast: Atlantic City, 60 miles down the freeway, in all its tacky splendor."

Sidney could now be either a Philadelphia or Atlantic City cop, even a homicide investigator for Atlantic County. The "self-confident Philadelphian snobs" will dismiss him as a "boardwalk flatfoot, probably on the take." But Sidney has jurisdiction over the murder(s) and uncovers clues that lead him to the Main Line for a rumble with the bluebloods.

At this point, the majority of the story would not take place in Philadelphia but in the preferred Atlantic City. "It looks like a movie set," Dutch wrote Mirisch, "and it isn't much bigger: 48 blocks long and 10 wide, with a striking visual mix of old and new. Organized crime has been kept out of

casino gambling; but the Philadelphia Mafia controls prostitution, loan-shark operations, some casino unions, and it's buying up real estate fast, to be ready for the day the state relaxes its supervision and the wise guys can take a more active part in legal gambling. Right now each casino is required to maintain a security force larger than the city's 320-man police department."

By January of 1984, Dutch was still attempting to write a story and/or an original screenplay for Sidney. Atlantic City was locked in as a location, but he chose Puerto Rico as yet another high-contrast set. One reason for the choice was Michigan in January, as good as any to head someplace sunny and warm. Whatever the catalyst, this particular opportunity would bear much in the way of inspiration.

This time, Sidney's character is Vincent Mora, a retired Detroit cop living in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Back in 1967, during the Detroit riot, when parts of the city were on fire, Vincent's character confronted four National Guardsmen from Flint, Michigan, caught looting and killing a black store owner. These

The support team in New Orleans. l to r: Officer Gus Krinke, Louisiana Film Commissioner Phil Seifert, Lieutenant John Schlutter and New Orleans Movie Coordinator, Richard Castleman.

yahoos aimed their guns at Vincent and he shot all four of them, severely wounding the leader, a geek named Teddy Kozerek. Vincent was reprimanded by the Detroit Police Department, investigated by Internal Affairs, and threatened with a charge of assault or attempted murder—until stolen goods were found in the Guardsmen's Jeep. Kozerek was convicted of second-degree murder and sent to Jackson to do twenty-to-life. This did not appease Vincent, though. He quit the police and moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico to forget about it all. Upon release, Teddy tracks him down to Puerto Rico to seek revenge.

Then, Serena, the daughter of Connie Ruiz, Vincent's Puerto Rican girlfriend, is murdered in Atlantic City; perhaps pushed out of a party boat near Atlantic City by Teddy, precipitating a coverup and more murder on the Main Line. Things were still a bit sketchy, but Dutch had some good cross-plotting going.

Poitier was not as thrilled with what was happening to the story as Dutch was. Dutch had, after all, reversed his usual dictum: where there's a book there's a movie. Now the movie was turning into a book and Poitier knew it. Dutch was firmly locked on target, and Poitier basically said, "Go write a book," and dissolved whatever working arrangement they had.

Once the handcuffs were off and he was writing strictly for himself, Dutch simplified the story a great deal. Now, Vincent Mora comes, *via* Miami, to Puerto Rico. The murdered girl is his girlfriend from San Juan, and the Guardsman is now an incorrigible pervert from around Atlantic City named Teddy Magyk, who likes to rape old ladies. Vincent still sent him to the penitentiary once, and Teddy still never forgot and tracks him to Puerto Rico.

That was the state of *Glitz* on the eve of my departure to Atlantic City. Dutch was still finishing up *LaBrava* but wanted to get a jump on the book research. He knew that it would take too long for him to go in there totally cold and get what he needed in the time he was willing to spend on it. Atlantic City wasn't like Detroit or Florida or Arizona, locations he could write about instinctively. He needed to pound some boardwalk before he wrote about the town's sound.

So that's where I came in. I'd be his advance man in Atlantic City. We discussed the story, such that it was, and he gave me a shopping list.

First things first. What about the cops? What gun do they use? How were they organized on the city and county level? How was the major crime unit set up and when did it take over? Check into the morgue. What was the setup? How did you view a body? When did the coroner get into the act?

Then, there was the high-rolling big shot. Where would he live? Where would he entertain? Where would he dump the body?

Despite the surreal quality of Atlantic City casinos, Dutch wasn't particularly interested in a casino story, *per se,* other than to examine members of the casino crowd who might figure into the death of Iris, *née* Serena.

Before I left Detroit, I got in touch with Jeff Pergament, Coordinator for Cultural Affairs for Atlantic County. He grasped immediately what I wanted.

I told him everything I knew about Vincent Mora—especially about the discomfort he'd feel staying in

the casino hotels. So where would he stay? I figured I'd stay there too.

Jeff steered me to the Hotel Holmhurst on Pennsylvania Avenue, across the street from Resorts International Hotel and Casino. He promised to get me access to the coroner and the cops.

In the second week of January 1984, I flew to Atlantic City and into an embryonic Elmore Leonard novel. I took raw, scant facts about a novel-to-be and had to weave them into a story that would fly long enough to get people talking and thinking. My "story" would wear thin, but, five days later, I had enough facts and images to give Dutch a profile of the place before his follow-up visit.

Upon arrival at Atlantic City's woefully inadequate airport, I grabbed a casino shuttle into Glitz City and hit the ground running. This bus stopped at every casino, dropping off eager gamblers before reaching the end of the line, Resorts, where I got off for the Holmhurst. With this introductory tour, I formed an impression of what this town was about. Not much different from Detroit, actually. Glitter and flash covering up a lot of decay, poverty, and despair. Exciting growth, but not at a quick enough pace to keep the anomalies from showing. Definitely Elmore Leonard country.

The Holmhurst was perfect for Vincent. One of the last of the old wood hotels, on or near the Boardwalk, with long open verandas to catch the salt air. Today, from the Holmhurst porch, the air was soaked in diesel fumes from the buses jamming the far end of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of Resorts.

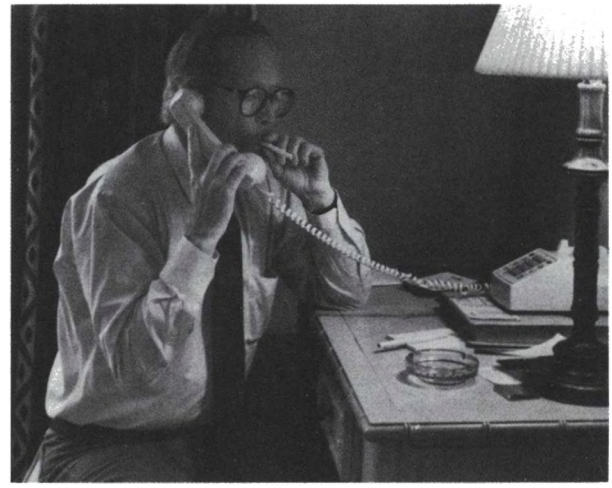
Jeff Pergament and Steve Gorlick, from the New Jersey Film Commission, picked me up at the hotel, about an hour after I arrived, for an initial tour of Atlantic City and the rest of Absecon Island. Without much prompting, they showed me the seamy side. "As you look to the right," said Jeff, the tour guide, "you see the South Inlet, once the most affluent part of the city until urban renewal or Negro removal—which ever way you want to look at it. Then it became HUD-cleared land. There was no incentive to redevelop. The old summer resident homes are now occupied by tenant Hispanics. There are a few speculators who invest their money in South Inlet property and have their kids come and live in the houses and work in the casinos, but ninety-nine percent of the people you see on the street in the Inlet are either drug dealers or undercover cops." Sounded like the right stuff to me.

Over the next couple of hours, Jeff would brief me about the mob, prostitution, bikers, drugs, gambling, real estate, Puerto Ricans, and submarine sandwiches. We drove from the South Inlet, through Atlantic City to Ventnor, Margate, and Longport, and back along Casino Row.

That night, I took off on foot to play some real-time Monopoly on the streets of Atlantic City. I walked the length of Pacific Avenue from the Holmhurst down to the Golden Nugget and then swung around on Atlantic Avenue, making a big loop. I was later told that this hike was ill-advised, bordering on stupid or insane, but I didn't feel threatened and was glad I had made it.

The next morning, the police came for me. Fortunately it was arranged. Captain James Barber of the Major Crime Squad of the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office pulled up in front of the Holmhurst in a non-descript Ford Fairmont. He took me over to Northfield on the mainland where the Major Crime Squad was headquartered. Atlantic City did not have a homicide division as such, so all major crimes were handled through Northfield in a former mental institution.

There I met Captain Frank Stites, Barber's partner, and Chief of County Detectives, Bernard McBride. I gave each copies of *Split Images* and *City Primeval* to build confidence in Dutch's treatment and understanding of cops. I ran by them what I knew about the "story," and we spent a couple of hours chatting about the Atlantic City crime and vice situation. I asked a lot of questions about Vincent, like: how would they treat him, a visiting cop outside his jurisdiction poking around in their back yard?



Dutch in his room at the Resorts talking to his agent, the legendary H. N. Swanson.

"With skepticism and suspicion," assured Barber. "We'd call and check this guy out, run a background."

How would Vincent get them to help? "If you want Vincent to receive co-operation, he would have to have, at one time, done somebody in the Atlantic City Police a favor, like a murder suspect from Atlantic City is believed hiding in the Miami area and Vincent helped in the investigation—then we'd bend

a little. But we'd say: 'Vincent, don't jam us up.'"

During our talk, we were joined by Chief McBride, and the four of us piled into the car for the short ride over to Shores Medical Facility in Somers Point to meet with Coroner Donald Jason.

Jason, who is regarded as a "Quincy"-style coroner, filled in a lot more details about a variety of "sudden deaths" that were common enough in Atlantic County—possible background for Iris's death. Jason was being coy, careful not to go too far. "I got my own book to write," he explained.

After dropping off Chief McBride, Captains Barber and Stites and I had lunch. They escorted me to some marshy areas off the many connecting water "thoroughfares" where foul play was relatively common, reviewing cases involving dumped and chopped-up bodies. Feeling reasonably loose about the project, they extended an invitation for me to ride with them the next night—Saturday night—on some runs through Atlantic City. We went back to Northfield, and Barber, at my request, called a police reporter at the *Atlantic City Press* to get me into that newspaper's clip morgue to start background research.

I grabbed my camera and headed toward the French Quarter, documenting the freak show until dawn. I called it quits when I could no longer outrun the pickpockets and hookers, who were often one and the same.

Friday night, I hung out at the tiny bar at the Holmhurst and met a blackjack dealer from Resorts named Frank, who told me just how far the casinos will go to keep high rollers happy; how they'll "comp" (give complimentary) meals, rooms, call girls, drugs—whatever it takes to make a sucker gamble. Frank told me about many off-premises games, staffed by moonlighting casino dealers, staged when the casinos shut down, between the hours of 4:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M. I didn't know how much to believe, but that didn't bother me. I knew Dutch would be interested in this angle.

Saturday morning, I checked out of the Holmhurst and into the Aristocrat Motel, across the street, directly behind Resorts. There were no room phones in the Holmhurst, and that night I had to wait for the call from the cops. I spent the whole day at the Atlantic City Library, risking blindness trying to get materials together. The *Atlantic City Press* would not let me copy more than six articles, so I had a massive number of clip dates to track down, sift through, and edit in a short time. When the library finally closed, I was exhausted. I grabbed a cheese steak and took a jitney back to the motel to wait for Barber to call about my evening tour.

The call finally came in about 9:00 P.M. Bad news. The cops couldn't make it. Reality had intervened. Down by the Boardwalk, a seven-year-old boy, the son of an Atlantic City policeman, had been found with his head crushed in. At that point, I figured I wouldn't see the cops again and collapsed into sleep.

On Sunday, cut loose and pretty much on my own, I grabbed my camera and took off to get location photos to background the "big guy" and Teddy Magyk. I was also looking for a highrise from which Iris might take a swan dive. This cause of death was starting to win out over the others.

I photographed up one end of the Island and down the other, snapping every highrise in Ventnor and Margate. I cruised through Longport Boro, where the Philadelphia rich spend their summers. I shot some of the more expensive homes on the ocean in different architectural styles. Then I went over on the mainland, across Longport Boulevard, to Somers Point and Linwood, documenting the marshy outreaches, basically retracing the steps I had taken with the cops as best I could.

Sunday night, about the only thing to do was hit all nine casinos and lose a little money in the slots. After seeing them all, one after another, I felt that Resorts—the first casino in Atlantic City—was the most compelling, from the standpoint of the project.

On Monday, my final day in Atlantic City, an ugly winter storm moved in. Fortunately, I did have one last chance to talk to Barber and Stites, so I slid out to Northfield, on the ice, during a vicious winter storm. The mood there was glum. Everybody was exhausted and depressed about the murder of the little boy.

I headed back to the City for some frantic last-minute research and photography. I didn't have time for more library research, but I had a hundred promising clips to run down. I ended up going to the *Atlantic City Press* office and buying about 25 back issues. Then I bolted for the airport, lugging a corpse-weight worth of newspapers in my flight bag. I had given myself five days to get the story, and I felt I had it.

I never made it inside the White House Sub Shop nor seen an off-premises game or even the back room at a casino, but I had witnessed the young Puerto Rican dope hustlers in the South Inlet and driven through "Ground Zero," a street-drug emporium at Arctic and Kentucky, just around the corner from the old Club Harlem. I had seen some of the flotsam that drifts into Atlantic City. I had started to pick up on sound, and I knew that, if I could, it went without saying that Dutch would, too.

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Dutch was not ready to start going through the Atlantic City stuff right away. That gave me plenty of time to transcribe twelve hours of tape, organize the clip file, and put together a location book. The *LaBrava* screenplay was still hot, and he looked forward to his own research trip in Puerto Rico. Private investigator Bill Marshall, Dutch's college chum and occasional researcher in Miami, offered to send his operative Ernie Palmer to Puerto Rico with Dutch and Joan to act as a tour guide.

While in San Juan, Dutch talked to a former police superintendent about procedural facts and found a guy who booked casino-style entertainment. He realized then that a new character was emerging. Actually, an old character was re-emerging. The female pop star named Moon, an early idea for the female lead from *LaBrava,* was being dusted off to become Linda Moon in *Glitz.* Dutch would create some kind of one-woman-band nightclub act for her.

After a few days, Dutch had his locations down pat and knew where the cops ate, what they ate, and what they talked about. With Puerto Rico and the summer and the Inlet offered rooms only a few blocks from the ocean.

...To Vincent the area looked as though it had been fought over in a war, house to house and half the people had packed up and left.

On that drive, Dutch also pinpointed Teddy's mother's house in the Marvin Gardens area and Donovan's house in Longport. It's seven miles across the island from the Inlet to Longport, but Vincent sees both in the same shade and hue:

Vincent drove to Longport in the rain, down-beach to the bottom of Absecon Island. Big money, big homes, but it looked barren to him; there were so few trees. He was used to the Florida coast. Here were weathered frame beach homes out of the past next to white modern ones with round corners, as different as privies and spaceships. Maybe it would have more of a seaside resort look with the sun shining. He found Donovan's address and was surprised to see one of the old, old ones, with peaks and gables and a porch sitting on brick stilts that circled the entire house.

A working lunch at the Irish Pub which is right off the Boardwalk in Atlantic City. l to r: Sgt. Billy McIntyre, J. Anthony Lucas, Dutch and Captain James Barber.

Gamblers, joggers, tourists and Dutch.

LaBrava screenplay behind him, Dutch planned his own trip to Atlantic City in late March. He asked me to set some things up and join him there for a few days.

We cruised around the Island with Jeff Pergament, a much more specific tour than the one I'd had in January. It yielded some good background. As before, we started off in the South Inlet. This is how Dutch described it:

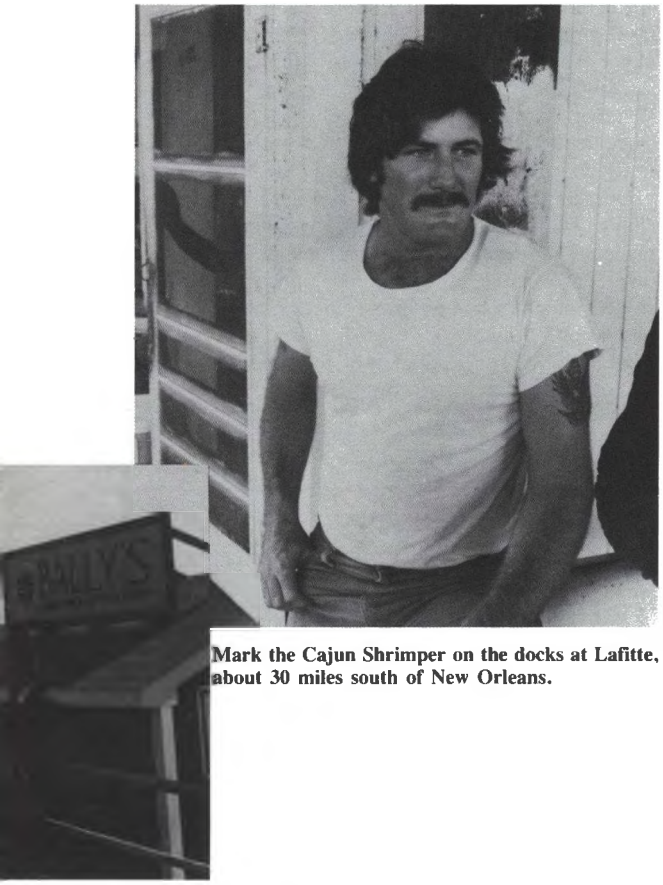
Vincent looked at the Inlet neighborhood through venetian blinds, at old frame houses and empty lots, telephone poles standing alone on streets named after states and oceans. He saw homes that looked like barns with bay windows and dormers stuck on, built in a time when tourists came here in

We had dinner at Angeloni's, a neighborhood Italian restaurant, the model for La Dolce Vita, a location on Fairmont Avenue, where Ricky the Zit kills Frank Cingoro. Afterward, Pergament dropped us off at Resorts, where we were staying, and Dutch and I took off on foot and by jitney to hit about five casinos on the Boardwalk, playing some slots and waiting around for lounge acts to appear.

It was the lounge acts that drew Dutch into the casinos. He was determined to fill in parts of Linda Moon's character before leaving Atlantic City. He also felt that Resorts had the most consistent and "glitzy" entertainment, and, throughout the rest of his stay, Dutch would sip ginger ale in the lounge

there and jot down notes through a variety of acts, churning out everything from Michael Jackson's "Beat It" in Spanish to old big-band charts.

The next morning, Dutch met up with J. Anthony Lukas, the Pulitzer Prize–winning author who was writing a feature on Dutch for *GQ* (November 1984). Lukas spent three days tagging along as he researched his article.



Mark the Cajun Shrimper on the docks at Lafitte, about 30 miles south of New Orleans.

Around noon, we had a lunch date with Captain Barber, who came for us in the ubiquitous Ford Fairmont. Captain Stites was under the weather, so Barber brought along Sgt. Billy McIntyre. We took a little tour of the neighborhood, and the two cops were quite animated, pointing out interesting tidbits such as the Mafia gofers on South Georgia Avenue, where Little Nicky Scarfo, reputed don of Atlantic City, lived when he wasn't in prison.

We then descended on the Irish Pub near the Boardwalk for lunch. Dutch got out his notepad and asked very specific questions of Barber. "You find a woman lying on the sidewalk in front of a highrise. What would you do first?"

"Look up," replied Barber. The interview was very productive for little nit-picking details like that. Barber has read a couple of Dutch's books by now and had an idea what he was looking for.

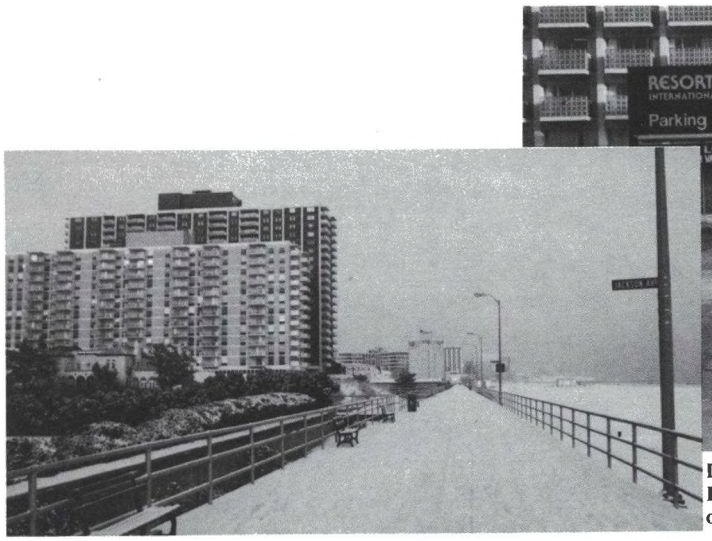
After lunch, we drove down to the edge of the Boardwalk and Kentucky Avenue, walked underneath where the winos and bums lived. Barber told us that recently, in this choice spot, there had been a bloody homicide over a bottle of wine. It would be here that Teddy would murder and rape Marie, the old lady slot player.

Later that afternoon, Tony, Dutch, and I waited at the Hotel Holmhurst bar for Frank, the Resorts dealer I'd met there in January. He promised he'd come over and talk but never showed. I called his house and was told rather obliquely that "Frank's crashed." It sounded as if he'd be out for a long time. I was disappointed.

But I had to get back to Detroit, so I left that evening. The next day, Dutch met with Bill Weinberger, president of Bally's Park Place Casino. The background for this contact goes back to *The Hunted* wanted to know how he knew about her husband's feud with Greenberg. The two were the only two Jews in baseball at that time. Dutch was surprised; after all, he just pulled facts out of the newspaper. Rita Rosen said, "But you had more than was in the paper." The only thing that Dutch can figure is, Dutch's character, Al Rosen, must have made certain assumptions on his own and was right on the money.

Rita Rosen became an Elmore Leonard fan as a result and called him in March of 1984 to say hello. Dutch was getting ready to go to Atlantic City, and she suggested that he look up her old friend Billy Weinberger. Great timing. She solved a problem, since neither Pergament nor myself were able to get much co-operation from the casinos.

Dutch's interview questions made Weinberger change the subject a lot, especially when the topic turned to money laundering and the like. As a casino owner in a carefully monitored industry, it was a subject which he had no interest in acknowledging or discussing. Weinberger turned Dutch over to the head of casino surveillance, which turned out to be a



Downbeach highrises which were the reference for the spot from which Iris Ruiz was tossed over by Teddy Magyk.

Dutch and Pulitzer Prize winning author J. Anthony Lukas, who was writing about Dutch for *GQ*; they are on their way to meet a dealer who didn't show.

(1977), a thriller Dutch wrote after a visit to Israel on a screenplay assignment in 1974. Dutch had a main character who is hiding out from the Mafia in Israel and is using the name Al Rosen, lifting it from the Cleveland Indians third baseman who is now the general manager of the San Francisco Giants. In the book, Rosen describes how the real Al Rosen got into a salary dispute with the great Hank Greenberg, who was then (in the early 1950s) the general manager of the Indians. Rosen subsequently left baseball to become a stock broker.

Al Rosen's wife Rita called Dutch in 1979 and bonanza—a chance to see the inner workings of the casino surveillance room that monitored the entire casino floor, and the so-called "eye in the sky," which looks directly down from a few feet above the player.

This chunk of research would finally bring his story into the casino, whether Dutch liked it or not. Events, as always, were shaping themselves.

Glitz had a definite direction when Dutch returned to Detroit. The entire first act would be set in Puerto Rico, then a long second act in Atlantic City, and back to Puerto Rico for the finale. But it didn't start out that way. These sections blended together

extremely well, but Dutch agonized about them a little. There existed a bridge between Atlantic City and Puerto Rico—a cultural and economic exchange; Dutch unconsciously found the literary bridge, and played it to its maximum advantage.

After *Glitz,* there was—what else?—the *Glitz* screenplay. This project would go through many revisions and be a source of frustration as Dutch tried to please Hollywood and at the same time make sure they did not chop up his book too badly. Scenes appeared and disappeared. And they appeared again. Finally he was happy with it. When a movie deal began to firm up in the summer of 1985, and it looked as though the film would finally get into production, there would be more revisions, some major.

But backing up to August of 1984, the screenplay of *Glitz* had been shipped off, and it was the perfect time to begin the next book. Then came a further distraction: television producer David Gerber, now head of MGM-TV, came knocking. He commissioned Dutch to write a cop action-adventure series—with total freedom to select subject matter, characters, and location. That's what he said.

But Gerber and his producer balked when Dutch said he wanted the setting for the TV movie to be in his birthplace, New Orleans, which the producer described as a "downer city." They wanted to move the action to Seattle. To Dutch, the point was non-negotiable, and the producer backed down.

As always, Dutch had a wisp of the plot in his mind. A mass murderer, a king-sized creep, is being released from Angola Prison (possibly on a technicality), and the New Orleans Police Department—specifically Raymond Wilder, the detective who sent him up—is required to protect this guy, knowing full well he will kill again.

With that slim thread, Dutch instructed me to go to New Orleans and "talk to the cops." I contacted the Louisiana Film Commission—to co-ordinate some location scouting—and the New Orleans Police Department. They said, come on down, we'll talk when you get here.

I arrived about 1:00 A.M. on Labor Day, and the French Quarter was in full swing. The big surprise was the room—actually a palatial suite at the Saint Louis Hotel on Bienville Street, within shouting distance of Bourbon Street. So far, I liked the Louisiana hospitality.

The street scene rejuvenated me, so I grabbed my camera and headed out, documenting the freak show until dawn. I called it quits when I could no longer outrun the pickpockets and hookers, who were often one and the same. After nearly collapsing into a plate of chili and eggs, I drifted back to the Saint Louis to crash. I knew it was necessary to get the Bourbon Street stuff out of my system right away, so I could concentrate on my real research objectives.

Since my appointments with the Film Commissioner and the cops weren't until the day after Labor Day, I rented a car to motor across the swamp to Ponchatoula, on the other side of Lake Ponchartrain, spending the holiday with the family of an old running buddy, Bryan McMahon, now editor of the Ponchatoula *Times,* a newspaper with a column "written" by a "talking" alligator named Ole Hardhide. Bryan filled me in with some good background stuff about New Orleans and its environs.

The next morning, I began my actual research program. I was picked up by Phil Siefert, the Film Commissioner, and Richard Castleman, New Orleans Movie Co-ordinator. They took me downtown to meet the cops who were going to be my contacts at the New Orleans Police Department: Officer Gus Krinke, Public Affairs Officer, and John Schlutter, Lieutenant in charge of the First Precinct Promenade, which covers all of the French Quarter.

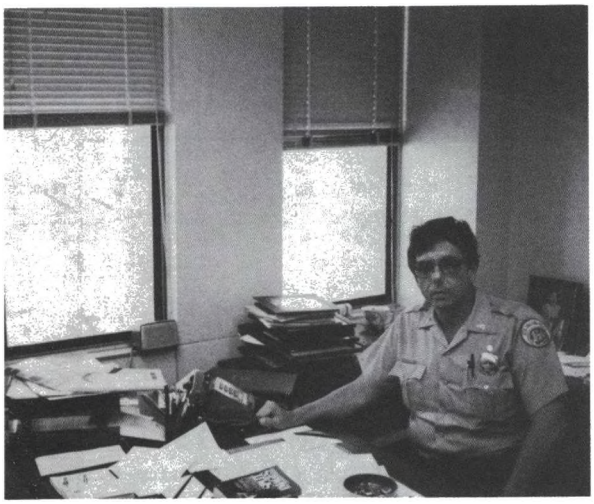
Krinke and Schlutter had been involved in many previous film productions, from *Cat People* to *Tightrope.* Schlutter had even had a bit role in *Tightrope.*

We found the two on Carondelet Street, controlling traffic for a Japanese film crew shooting a furniture commercial. The star of the show was Nastassia Kinski, who was made up like Blanche

Dubois, getting off—what else?—A Street Car Named Desire. A few days later, at Audubon Park, on the Mississippi, filming part two of the commercial, Nastassia would be dressed up as Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind,* crumbling the earth of Tara between her fingers. I never did figure out what the commercial was about. For me, as a researcher, it was a colossal diversion, but I couldn't resist standing in line like everybody else to get my picture taken with the star. I knew Dutch would understand.

While waiting for her to arrive that first day, I had done a preliminary interview with Krinke and Schlutter, filling them in about *Wilder* and trying to get a feel for where he would fit in. Schlutter said he might be assigned to the First Precinct as a detective, where all the action was.

Krinke thought more in terms of the General Assignment, a cleanup squad for Vice, Homicide, and Robbery. General Assignment got a little bit of everything and was not confined to the same type of crime, a plus factor which would expand the plot range of a television series. Since Dutch had already decided on Raymond being unconventional and



Officer Gus Krinke who is the police liaison for film and TV projects.

relatively unaccountable, it sounded right. Said Krinke: "In General Assignment, there are no three-piece suits. They're not tied down to a desk. They're always working on something of an undercover nature, like traveling criminals. They may report once in the morning and then that's it, out, gone. That's how they have to work—unless they need backup or it's a surveillance thing."

Over the next three days, I'd spend a lot of time with Schlutter and Krinke and the members of the General Assignment Squad in the squad rooms and the street. I hung out at the First Precinct with Schlutter and walked up and down Bourbon Street with Detectives Sam Boa and Bev Gunther. Detectives in New Orleans can pull overtime by patrolling the streets of the French Quarter at night. I thought it would be a step down from a top detective job, but those who pull the duty like it. They get closer to the street that way.

All told, after ten hours of interviews, I got some very good character background and plot ideas for the TV movie and possibly the series.

By the end of the week, it was obvious to me that Dutch should focus his story on the General Assignment Squad and specifically Detective L. J. Delsa. I rode with Delsa around town on a Friday afternoon in his late-model Camaro. As we drove through the war-torn projects, his floor console storage box was open and his gun rested inside at the ready. The New Orleans Police Commissioner insists that his men carry revolvers, just the opposite of Atlantic City. Delsa uses a .38 caliber with a Packmeyer Handle for a better grip. With the bad guys out there using Uzis and Mac-10s, a cop needs all the help he can get.

For the better part of an hour, I listened with great interest while Delsa filled me in on many specifics about the New Orleans police and answered questions about Raymond's probable character. Delsa talked about the many changes over the years—about drug pushers, snitches, child murderers, and a variety of killers and victims. He told me the way of the streets: "We are the ones who have standards to go by. The criminals have no standards. They think about what they are going to do every minute they're awake. We can only think about it eight hours and then you try to go home to your family. The criminal goes home and tries to figure any way he can to get over on the police."

When all was said and done, Delsa was the best model possible for Wilder, and, after Dutch met him, he agreed. In fact, Delsa was the only cop that Dutch interviewed for *Wilder* when he came to New Orleans himself.

The rest of my research time was spent location-scouting in the city and down the bayou. Siefert, Castleman, and I drove out to various camps (houses) on the outskirts of New Orleans. I was thinking of such locations, possibly for Wilder's father or maybe some other undefined character. We also went down to Lafitte to meet a Cajun shrimper. I was convinced that the Cajun element would appeal to Dutch and wanted to at least touch on it. We met with a young, rough-and-ready, hard-working shrimper named Mark, and I got excited about this angle. His point of view would make good background for *Wilder* or possibly for the next book, *Bandits,* which would have a New Orleans setting. But the producer, for a reason best known to himself, wouldn't buy a

country twist to the plot. He wanted a big-city cop story, period. At least for the pilot.

As with the *Glitz* research, I brought back many photographs and tapes from New Orleans. The pictures, as it turned out, were unnecessary for the most part, since Dutch knew this city well enough despite the fact that he hadn't been there in several years. The tapes were more valuable. I transcribed them and played excerpts from many to refresh Dutch on the sounds of the locals. A few months later, Dutch went to New Orleans to interview Delsa and visit his relatives. Just about everything he needed, he had. Upon his return, he wrote *Wilder* in a few weeks. The screenplay had all the Elmore Leonard ingredients, and there was definitely a book there, but this one wasn't destined to evolve that way. But just as *Split Images* spawned *Cat Chaser, Wilder* would provide the foundation for *Bandits.* As of this writing, one of the networks is still sitting on *Wilder.*

During and after the *Wilder* project, I did some library research on Panama and Nicaragua for *Bandits,* but nothing specific. Dutch was overloaded again with *Glitz* screenplay rewrites and still couldn't get at it. He was also rewriting *LaBrava* and working on yet another television series.

In January of 1985, Universal TV asked Dutch to do a pilot on whatever he wanted. Dutch agreed if Walter Mirisch would be brought in as supervising producer. Mirisch suggested that the pilot be a Western. The result was *Duell McCall,* centering around a favorite Leonard theme: the consequences of pushing a mellow man to the brink.

I was happy, in a way, that he was doing another Western, even though it was delaying the new book. Elmore Leonard has a special feel for the West, and it shows in his Westerns from *Hombre* to *Gunsights.*

I did a little research, mostly on Wyoming in the 1880s, on ghost towns, the cattle industry, and cow culture in general. I delivered the material to Dutch, who had only the vaguest idea of a plot. Nonetheless, Mirisch called and asked him to tell Universal the story line in a conference call that would take place in three hours. Before the call took place, Dutch changed the background of the story from cattle to mining, coming up with characters and situations which the studio liked. He wrote an outline and was given the go-ahead. Like *Wilder, Duell McCall* is tentatively slated for production within the next year.

As Dutch achieved international fame and recognition in the early part of 1985, he found increased demands on his time for interviews and personal appearances. *Bandits* was on hold again, but, in his mind, he was assembling characters and listening to them speak. Happily, he got a chance to do some more research.

Newsweek, in preparing their April 22, 1985 cover story on him, asked Dutch to go down to New Orleans and do some research on his next book, and they'd have Peter S. Prescott follow him around.

Dutch got together with Delsa and Schlutter in New Orleans and asked Siefert and Castleman to take him up to Angola Prison, where he interviewed Wilbert Rideau, editor of the prison newspaper, *The Angolite.* He came away with some good prison sound. Dutch and Joan also slipped away to London and Dublin, in the spring of 1985, where he did more interviews and researched an IRA-type character itching to be born.

The research for *Bandits* was rapidly reaching completion. But upon his return to the United States, Dutch was still being sidetracked by the demands of having "arrived" in the national consciousness. Then came more rewrites of *LaBrava.* Martin Scorsese and Dustin Hoffman expressed strong interest in *LaBrava.* Director Sidney Lumet took a liking to *Glitz,* and Dutch had a chance to work with two top directors. Unfortunately, after many meetings in New York, Lumet announced plans to make a film with Jane Fonda and *Glitz* is again in limbo.

Dutch is expecting great things from the film versions of *LaBrava* and *Glitz.* After the saddening experience of the *Stick* movie, it's a miracle that he can still be so optimistic, especially considering the damage of a well-intentioned failure. His sound is subtle and prone to misinterpretation, and for this

reason he remains unsatisfied with every single movie based on one of his books.

It was autumn 1985 before Dutch began *Bandits* in earnest. Set in New Orleans, this novel will be a departure from his last several books, again adopting the point of view of the bad guy/semi-hero, a charming ex-con named Frank Matisse. As he writes, Dutch is doing some additional firsthand research on the funeral business. Last week, he sat in on an embalming from start to finish. What he witnessed has already made its way into the first chapter of *Bandits*.

After more than a year of delay, generated in large part by his success, he is back doing what he does best and enjoys most. That unmistakable Elmore Leonard sound is heard again.

* * * * *

Doing research for Dutch these past five years has tuned me in to his essential strength: the ability to pull biography and transcripts out of everyday life. He has been doing that throughout his career. He is still—and always must be—his own best researcher. There's no other way, really. He brings in a researcher to broaden his scope, but, in the final analysis, only he can make things work.

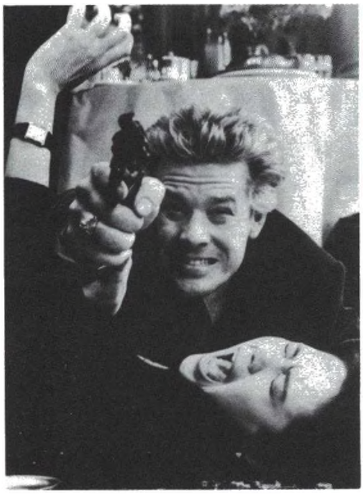
It's challenging and difficult being Elmore Leonard's researcher. I'm constantly shopping for his imagery and listening for his sound. Most of the time, I'm off the mark. Then, when despair starts to set in, Dutch pulls some totally random snippet from the output to justify—in my mind at least—the rest of the bumbling and fumbling.

I continue to try to develop new ways to collect data in the future, including using computer database searches and video location photography. In the end, all this means nothing if I don't pay proper attention to the essential ingredient: knowing and following his characters, the focal points and signposts to the important details.

When doing the field research for *Glitz* and *Wilder,* I discovered that character is so subjective and akin to the writer's creative core that it's extremely difficult for a third party to mimic it even under the best of circumstances. The secret is to become an extemporaneous actor who, handed some sketchy description of a character or scene, is forced to bring it to life. Sometimes the results are just plain ridiculous—other times not bad at all. Either way, it's a lot of fun. □

By Thomas Godfrey

TAD at the MOVIES



Year of the Dragon: **Chinese Restaurant Syndrome sets in as Rourke protects girlfriend Ariane in after-dinner shootout**

The papers have been full of the racial controversy sparked by **Year of the Dragon,** as well as a fair amount of rankling among the writers in the entertainment pages who have either loved or hated it at great length.

A look at the film itself makes you wonder what everyone is getting so exercised about.

Michael Cimino's (*The Deer Hunter, Heaven's Gate*) first film in a few years, *Year of the Dragon* is a very uneven product—effective touches thrown against amateurish turns, imaginative invention beside the tiredest of clichés, good acting set against the embarrassing, well-written exchanges heard above the roar of the ridiculously inept. Cimino seems unaware of the difference.

By present standards, it's not the worst thing to come along this season, though it's far from the best. Without the hoopla surrounding its opening, it might have passed on to cable and video cassettes rather quickly. But once again, negative publicity has rescued a mediocre film from the obscurity it deserves.

The plot serves up Mickey Rourke (*Diner, The Pope of Greenwich Village*) as a middle-aged lieutenant assigned to clean up New York's Chinatown as a slick young crime lord (John Lone) is wresting control from a group of elderly capos.

It's a story we've seen many times before with Italian or nondescript figures. The novelty of seeing it in a Chinese setting does not make it greatly refreshed.

Bloody it most certainly is, gut-wrenching and often explosive. But it grows tedious and tiresome by turns. Rourke acts well enough within his familiar range of mannerism, though his "aging" make-up varies wildly from scene to scene, sometimes suggesting a high-school production of *The Long Christmas Dinner*.

By contrast, his co-star Ariane as girlfriend–TV reporter Tracy Tzu looks exquisitely turned out in designer everything but acts strictly from hunger—limited, stiff, lifeless, like a robotized manikin.

Further detailed analysis would resemble the menu of a Chinese restaurant, with column A representing the strengths and B the equal number of weaknesses.

If you are a fan of the gangster saga, you may find the Chinatown setting enough to interest you. Others are directed to more satisfying fare.

Compromising Positions suggests that the spirit of Agatha Christie may be alive and well in suburban Southern California. Susan Isaacs's screenplay from her own novel is squarely in the tradition of the St. Mary Mead whodunit overrun with social caricatures, but, instead of ne'er-do-well lounge lizards with waxed mustaches, we have the sun-tanned, gold-chained periodontist in a blue smock unbuttoned to the brisket. Instead of the shady lady married to the superannuated aristocrat, we have the sharp-tongued, nosy suburban bedwarmer (well played by Judith Ivey). Instead of Miss Marple, we have an ex-*Newsday* reporter turned Yuppie housewife (Susan Sarandon).

Isaacs's ability to put across a mystery does not match her talent as a satirist. Carolyn Keene is more devious. Collaborator-director Frank Perry (*Diary of a Mad Housewife, Mommy Dearest*) seems similarly more inspired by the chuckles of domestic strife than the intracacies of a murder plot.

The primitive Girl Scout investigations are thin entertainment. The shadows-on-the-wall shudders are vintage Fay Wray. Raul Julia, the Latinate police investigator and possible love interest, is given a part that looks as if it were still being thought out *after* it had been filmed.

By the time the murderer's identity has been revealed, most of the audience has stopped caring. The ending, in which the killers trap Sarandon, looks like recycled *Charlie's Angels* with ring-around-the-collar.

It would have been a much better movie with a stronger mystery. As it is, there is still a strong cast of character actors putting across some funny bits about lust among the carpool-and-aerobics set, though unsympathetic Edward Herrmann's emoting about how-hopelessly-chauvinistic-he-really-is belongs in another film.

Best of all is Ivey suggesting that the spirit of Eve Arden is alive and well at the cinema. And that is the best news we've had in a dog's age.

Genuine Agatha Christie comes our way courtesy of an adaptation of her 1958 novel **Ordeal By Innocence**, filmed on location in Devonshire, England.

A paleontologist (Donald Sutherland), just returned from a two-year expedition to the Antarctic, tries to return an address book left in his car by a hitchhiker, only to discover that the hitchhiker has been hanged for murdering his mother the night he was on the road with the scientist. What's more, the family seems indifferent to the man's possible innocence and regards the scientist's intrusion with hostility.

Director Desmond Davis lays out Alexander Stuart's screenplay faithfully and methodically, relying on flashbacks and cross-cutting to provide much of the drama. The contrivance of the plot is not disguised. Mrs. Christie obviously came up with another

corker of a plot idea, and was not to be dissuaded from setting it forth by considerations of logic and plausibility. (Witness the fact that the scientist might have easily posted the book back to its owner at any number of times.)

The film's real undoing, however, is its inability to put even this strained piece of fiction across with any real impact. One big contributing factor was the artistically disastrous decision to use a Dave Brubeck jazz improvisation score under the picture. It works at odds with the carefully photographed English seacoast-village locale. But what's worse, it tootles along through scene after scene with unvarying mood and tempo. I believe that the music would make pleasurable listening in a club or the privacy of one's home, but no score at all would have been better than Brubeck here, as the sound engineers occasionally allow him to drown out important bits of dialogue.

Sutherland's scientist-sleuth is slightly underplayed to advantage, though he has been given a dyed-brown punk hairstyle, especially created for the film, or so the credits tell us. Faye Dunaway contributes a toned-down Mommy Dearest cameo as the murder victim. (She should give this sort of thing an extended vacation from her repertoire.) There's also a matronly, lacquered-haired Sarah Miles as a tippling suspect, and Christopher Plummer in form as yet another curled-lipped gentleman-not-to-be-trusted. The best acting comes from Annette Crosbie, PBS's Queen Victoria of several seasons ago, as an anxious housekeeper who may know more than she tells.

Sarandon in *Compromising Positions: Fay Wray recalled*

The film tips its hand as to the murderer's identity prematurely and clumsily, though the editor seems so caught up in his flurries of clever assemblage that he never notices.

It's but one of a series of artistic bungles which turns what might have been a nice little Christie whodunit into an exercise in how to sabotage a picture.

Can a successful mystery be built around the responsibility to be assumed for a suicide?

Wetherby, directed by playwright David Hare from his own original screenplay, tackles just such a challenge. Here a young stranger insinuates himself into a small group assembling for dinner at a Yorkshire cottage owned by spinster schoolteacher Vanessa Redgrave. The next day, he returns alone and

Ivey and director Perry in *Positions:* Eve Arden recalled

blows his brains out.

Who was this man? Where did he come from? Why does he single out Redgrave as the witness to his last futile act? The film takes a long time getting around to the answers, as it reconstructs the patchwork of the man's last days.

Hare certainly knows how to put across mood and tone, and he gives the production a professionally high gloss, but I couldn't escape the feeling that he'd worked the material over once too often. All the spontaneity has gone out of it—and most of the humanity, too—leaving behind a symbol-laden contrivance creaking with studied gestures and double meaning.

He can't resist putting psychological little pearls into the mouths of his players about the pain of loneliness, emotional inhibition, and the ordeal of relating to other persons. The result is not so much a human tragedy as a contest of social philosophers. He leaves many of his characters underdeveloped and their inert relationships unexplored, instead preferring to bring on new, peripheral figures who will bolster his messages.

The film never builds, for all its portentousness, until the last few moments, when it finally takes off into a little dramatic frisson, only to trail off into two further scenes of teasing, tedious philosophizing.

In spite of excellent performances from Judi Dench, Ian Holm, and Redgrave's own daughter, who plays her as a youth in flashbacks, the film belongs to Redgrave, who is, as ever, commanding. But to no avail, for, with all Hare's pretensions and fake art, she's commanding a shallow vessel that ventures out of its depth and finally sinks.

J. B. Priestley had the right idea about handling responsibility for suicide as the basis of a mystery. If the film version of his *An Inspector Calls* with the incomparable Alistair Sim turns up in your television listings, tune in and fine out how it's done.

Gossett and Matthau in *The Laughing Policeman:* Not to be forgotten

In the wake of another Bouchercon-by-the-Bay, it is worth noting the appearance of **The Laughing Policeman** on videotape. This 1977 filming of Per Wahlöo and Maj Sjowall's thriller transplanted the setting to San Francisco with surprisingly successful results. The grim, gray, meticulous style of the Swedish authors draws out a different side of the city, one that is probably closer to the perception of its inhabitants than anything that has heretofore been put on film or tape.

Audiences have grown so used to Walter Matthau as a comedic actor that it takes some adjustment to accept him as a drab, humdrum police detective, but given this chance he performs convincingly. (His early films, mostly as the "heavy," were all serious.) Lou Gossett (*An Officer and a Gentleman*) gets to show his range as Matthau's associate, as does Bruce Dern, less twitchy and intense than usual, as another.

There is a nice symmetry to this story about the investigation of a mass shooting of passengers on a city bus, one of whom turns out to be Matthau's off-duty partner.

Director Stuart Rosenberg's confident direction tells the story without much creative fuss, though he might have given things just a bit more edge and focus. But this is a satisfying film, and one that deserves to be better remembered than it is. □

This Pen for Hire

By Raymond Obstfeld

I sat on a panel at this year's Bouchercon. There were five of us, including Robert Randisi, Warren Murphy, Gayle Stone, and Bill Crider. The panel was called "The New Pulps." This title confused me, and, every time I saw it, it made my teeth hurt.

Someone in the audience asked a question. I don't remember what. But somewhere in it was the word "hack." This word confused me and made my hackles rise. Don't look for hackles on your body; only hacks and certain birds have them.

Everyone of us addressed ourselves to the question of what a hack was and whether or not we considered ourselves one. I don't remember any of our answers. Bob Randisi said he referred to himself affectionately as a hack. Warren Murphy said he always wrote the best book he could at any given time. Gayle Stone said something about "Mythology." I'm not sure what I said; something about writing for fun.

I know I was sincere about whatever I said, but the whole time I couldn't help thinking how the question ever came up. I mean, here I was, a college professor, a guy in a tie, a dozen of my students having driven up from Southern California for this convention, being asked about hackism, hackdom, and hackamania.

I looked around the panel table for a glass of water, but of course none had been provided for us. Maybe if we'd been on a panel with Bill Pronzini and Dorothy B. Hughes called "The Pulps Panel," we would have received water. Maybe not.

The thing was, I'd been writing for almost twenty years, most of that time plays and poetry and short stories. Mainstream stuff.

My first published book was a collection of poetry called *The Cat With Half a Face*. It had taken ten years to write, including three years of graduate school. It had a nice blurb on the cover from poet Karl Shapiro.

But then, somewhere along the line, I went bad. I started writing suspense and mystery novels, and I was booted out of the realm of Mainstream into the backrooms and pool halls of genre writing. As if I'd suddenly abandoned character, theme, craft, and all that other stuff I'd used and studied before.

Oh, sure, there are respected mystery writers, but they are mostly paraded around like token minorities at an all-white ball. At the college where I teach, there is a sniffing attitude about my novels from other faculty members because the books aren't more Mainstream. I don't bother to remind them that Dorothy Sayers also translated Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Nowhere is this attitude more obvious than in paperback originals. In many major metropolitan newspapers, they are reviewed as a literary genre rather than a physical type of publishing. In the *Los Angeles Times*, their reviewer does occult, Westerns, how-to, mysteries, medical, science fiction, sagas, romances, and teenage advice books. If it's paperback, it's all the same.

So, this time I thought I'd do a little turnabout in the reviews and mingle some Mainstream novels in, approaching them as a mystery/suspense writer. Try to bridge the gap. The books were chosen at random, just whatever struck my fancy.

* * * * *

The Desert Rose (Touchstone), Larry McMurtry. McMurtry is one of those writers on whom reviewers have been trying to pin a label for years. For a while, they considered him a Southern writer, then a Texas writer, then just a mainstream writer, then back to maybe a Western writer. He's written such diverse books as *The Last Picture Show* and *Terms of Endearment*. His latest, *The Lonesome Dove*, is a sprawling novel of the Old West that is riding the bestseller lists.

While reading *The Desert Rose*, I couldn't help but think about William Goldman's *Heat*. Both are set in Las Vegas. Both have a similar attitude about the place, though neither exploits the more obvious symbolism such a city represents. Goldman's suspense novel has seedy characters, crime, cruelty, betrayal. So does McMurtry's Mainstream novel.

The difference is that McMurtry concentrates on the unraveling of an aging showgirl's career and family as she nears her 39th birthday. In many ways she is a victim of the harshness of the world around her, yet she manages to survive it all with a compelling optimism. She endures like the desert rose.

Goldman's character is also a survivor, and also a victim (of his compulsive gambling). Thematically, the stories are similar. The differences then become style and the fact that the crime and action elements are more pronounced in Goldman's work.

The Desert Rose was written in three weeks while he was in the middle of writing *The Lonesome Dove*. Tired of the logistics of such a complicated work, McMurtry wrote *Rose* as a diversion. It has that loose feeling to it. Despite enjoying it quite a bit, I couldn't help but feel that, if McMurtry had taken more time, he could have made this seem less like a drawl and more active, like his other novels. I think he is one of the major writers in this country, especially with *All My Friends Are Going To Be Strangers, Leaving Cheyenne*, and *The Last Picture Show* (which he considers his weakest book). But *Desert Rose*, pleasant as it is, is not one of his major works.

* * * * *

Fletch Won (Warner), Gregory Mcdonald. This is supposed to be the first of Fletch's adventures, involving the usual dead bodies and rapid-fire quips. I've read all the Fletch books and find that they seem to be getting more and more predictable and less and less witty. The patter gets tiring and juvenile. Fletch's famed independence and irreverence seem forced, contrived. This is especially evident when compared to the much more original wit of the protagonist of *Bright Lights, Big City*.

* * * * *

Bright Lights, Big City (Vintage), Jay McInerney. This is a first novel about drugs, sex, and rock 'n' roll. The movie is already set to star Tom Cruise. Its success took everyone by surprise. It deserves its success.

The tone is very much in the mode of the hardboiled detective novels, the wittier ones. Read this and read *Red Harvest* by Dashiell Hammett and you'll see some echoes in the tone. But *Bright Lights* has its own style and approach. It's written in the second person point of view ("You go to the corner, ask yourself how you got there"), which is only awkward for a line or two. Then its humor and pathos take over and you begin to get involved.

The protagonist is a fact-verifier for a *New Yorker*-type magazine, who spends all of his spare time pursuing cocaine and the rock nightclubs. He is getting over the break-up of his marriage to his pretty but vacant model wife. He is looking for meaning and avoiding looking for meaning at the same time.

This one's a little different, but, despite its shaky *dénouement*, it delivers a lot of funny passages and interesting characters, with a tone that is touching and authentic.

* * * * *

Ironweed (Viking), William Kennedy. Murder, police, beatings, perverted sex. Sounds like a "new pulp" instead of last year's Pulitzer Prize–winning novel. The story is that this book was turned down by a dozen editors before Saul Bellow stepped in and got one to reconsider. And so a legend is born, movie deals are made, and William Kennedy's Albany novels are all headed for the screen. (He wrote last year's film *The Cotton Club* by the way.)

The main difference between this novel and any mystery novel dealing with similar events, is that just about any mystery novel would be more interesting to read. If I'd been one of the editors who'd had this novel submitted, I'd have turned it down too. I still would. Its tale of the lives of several Depression Era bums is smug and self-congratulatory. It has Catholic undercurrents about sin and redemption, punishment and purification. Lots of that Mainstream magic. But it's as dull as watching glue dry. There's more honest moral struggle and revelation in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*.

* * * * *

Less Than Zero (Simon & Schuster), Bret Easton Ellis. Ellis was nineteen when he wrote this novel. Since its publication, it has climbed the bestseller lists, boosted by the usual pile of reviews proclaiming it this year's new *Catcher in the Rye*.

Like *Bright Lights* and *Ironweed*, this is a picaresque novel of depravity, charting the modern Huck Finn's voyage down the mainstream of America on a raft of drugs and anonymous sex. There's hardly a page on which someone isn't getting high or laid. Pulp stuff.

But you have to give the kid credit. He has a fine ear for dialogue and some excellent descriptive passages. But *Catcher* it ain't. It is a chronicle of events, a witnessing of characters performing acts. There's a discontent in the tone, a put-upon adolescent *Weltschmerz*. But it has none of the insight and vision that Salinger's novel has. It can only recall what happened without fully understanding—or communicating—the implications.

* * * * *

Wake Up, Stupid and **Lying in Bed** (McGraw-Hill), Mark Harris. I was in Jamaica this summer. I'd taken *Living in Bed* with me to read on the plane. By the time I arrived in Montego Bay, I was so hooked on the book that I wanted to read it more than do anything else.

This is a novel of letters from a protagonist, a novelist and professor, to family, friends, and strangers. In the letters, he discusses his writing, sexual impotence, writer's block, former affairs, and everything else you can think of. While reading this, I couldn't help but remember Bob Randall's epistolary mystery, *The Fan*, which was even harder to pull off because Randall had to build suspense while defining many characters. Yet Mark Harris (who also wrote *Bang the Drum Slowly*) has fashioned a remarkably witty book, both compelling and hilarious, yet touching.

Upon finishing this novel, I immediately went out and purchased *Wake Up, Stupid*, also an epistolary novel with the same character, yet written 25 years ago. The contrast between this man then and now is wonderful, especially since I'd read the books in reverse order and knew where he was going. For those who appreciate Donald E. Westlake's humor in *A Likely Story*, these two novels are perfect. □

TAD ON TV

By Richard Meyers

Oh, this is going to be great. I can't tell you how jaded and cynical I've become since coming out to the West Coast. Thankfully, I'm in my last month here (October 1985) but get to do this "new season" column direct from tacky, catty, nasty Hollywood. It just wouldn't have the same vindictiveness if done on the "right" coast.

The great thing about TV execs is that they never "learn" anything. And the great thing about any new season is that it is filled with easily knockable tripe created by those who never learn anything. Tell me, quick—what movies or shows were last year's hits ripped off from? Answer: none, really. So what do the bozoids do this year? Why, mount series after series "borrowed" from the successes of yesteryear.

Don't they ever learn? Oh, yeah, right, sorry—I already answered that.

Actually, the single most heartening bit of news came from ABC, which had the worst lineup (and worst ratings) of last season. When faced with figuring out why every single one of their new shows died last year, the powers that be could only come up with a single reason. To quote: "They stunk." Now, believe it or not, that is *wonderful* news. It means they're not hiding behind the same old rationalizations (cast, time period, "chemistry").

Of course, looking at ABC's new 1985–86 series gave me the impression that they haven't taken action on that conclusion yet. Take **Lady Blue** for example. . . *please!* What would happen if you changed Dirty Harry's sex? You wouldn't get Katy Mahoney, that's for sure! Harry is a caring man pushed too far. Katy is a homicidal psychotic who seemingly loves becoming a reckless endangerment to public safety. Maybe she's actually Popeye Doyle with a sex change. . . .

Anyway, Katy is a Chicago policewoman with a .357 Magnum who is doomed to recreate scenes from *Dirty Harry, The French Connection,* and even more on a TV budget and TV schedule. As if that's not enough, she's forced to do it in freezing weather and high-heeled boots. I suppose that if actress Jamie Rose, the redhead cursed with this part, had to figure out a telehell, this would be it.

I won't keep you in suspense any longer. I detest this show and can only alternately pity and dislike Rose and the callous boobs who put it on the air. I mean, *really,* ripping off these movies *scene for scene,* then picturing the woman as a manic-depressive murderer serves no one, least of all feminists. And Katy doesn't even *hold* the gun right!

Now, your honor, for my next witness, I call **Hollywood Beat,** an Aaron Spelling travesty that feebly attempts to be a West Coast *Miami Vice.* Hilariously, however, it makes two wildly false contentions. One, that heroes who are pictured as drunken, womanizing, inconsiderate, boorish, slobby jerks are actually endearing, lovable rogues, and two, that the myriad hookers, pimps, musclemen, and bag ladies who litter the Sunset Strip are actually sweet, terrific guys and gals.

At least Florida pushers and pornographers are worthy of derision. On *Hollywood Beat, everybody* is hateful! Naturally, the producers don't leave it at that. Jack Scalia, who plays the womanizing drunk Nick McCarren, dresses up like Starsky, and Jay Acovone, who plays the inconsiderate slob Jack Rado, comes on like Belker of *Hill Street Blues.* Barf, barf, barf, barf, barf.

I'll keep you in suspense on this one. Go ahead—guess if I like it or not.

Another nail in ABC's ratings coffin is **The Insiders.** At first, all it had going against it was a galloping case of *Miami Vicitis,* that disease with the overwhelming symptom of shiny cars, fast women, and hopelessly hip heroes. . . not to mention great photography and rock music. But *Miami Vice* struggles to be different, or at least to make their clichés fresh. *The Insiders* starts okay, then degenerates into just another glitzy bucket of preconceptions.

Stoney Jackson plays Mackey, an ex-con who's helping intrepid investigative reporter Nick Fox get the goods on all sorts of bad people. Now here comes the "West Coast catty" stuff. Ready? Nicholas Campbell plays Nick mostly with his versatile blond hair and often comes on looking like an extra from *Return of the Living Dead.* If you want to know what I mean, take a look at the show. Better yet, take my word for it.

Boy, but these guys' clothes are really neat, though, and the crew, bless 'em, do their best to be exactly like *Miami Vice* but totally different (in other words, they douse the sets with earth tones, something *Miami Vice* never does). Meanwhile, the writers struggle to be hep while the producers keep having things turn out like any episode of *Barnaby Jones.*

For instance, one of Mackey's good friends is murdered during the first episode. When he finally faces the guy who's responsible, he hits him a couple of times, then pushes the man's Rolls Royce off a mountain. (It, by the way, explodes on the second bump—as all good cars do on television.) Naturally, after that, Mackey can yuk it up with Nick at the fadeout.

I'll try to be more genteel this time. It is, as they say, to barf.

That, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, is my case in a nutshell. That ABC willingly, and with malice aforethought, committed premeditated murder on their own shows. . . but wait! The defense has a surprise witness. Will **MacGyver** please take the stand.

Now, either this guy is named Mac Gyver or he has no first name. Even so, the pilot was a fairly clever combination of James Bond, *Mission Impossible,* and Indiana Jones, with Richard Dean Anderson (who was promoted from the soaps) playing a certifiable genius-troubleshooter who lives in a planetarium. Besides MacGyver's boyish charm, the fun in this otherwise familiar show comes from wondering how the character will use whatever mundane piece of equipment he has on hand to get out of the awful fixes in which he finds himself.

In the pilot, he uses cigarettes, chocolate bars, and binoculars, among other things, to catch a traitor and fix an acid leak. But, although I enjoyed the piece, there was obviously more there than met the eye, since no "created by" credit was given and the episode was ostensibly written by "Thackery Pallor."

"What do you say, Holmes?"

"Obviously a pseudonym, Watson. On the basis of the pilot, I should say that a disgruntled writer, perhaps Terry Nation or Terrence Dicks, took his name off the project."

The names which remain are producers John Rich and Henry (the Fonz) Winkler. There, you see, ABC cries. We haven't built in kamikaze obsolescence in *all* our new shows! Ah, but your honor, may I point out that ABC, in its wisdom, scheduled its only halfway decent action show opposite *Murder She Wrote* and Steven Spielberg's *Amazing Stories?*

I rest my case.

Speaking of the wunderkind's television series, much has been made this season of the anthology format. It is giving major creative talents a great excuse to stretch the limits of

the medium. So far, the Steve Martin-co-produced *George Burns Comedy Week* is worth watching, but that's not my field, as it were. Instead, I'll concentrate on three others with which TAD should be concerned—by chance or by choice.

As you may know, I spent seven months as "Special Media Consultant" to the new *Twilight Zone*, so I'm far from objective on the project. But I'll try to be as constructively subjective as I can. **The Twilight Zone** is a worthy project. It is attempting to be a continuation, rather than a remake, of the original. The first episode bore this out, but also suffered slightly for it.

Sid Caesar plays washed-up magician Lou Bundles in "Mr. Magic" on NBC's *Amazing Stories.*

Rod Serling was quoted as saying that he structured his *Twilight Zone* the same way you would a joke. But Serling told a lot of jokes, many of them brilliantly. This production couldn't afford to do the same jokes. The audience would be shouting out the punch lines minutes before the episodes did. So, for better or worse, executive producer Philip DeGuere and company are trying something different. They're setting up the joke, telling the punchline, then going on. On any other show, the character in "Wordplay" (from the second episode) would have fallen down an elevator shaft because he couldn't read the "OUT OF ORDER" sign. But on *The Twilight Zone*, the gradual disintegration of language around him is used to say something about the human condition, and not just to showcase a feeble, cheap joke.

The rest is a matter of taste, but, no matter how one feels about it, *The Twilight Zone* is striving for high quality in both style and substance. (If pushed, I will admit that I could do with someone other than Charles Aidman doing the Serling-like narration, and that the second story in the first episode, "A Little Peace and Quiet," was uncomfortably similar to the original *Twilight Zone* episode about the pocket watch which could stop time.)

Lyle Alzado, Ed McMahon and Sydney Lassick (center) in "Remote Control Man," an episode of *Amazing Stories.*

Now, about **Amazing Stories**. . . . ! I tried to like this show (or at least the pilot). I really did. I knew what would happen if I didn't. No one would believe me anyway, since I worked for *The Twilight Zone*. But honest, folks, really. . .

DISCLAIMER: I have absolutely no reason to automatically hate *Amazing Stories*. *The Twilight Zone* isn't scheduled opposite it, and I even have friends working on Spielberg's show. But. . .

But. And this is a big but. *Amazing Stories* did exactly what I was afraid it would do. It dumped the story in the name of the production values. The premiere was a sickening example of style over content. This story was entitled "Ghost Train," in which an old man is certain a train he was responsible for derailing one hundred years ago will come back to fetch him.

Spielberg reportedly spent $2,250,000 to mount this transparent tale of a grandson's love for the old man, which climaxes with the train going right through the house to pick the man up.

Okay, it was impressive, I'll gladly admit that, and very well directed. *But this man was responsible for all these train passengers' deaths!* He was responsible for at least one hundred wrongful deaths, which were probably extremely agonizing ones in many cases. (You ever *seen* a train wreck, Spielberg?) And what do these anguished ghosts do? Do they tear the man limb from limb? Do they make *him* suffer the train wreck over and over? No, they gladly welcome him with loving arms.

All Spielberg (who also wrote the story) does is have some feeble jokes about "Mr. Coffee" and insurance agents, then has the now-familiar loving family wave goodbye to their happy ancestor, who goes merrily away on the Ghost Train. It isn't to barf here. It is to shoot your dinner across the room. It is to call China on the porcelain telephone. Spielberg couldn't even stay honest to the story he set up.

If you're going to have the old man kill everybody wrongly, don't force a happy ending on the thing!

It grieves me to say all this. I think Spielberg is one of the great film directors, and I really liked *Jaws*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.*, and the Spielberg-produced *Back To the Future*. But *Amazing Stories* enraged me.

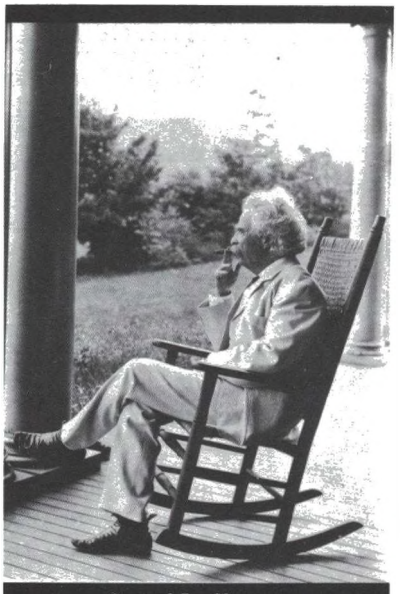
Thankfully, however, it wasn't as awful as **Alfred Hitchcock Presents.** The boy-os responsible for that really have a nerve—forcing the Master's blessings on this pale plagiarism from beyond the grave. Seeing Hitch colored up by computer like some re-animated corpse is painful, and the remake/updates of the original stories are also nerve-grating. They were fine the first time. What the heck do these grave robbers think they're doing? At least *The Twilight Zone* is attempting to build a monument to Serling. These dorks are vandalizing.

The first episode was a strong case in point. "Revenge" was originally done with Vera Miles. The Linda Purl remake had literally twenty minutes of padding, showing the svelte girl in dance classes and walking the Venice beachfront. The two-hour telefilm which preceded it could be seen as an homage. The subsequent series is an awful mistake. □

Escaped convict Jack Worth (Yaphet Kotto) livens up Julie Randall's (Cristina Raines) world in "You Gotta Have Luck" on NBC's *Alfred Hitchcock Presents.*

Mark Twain's Detectives:

Tom Sawyer didn't just paint fences



Samuel L. Clemens

by Jane Gottschalk

Remember the scene in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in which Huck dressed as a girl and improvised names? Disguise was only one of the favorite devices of Mark Twain. Advocate of accuracy of observation and reporting, Twain also liked to use fear of ghosts, twins, backwoods trails, swindles, and switched identities. There are elements of detection in much of his fiction. When these elements were concentrated for a mystery, he created detectives for stories of uneven calibre. In "The Stolen White Elephant" (1882), *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (1896), and "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story" (1902), he wrote mainly as a "phunny phellow." In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1893) there is tragedy.

But detectives were in his creative mind earlier, when Twain flirted with writing for the theater. He wrote enthusiastically to his friend William Dean Howells in 1877 that he was working on a play. "Never had so much fun over anything in my life." He had even selected an actor for the part of *Simon Wheeler, the Amateur Detective.* Unfortunately, the storyteller of "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" did not adapt well to the stage under his handling. Managers and actors said that it would not play, and he dropped interest in this and other dramas.

Twain claimed that the tale of "The Stolen White Elephant" was told to him by a chance railway acquaintance. The acquaintance had been responsible for delivery of the elephant, a gift from the King of Siam to the Queen of England; it was stolen from its resting quarters in Jersey City. Twain's burlesque of detectives centers around Inspector Blunt of New York City, who is in charge of the search. Blunt courts publicity and demands minute details before he sends dozens of detectives around the country with orders to report by telegraph. The elephant's name is Hassan Ben Ali Ben Selim Abdallah Mohammed Moisé Alhammal Jamsetjejeebhoy Dhuleep Sultan Ebu Bhudppor. Given name? Jumbo. A reward is offered, and the rampaging elephant is seen by hundreds. Inspector Blunt has theories. Detectives keep the telegraph machine clicking. Barnum offers $7,000 a year to use the elephant as an advertising medium until the detectives find him. A late telegram reads:

When Detective Brown and I arrived, some time after, we entered enclosure and proceeded to identify elephant by photograph and description. All marks tallied exactly except one, which we could not see—the boil-scar under

Twain claimed that the tale of "The Stolen White Elephant" was told to him by the man who was responsible for the delivery of the elephant, which was a gift from the King of Siam to the Queen of England. It was stolen from its resting quarters in Jersey City.

armpit. To make sure, Brown crept under to look, and was immediately brained—that is, head crushed and destroyed, though nothing issued from debris.

The elephant remains on the loose, and, as the weeks go on, the reward is raised and the attitude of the press changes. The caricaturists make

all sorts of ridiculous pictures of the detective badge—you have seen that badge printed in gold on the back of detective novels, no doubt—it is a wide-staring eye, with the legend, "WE NEVER SLEEP." When detectives called for a drink, the would-be facetious barkeeper resurrected an obsolete form of expression and said, "Will you have an eye-opener?"

Wrong in his theories, Inspector Blunt alone stays calm and collected even at the end when he has collected.

Tom Sawyer is Tom Sawyer, and in *Tom Sawyer, Detective,* he is the hero. For this work, Twain drew upon the incidents of an old Scandinavian crime involving a theft of diamonds and a murder. The transformation is uniquely his. Huck is the admiring narrator. The spring after *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Aunt Sally Phelps, whose farm was featured in the *Adventures,* writes to invite Tom and Huck for a visit in the hope that they will distract Uncle Silas, who has become irritable. The first mystery for the boys is on the sternwheeler heading south. Huck writes:

It was always nuts for Tom Sawyer—a mystery was. If you'd lay out a mystery and a pie before me and him, you wouldn't have to say take your choice, it was a thing that would regulate itself. Because in my nature, I have always run to pie, whilst in his nature he has always run to mystery.

The mystery is why a passenger who is not ill would have his meals served in his cabin. They solve this one by borrowing "aperns" to deliver a meal. At first they think he is a Dunlap who lives near the Phelpses, but they discover that he is the missing twin Jake who has been presumed dead. Little by little, he reveals that he has taken part in a diamond theft, and that he has stolen the diamonds from his two accomplices, who have pursued him to the ship. Tom and Huck agree to help him get to the Dunlap farm quietly.

There are more mysteries ashore. There are the loss of a corpse, the disappearance of Jubiter Dunlap, a figure in the night, and a supposed ghost. Tom continues to hunt for the corpse when others have given up, and he finds it. Unfortunately, because of Uncle Silas's admission that when he was provoked he hit Jubiter, and because of the testimony of witnesses, Uncle Silas is arrested for the murder. Tom takes an active part in the trial until Huck notices that he seems to be daydreaming.

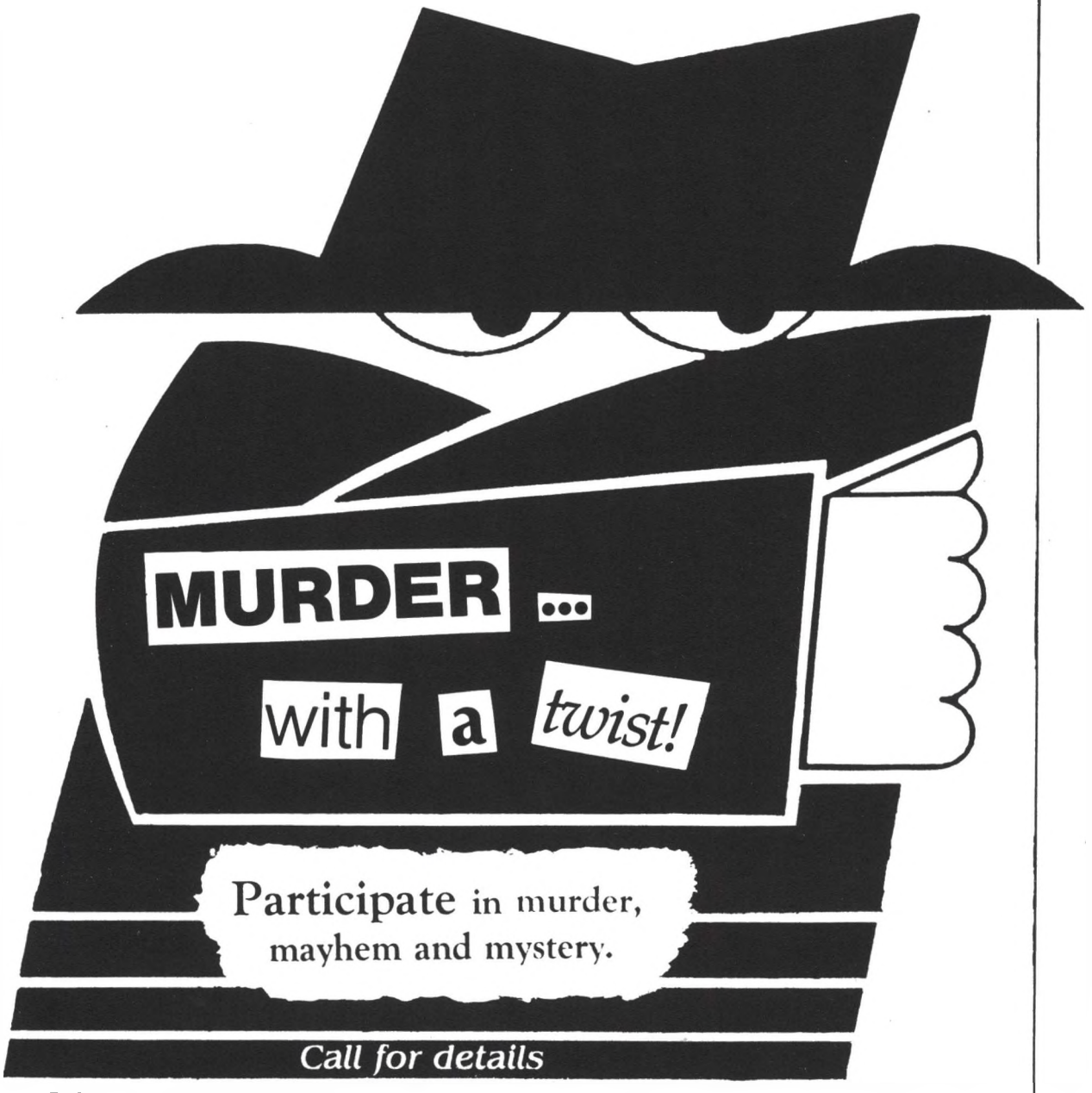
The lawyer for the prostitution looked very comfortable, but the judge looked disgusted. You see, Tom was just the same as a regular lawyer, nearly, because it was Arkansaw law for a prisoner to choose anybody he wanted to help his lawyer, and Tom had had Uncle Silas shove him into the case, and now he was botching it and you could see the judge didn't like it much.

Uncle Silas is in such a state that he starts to confess.

Up jumps Tom and shouts—
"Now I've got it!" and waves his hand, oh, ever so fine and starchy, towards the old man, and says—
"Set down! A murder *was* done, but you never had no hand in it!"

Tom is off to spellbind the backwoods court, frequently manipulating his points to gain more effect. Perry Mason could not have done better. He has solved the case with the time-honored method of observing and remembering personal, habitual idiosyncrasies, and he proves it to the court.

relled Detective Story," that Twain was also deliberately playing games with his readers. In the opening of the short novel, he elaborates on the spring fever that had addled Tom and Huck. Yet the evening of their arrival in Arkansas, before they went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to the Phelps's farm, Huck wrote: "That night was the second of September—a Saturday. I shan't ever forget it." The trial was in October. Three months on the sternwheeler? And a character in disguise could not have known part of the masquerade. Tom had suggested it.

"A Double-Barrelled Detective Story" had a kind of notoriety when it was first published in *Harper's,* but not for the excellence of the farce. It does have its moments, however, and the title is a clue to the two mysteries that Twain was shooting from his pen. Both are "inverted" mysteries, i.e., the reader knows the villains and can marvel as the detectives work out the solutions.

The first villainy has been perpetrated years before in the South. A husband ties a young bride to a tree, whips her, sets bloodhounds on her, and leaves her naked. The son she subsequently rears in New England is gifted with extraordinary senses—like a bloodhound; he has a keen sense of smell and can see in the dark. When he is sixteen, Archy Stillman is told his mother's story. She provides him with disguises and typed notices, and she tells him to hunt "Jacob Fuller" and to keep driving him from place to place, reporting to her by letter.

Archy pursues his quarry to Denver and then all around the world for three and a half years until he is back in the United States at a silver mining village in Hope Canyon, California. Here, some inhabitants think that the unlikely pairing of an abusive Flint Buckner and a young Englishman, Fetlock Jones, is a mystery; others think that Archy is a mystery because of his tracking powers, especially after he finds a child who has disappeared.

For "Tom Sawyer, Detective," Twain drew crime involving a theft of

Enter Sherlock Holmes. The village buzzes when a distinguished foreigner signs the tavern register with that illustrious name. Only Fetlock Jones is upset. "Uncle *Sherlock*! The mean luck of it!—that *he* should come just when..." But he consoles himself that his uncle cannot really detect a crime.

Enthusiastic admirers of the scientific detective cut peep holes in window blinds so that they can view him when he raises his window blinds across the way.

"Say—look at that awful gravity—look at that pallid solemnness—there ain't any corpse that can lay over it."

"No, sir, not for dollars! And it's his'n by hereditary rights, too; he's been dead four times a'-ready and there's history for it. Three times natural, once by accident. . . ."

"Sh! Watch him! There—he's got his thumb on the bump on the near corner of his forehead, and his fore-finger on the off one. His think-works is just a-*grinding* now, you bet your other shirt."

"That's so. And now he's gazing up toward heaven and stroking his mustache slow, and—"

The admiration continues and grows, and the men rehearse how the great one might have found the child that Archy has. He would have been more scientific. They conclude:

"I wonder if God made him?"

There was no response for a moment; then Ham Sandwich said, reverently,

"Not all at one time, I reckon."

The second known villainy is Fetlock's plan for murdering Flint Buckner through an explosion of his cabin. His uncle's arrival does not deter him, and the explosion goes off as scheduled. The two detectives go to work. Holmes measures and collects clues—and tells the constable to arrest a man. Archy, however, attacks Holmes's theories and, ironically, produces physical (scientific) clues to accuse Fetlock, truthfully adding that Sherlock Holmes supplied the matches. Fetlock confesses.

The story limps to a happy conclusion, but not before Twain works in a favorite anti-lynch-mob

scene occasioned by a mistaken accusation against Holmes, who stoically bears with the mob.

The notoriety—a six-day *tour de force*—which followed the periodical publication of "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story" stemmed from a

upon the incidents of an old Scandinavian diamonds and a murder.

paragraph Twain inserted to hoax his readers. Supposedly a description of Hope Canyon, it read:

> It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind Nature for the wingless wild things that have their homes in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of the woodland; the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swooning atmosphere; far in the empty sky a solitary oesophagus slept upon motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God.

Dozens of readers responded with inquiry and comment. One of them wrote that she assumed an oesophagus to be a kind of swallow. "Or is it a gull? Or a gullet?" Twain made a public confession in a newspaper, but he must have been satisfied, for he wrote to his friend, the Rev. Twichell: "How long it takes a literary seed to sprout sometimes. This seed was planted in your house many years ago when you sent me to bed with a book not heard of by me until then—*Sherlock Holmes*."

Quite a different inverted tale is *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* one of Twain's strongest indictments against slavery and one of his best constructed works. As he acknowledged several times, the character made it so. What he had begun as a short farce, "Those Extraordinary Twins," began to change shape when he introduced the character of Roxy. He had planned for an extravagent romance between a light-headed heroine and one of a pair of Italian Siamese twins of two heads, four arms, and one body and one pair of legs. His story grew longer, and Roxy, a one-sixteenth-part black slave, grew in importance; tragedy evolved. Eventually, Twain realized that the two stories were fighting each other, and he performed a kind of literary Caesarean section. *Pudd'nhead Wilson* was the result.

The setting is Dawson's Landing, Missouri, and the novel opens in February 1830. In that month, David Wilson, lawyer, comes to the town from New York; in that same month, two boys are born in the house of Percy Driscoll, one to his wife and the other to the slave girl, Roxana. Because of an unfortunate remark, Wilson is dubbed Pudd'nhead and does not prosper. Since he has the time, he explores new things, one of them fingerpainting and another making up aphorisms for a calendar. He keeps records of the fingerprints of the townspeople on pieces of glass, carefully labeling them. One of them could apply to his characters:

> Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education.

Roxy takes care of both babies since Mrs. Driscoll has died within a week of childbirth. Her baby is named Chambers, and the heir, Tom. When Mr. Driscoll suspects petty theft, he threatens his slaves with being sold down the river unless they confess. Roxy is innocent, but the threat so frightens her that she prepares to commit suicide with her baby rather than face a future in which they might be sent down. She dresses in her finery for the tomb, but her Chambers has only the tow linen shirt of a slave baby. To make him equally presentable, she changes the shirt for the fancy dress worn by Tom. No one has been able to tell them apart before, and with the

switch in clothing, she changes her mind about suicide and provides for the future of her son by switching the babies. In the first three chapters, Twain has set the background for the characters to work out their destinies.

The new Tom grows up arrogant, bullying the supposed Chambers. On his deathbed, Mr. Driscoll frees Roxy, and the Judge keeps Chambers so that Tom cannot sell him down the river. Roxy goes chambermaiding on the steamers until her health gives out, and then she returns to Dawson's Landing, where Tom has acquired the adult vices of drinking and gambling and, in disguise, of stealing to pay his gambling debts.

Italian twins, Luigi and Angelo, also come to town, where they are lionized by everyone except Tom. Tom goes from bad to worse to worst. He treats Roxy so badly that she tells him of the switching of the babies. When she suggests that he "sell" her up the river to pay his gambling debts, he sells her down the river. Finally, he kills his uncle in the act of robbing him. Twain dramatizes Tom's villainies for the readers.

The townspeople, however, suspect Luigi, whose knife is the murder weapon and who arrives at the murder scene with his twin in response to an outcry. Complicated circumstantial evidence is against him. To Pudd'nhead Wilson falls his defense. The observing Wilson, a most likable detective, is convinced of Luigi's innocence. Because the murder knife has a fingerprint on it, Wilson worries through his collection of fingerprints, observes more, and knows. He performs brilliantly in the courtroom to prove the switch of the babies and to prove that Tom is guilty.

The conclusion adds yet another irony to the novel. Tom is found guilty, but when creditors of the Driscoll estate came forward, everybody sees that they have reason.

> Everybody granted that if "Tom" were white and free it would be unquestionably right to punish him—it would be no loss to anybody; but to shut up a valuable slave for life—that was quite another matter.
>
> As soon as the Governor understood the case, he pardoned Tom at once, and the creditors sold him down the river.

And there was irony for Twain also. Although he himself could not seem to write for the stage, others could adapt his works for theatrical successes. Frank Mayo dramatized *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* and, in the ways of the theater of that day, played it until he died.

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What About Murder?

By Jon L. Breen

• Bakerman, Jane S., ed. **And Then There Were Nine...More Women of Mystery.** Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985. 219 pp. Illustrations, bibliography.

Highlights of this group of essays on female practitioners, a sequel to Earl F. Bargainnier's *Ten Women of Mystery,* are George N. Dove's fine survey of Dorothy Uhnak's output and the thorough, efficient treatments of Anne Morice and Lillian O'Donnell by the team of Martha Alderson and Neysa Chouteau. Another commendably fresh subject is Craig Rice, though Peggy Moran's essay is too heavy on plot summary and gives away endings with no good reason. Most oppressively academic treatment is accorded E. X. Ferrars. Susan Baker's thesis that Ferrars is *not* in the classical tradition as usually pegged is unconvincing, mainly because Baker defines the classical mystery far too narrowly. The essay certainly attracts one to Ferrars's books, however. Other subjects and their commentators: Daphne du Maurier (editor Bakerman), Margery Allingham (Rex W. Gaskill), Patricia Highsmith (Kathleen Gregory Klein), and Shirley Jackson (Carol Cleveland). Photographs are included of all the authors save Rice and Jackson. As before, there are chronologies and notes, but this time there is no index. Regrettably, in the case of the active writers included, coverage and chronologies end in 1981 or 1982, suggesting that the book took an unusually long time to get into print.

• Collins, Max Allan, and James L. Traylor. *One Lonely Knight: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer.* Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984. 186 pp. Illustrations, bibliography.

Two true believers present the case for Mickey Spillane as an important writer of mystery fiction. Though the book is overheavy on plot summary and is not likely to convince skeptics, it is important and welcome as the first book-length study of one of the great publishing phenomena of the century. The authors' honesty serves (for this reader anyway) to neutralize the effect of their argument: they admit many of Spillane's failings as a writer and don't leave enough standing to explain their high regard for his work. They offer quotes to illustrate their points, but the quotes don't always support the claims made for them. A fairly effective atmospheric description on page 84, we are told, is "outside the range" (!) of such writers as Hammett, Chandler, Cain, and the "various MacDonalds."

Other points: Be warned that nearly all of Spillane's vaunted surprise endings are revealed by the authors, necessarily or not. There is a good bibliography of Spillane's book and magazine writing since 1947, as well as books and articles about Spillane. It would be interesting to know exactly what Spillane wrote for the slicks, where he

reputedly started out.

Both Spillane's fans and his detractors will find this an invigorating book.

• Gregg, Hubert. *Agatha Christie and All That Mousetrap.* London: Kimber, 1980. 170 pp. Illustrations, index.

This is the first book to focus attention on Christie's plays rather than the rest of her output, and as such it is valuable despite some irritating features. Gregg directed *The Hollow* (and starred in it during its pre-London run), was one of several to direct *The Mousetrap* (though not the first), and also staged *The Unexpected Guest.* His style is cutesy-chatty, sometimes amusing, almost Wodehousian at its best, but frequently annoying. He provides a sketchy early biography of his subject and pays considerable attention to the disappearance mystery—here is one commentator on the case who seems to sympathize more with Archie Christie than with Agatha. There is also much autobiographical information on Gregg, some of it interesting, and much theatrical material unrelated to Christie, e.g., a treatise on stage lighting and a jeremiad on the inability of today's actors to tie a bow tie or to wear evening clothes correctly. Gregg also discusses his mounting of Audrey and William Ross's *Speaking of Murder,* a play of which he thinks highly, as a rival for *The Mousetrap* (in the theatre next door!).

Gregg is fairly patronizing toward his subject's work. Of her books, he claims to have read only *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.* He awards himself a large part of the credit for her stage success, including naming *The Mousetrap,* when the title *Three Blind Mice* was rendered unavailable, and creating the ending for the play *Witness for the Prosecution,* though he turned down the chance to direct it.

Gregg is scrupulous about giving the reader a warning when he is about to give away a secret, but he often doesn't tell you which secret he is going to give away—for example, he reveals the solution to *The Mousetrap* while discussing *Go Back for Murder.*

• McCarty, John, and Brian Kelleher. *Alfred Hitchcock Presents: An Illustrated Guide to the Ten-Year Television Career of the Master of Suspense.* Foreword by Robert Bloch. New York: St. Martin's, 1985. Illustrations, bibliography, index.

In a valuable contribution to both mystery and TV scholarship, the authors present a chronological, episode-by-episode account of the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *Alfred Hitchcock Hour* programs, plus the contributions of Hitchcock's production company to *Suspicion* and *Ford Startime.* Each entry includes title, director, writers (of teleplay and original story), a plot synopsis identifying major actors, and the program's airdate. A few of the entries are illustrated with wallet-size stills, and some include sidelights on the actors, writers, and directors involved. In a book more oriented toward celebrating writers and directors than actors, some film and TV buffs will regret that fuller cast information is not included.

The book leads off with an introductory history of the series, especially notable for the deserved credit it gives James Allardice, the author of all those wonderful tongue-in-cheek program introductions delivered by Hitchcock himself. Quotes from these are interspersed throughout the volume. Other features include a listing of major television awards and nominations the program received, a brief bibliography of books and periodicals, and an index to show titles. A name index would also have been helpful. As it is, a person trying to trace all of Henry Slesar's contributions to the program as writer or all of John Williams's acting appearances can only browse for them.

Viewers of the series' reruns, still available to television stations in syndication, should be warned that the synopses come complete with surprise twist.

Some errors were noted. The authors mistakenly believe that *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* antedated the TV show. Actually, the first issue of AHMM was dated December 1956, while the show debuted a year earlier, October 2, 1955. Also, Ziff-Davis never published AHMM (though it was purchased by Davis Publications, its present proprietor, in 1976), and the magazine did not start life as a stablemate to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* which was then published by Mercury Publications and in fact never carried the Ziff-Davis banner either. Once again, Fredric Brown and Talmage Powell get their names consistently misspelled, and at one point C. B. Gilford turns into C. B. "Guilford" for a couple of entries. In the individual show entries, there is no director credit for "Miss Paisley's Cat" (page 120) or "Night of the Executioner" (page 121) and no writing or directing credit for "Touché" (page 160). Stanley Ellin is not given original story credit for "The Orderly World of Mr. Appleby" (page 78).

• Morgan, Janet. *Agatha Christie: A Biography.* London: Collins, 1984. New York: Knopf, 1985. xvii + 393 pp. Illustrations, index.

This is the only authorized biography, produced with full co-operation of Christie's family and free access to her papers. Thus, it includes information and insights unavailable to earlier biographers and almost automatically supersedes Gwen Robyns's Edgar-winning *The Mystery of Agatha Christie* (see WAM #126) as the standard life. Morgan's account is far from being the piece of well-laundered hagiography that such works sometimes threaten to be. Morgan offers, for example, the fullest and most intelligent account to date of Christie's disappearance in 1926, and certainly she does not overrate her subject's literary importance. Christie comes across as a thoroughly admirable and likeable person whose quirks are more endearing than annoying.

Among the fresh elements included here are financial details, including her enormously complicated tax problems; a continuing account of how carefully and tactfully her British and American agents handled their star client and protected her from unwanted attentions of fans and media; examples of how notebook jottings were developed into mystery plots; and specifics on how Eden Phillpotts encouraged Christie early in her career. Her correspondence with family, agents, and publishers (which might be worth a book of its own) is quoted extensively. Especially entertaining is her reaction to a proposed jacket illustration for the Collins edition of *The Labours of Hercules:* "It suggests Poirot going naked to the bath!!! All sorts of obscene suggestions are being made by my family . . . Put statuary on the cover but make it clear it is statuary—not Poirot gone peculiar in Hyde Park!!!" (page 224).

Though Morgan has no track record as a mystery commentator, she is (or has made herself) decently knowledgeable about the field generally. Her critical comments on Christie's books are sound, and she admirably avoids solution giveaways—except in the case of *Roger Ackroyd,* which the subject tipped herself in her autobiography. Obvious factual errors are at a minimum, though there are some lapses in information. In some book references, Morgan is vague about whether

the volume in question is a novel or a collection, and she never explains that the actor referred to repeatedly as Larry Sullivan was professionally known as Francis L. Sullivan, or that another Larry (Bachmann), Christie's liaison with MGM during the production of the Miss Marple travesties with Margaret Rutherford, was also an accomplished mystery writer as Lawrence P. Bachmann.

The only major disappointment of the book is the illustrations, which include few recognizable likenesses of the subject. To make matters worse, throughout the text there are fascinating references to photographs and illustrations (e.g., Poirot going to the bath) that have not been reproduced in the book. Both the Robyns biography and Dame Agatha's own reticent autobiography (WAM #129) are superior in this department—but in no other.

• Pendleton, Don. ***The Executioner's War Book.*** New York: Pinnacle, 1977. 201 pp. Illustrations.

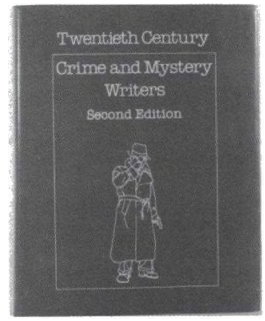
At the time this handbook appeared, the pioneering "splatterman" Mack Bolan had appeared in 28 novels. Since then, many more have appeared, some of them ghost-written by the two "Executioner" fans who have contributed essays to this handbook, Mike Newton and Stephen Mertz. Following an exhange of letters between Pendleton and a fan who compares Mack Bolan to Sherlock Holmes (!) and a two-page foreword by the great Mafia-fighter's creator, Mertz offers "Behind the Executioner," an admiring chapter of biography of Pendleton. Newton's "The Bolan Saga" summarizes the series to date. "The Gallery" is an index of characters appearing in the novels. "The Arsenal" describes and pictures various weapons used by the Executioner. "Interiors" and "Exteriors" offer some choice quotes from the novels. Finally, "Feedback" prints letters from fans and Pendleton's responses. Of very limited biographical or critical interest, this volume is only for the most devoted followers of the series.

• Pendleton, Don. ***The New War Book.*** Toronto: Gold Eagle, 1984. 187 pp. Illustrations.

This is more of the same as above. The character index is updated; more weapons are illustrated; more correspondence between fans and Pendleton is published. This time, there are also two short stories, considerable series hype, and a list of Marines killed and wounded in Beirut.

• Reilly, John M., ed. ***Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers.*** Second edition. New York: St. Martin's, 1985. xx + 1,094 pp. Bibliography, index.

The revised edition of WAM #29 is a considerable improvement on what was already one of the best and most indispensable reference volumes in the field. The smaller



number of pages is misleading—the format is now double-column and the total number of writers covered has risen to over 640, according to St. Martin's publicity. Included are 109 new entries, 23 completely rewritten critical summaries, and many updated entries on active writers. Since some writers (most but not all deceased or inactive) have been dropped, libraries and private collectors will want to retain both editions.

Many of the prominent omissions which I noted in the first edition (David Alexander, Howard Browne, Victoria Holt) have been added, as well as oldtimers such as Peter Rabe, Stewart Sterling, Jonathan Craig, C. W. Grafton, Clifford Knight, Kurt Steel, and Clyde B. Clason, and such contemporaries as Dean R. Koontz, Marcia Muller, Robert Barnard, Richard Neely, K. C. Constantine, James Crumley, Elmore Leonard, William McIlvanney, Ralph McInerny, William Marshall, Richard B. Sapir and Warren Murphy, Gerald Seymour, and Jonathan Valin. There are good new essays on John Ball and H. R. F. Keating, whose works were treated too narrowly in the first edition, and on Jack Webb, who is now firmly separated from his TV-star namesake. An author who probably *should* have had a new (or expanded) entry is Ivor Drummond (Roger Longrigg), whose work under the recently revealed pseudonym of Frank Parrish goes undiscussed.

A title index, to novels and collections but not individual short stories, has been added.

• Stevenson, John. ***Writing Commercial Fiction.*** Foreword by Tony Hillerman. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983. viii + 120 pp. Index.

Here is a wealth of practical nuts-and-bolts advice for prospective writers of "category" fiction. The genres discussed are romance, suspense, Western, occult, action-adventure, mystery, fantasy, and science fiction. After describing the characteristics and conventions of each type with a likeable deadpan humor, the author devotes sections to plot, characterization, and "the actual writing." The treatment seems strongest on romance, Western, and action stories, weakest on science fiction, but there are good points made about all categories.

Stevenson, who has been Nick Carter on occasion and is best known for the espionage novels signed by Mark Denning, states as his purpose to provide the information which he would like to have had at the start of his own career. He emphasizes the pleasures a writer can have (and provide to the reader) without venturing outside the well-established genre boundaries. Well-chosen examples are drawn from such good (and/or representative) writers as John D. MacDonald, Brian Garfield, Jerry Pournelle, Gary Brandner, Don Pendleton, Patricia Matthews, and James M. Cain.

• Symons, Julian. ***Bloody Murder.*** New York: Viking, 1985. Revised edition. 262 pp. Index.

In a new edition of his 1972 history (WAM #5), first published in the United States as *Mortal Consequences,* Symons has maintained the original structure of his work but revised and updated every chapter, particularly the chapters about the current scene. It's still an impressive piece of work, strong on style and agonizingly tough critical standards, though not quite as successful in reflecting the current scene as might have been hoped. Among the writers added are P. D. James, Ruth Rendell, Ross Thomas, Charles McCarry, George V. Higgins, Reginald Hill, Edward D. Hoch, and Janwillem van de Wetering. Symons has not considered every important new name—Elmore Leonard, James Crumley, K. C. Constantine, Robert Barnard, Simon Brett, and Colin Dexter are a few of the well-established newer writers not discussed.

There are still careless errors in the book, including some near-miss dates (the date of the first Perry Mason novel, Erle Stanley Gardner's death, S. S. Van Dine's birth) and a statement, unchanged from the first edition, that the Ellery Queen team also wrote under the name Drury Lane (again: Lane was the detective, Barnaby Ross the byline). Curiously, Symons still doesn't note that the mystery novels signed by Gypsy Rose Lee were actually the work of Craig Rice.

In his final chapter, "The Crystal Ball Revisited," Symons looks at the predictions he made in the original edition and comments on how nearly they have come true. He claims that his forecast of the continued decline of the old-fashioned detective story was one of the winners. Am I dreaming or has there been a considerable renaissance of the formal detective story in the last decade? □

J'Accuse

By William L. DeAndrea

Last column, readers were invited to read the opinions presented here, then write in and tell me what a jerk I am. Few did, but I know that the process was already under way. Jon L. Breen wrote in and took me to task for something I wrote in one of last year's "Foreign Intrigue" columns.

I had come down hard on H. R. F. Keating for disparaging remarks he made about Mickey Spillane and his work in an introduction to a British collection of Fredric Brown novels. Jon didn't like the way I put it.

Now, to me, Jon Breen is the E. F. Hutton of mystery reviewers. When he talks, I listen.

And to a certain extent, I even agree. I was vulgar, and there was no need to be. And I condemned a group (academics) *en masse,* which should never be done, except in the case of the Dallas Cowboys. I probably made the thing sound like a personal attack, which I did not (and do not) mean it to be.

The worst thing I did, though, it seems, was to fail to make clear just what I was upset about. I do *not* impute malign motives to "anyone not an admirer of Spillane." In the proper forum, I say: Go ahead – let him have it – both barrels. I have plenty of friends who proclaim loudly and often that Spillane stinks, just as they tolerate my opinions about Raymond Chandler, which I will not go into here, because this is not the proper forum.

The people I get angry at, as I should have stressed more strongly, are the people who take *gratuitous* swipes, at Spillane or anybody.

There's an example of what I'm talking about in the very issue of TAD in which Jon's letter appears. Andrew Greeley, America's bestselling priest, takes about five and a half pages of the magazine to beat Umberto Eco over the head with Ellis Peters. As a writer who has himself been used as the club by a critic in a similar way (as well as the clubee), I can say that it's an uncomfortable situation for everybody except for the critic and for the reader who already shares his opinion of the relative merits of the two works. It is hardly an invitation for anyone to make up his own mind.

Now, let's talk about the phrase "kiss of death." It is a metaphor for the Mafia practice of kissing someone to let him know that he is to be killed. Metaphorically, in the old neighborhood, at least, it means approval that destroys or injures.

I now quote Jon Breen directly:

"Surely Keating would not contend that a favorable quote from Mickey Spillane would not help sell books (though possibly not as many in England of the '80s as America of the '50s). I think what Keating meant by kiss of death is that anyone who shared Keating's own low opinion of Spillane's own writings (and there are many such) would naturally be put off by a writer whom Spillane celebrated as one of his favorites; that a quote from Spillane might mislead some potential readers of Fredric Brown and keep that excellent writer from at least part of his natural audience."

I accept that interpretation. Let's think about it.

These are interesting people, this "natural audience," or "part" of it. Apparently, their distinguishing characteristic is that they will base their decisions not on what they like, not even on what the *critic* likes, but on the already-expressed opinion of some third party.

Jon says in his letter, and correctly, too, that popularity does not mean quality. He asks, rhetorically, if *The Dukes of Hazard* is better than *The MacNeil-Lehrer Report* because more people watch it, or if Irving Wallace is better than Don Westlake because he sells more books. The answer to the first question is no, because *The Dukes of Hazard* is not better than anything, and the answer to the second is also no, because, in my opinion, nobody is better than Westlake.

But I've got questions, too. If you found out that Don Westlake were a big Irving Wallace fan, would that make you like Wallace any better? Or what if you found out that Mickey Spillane considered no day complete unless he'd explored the current crisis with Robert and Jim on his local PBS station? Would you stop watching it?

The whole thing is absurd. I suppose Hitler ate his share of sauerkraut, and maybe he even loved it. It does not affect what I like on my hot dog.

It seems to me that anyone who allows himself to be "naturally put off" something because a certain person or class of person already likes it, has taken a great big step on the road to snobbery.

And to let that attitude go unchallenged is to take it for granted. To take it for granted means that it has won.

It's a bad attitude, and when I see it, I'm going to call people on it. As I said, nothing personal.

Harry Keating is a superb writer, and a fine and friendly man. Jon Breen is the author of excellent novels and short stories and hilarious parodies, and his is the most perceptive, gentlemanly, and best-written mystery criticism available today.

But I insist on this: Fredric Brown needs no apologies made on his behalf because he was Mickey Spillane's favorite writer, and it's an insult to Brown, Spillane, and the readers of both to act as if he does.

* * * * *

More Foreign Intrigue

Orania and I spent the last few days of September and the first few days of October (I'd better say 1985) on a boat to Bermuda. (Better, you must admit, than a Kayak to Quincy or Nyack.) We were guests of Billy and Karen Palmer, and Bogie's Murderous Mystery Tours. About eighty of the passengers on the S.S. *Bermuda Star* (Panamanian registry, Scandinavian crew, American cruise directors, Filipino musicians, Bermudan dining-room staff, Korean cabin stewards, Japanese doctor, don't ask me to explain it) got to solve a case of murder among the heirs of a mysterious millionaire named Ben E. Factor.

I would give you the exact number of passengers involved, but nobody knows it. Billy and Karen showed resourcefulness and ingenuity at every turn, as they combated the effects of the cruise line's having screwed up a year's planning every chance they got, up to and including putting a lot of the people who thought they'd be in on the mystery at the wrong sitting so that they had to choose between murder and nutrition. Problems were worked around, though, and a good time was had by most.

Bogie's had lots of celebs on hand for the fans. Gregory Mcdonald and his wife Susan were there, as well as the Edgar-winning husband-and-wife team of Warren Murphy and Molly Cochran, Chris Steinbrunner, and Mary Higgins Clark and her daughter Carol.

Vincent Price was aboard, too, along with his wife, British actress Coral Browne, whom Price met when he killed her in the classic movie *Theatre of Blood.* Unlike some special guest stars I know of, Price was along for more than the ride. He gave a talk and answered questions, played a role in a separate mini-mystery contest open to the whole ship (as did Carol Clark, herself an actress). Price also went out of his way to approach people, and he must have posed for a thousand pictures of the "Look, Martha, it's me with *Vincent Price!*" variety and given five thousand bone-crushing handshakes. I should be that strong when I'm 74. I should be that strong *next year.*

Doctor Samuel Johnson is supposed to have said that an ocean voyage is like being in prison, with the added danger of drowning. I don't think that's entirely true. The food is better, for one thing. But there is something about being cooped up with maybe eight hundred other people you don't know, or don't know well, for a full week, that brings out things about you which people might not learn for years on land.

Gregory Mcdonald is an adventurer. Before he took up writing, he used to skipper sailing ships. That isn't in his author bio (a fact that astonishes me), which indicates he is

also shy. He and Susan took mopeds across Bermuda through a pouring rain instead of riding dry on the ship between our two ports of call on the island.

Mary Higgins Clark is a phenomenon. She took the soul of the Gothic, dressed it up in modern form, and has touched an audience to a degree I have never seen another writer attain. It's not that she has a lot of fans. A lot of writers have a lot of fans. It's the *attitude* these fans have, their identification with Mary and her work. All week, these nice old ladies, middle-aged ladies, young ladies, were telling Mary how much they *loved* her books, sometimes stating loudly that Mary's books are the only mysteries (or the only hardcovers, or the only *books*) they read. They all acted proud to be part of her success. If art is reaching people where they live, Mary Higgins Clark is an artist.

Warren and Molly are teachers. There was more good advice about writing in the hour during which they spoke than in a whole year of writing magazines. The talk took place on Friday, our last full day at sea, with a hot, wet wind howling outside, and the waves trying to convince our stomachs that there was no hope. A lot of stomachs listened, including mine, but Molly's didn't, which is especially remarkable because Molly at the time was two-thirds of the way through the process of producing a baby. I had been taught that pregnant women threw up on general principles, but no.

What they learned about me is that I can sing. I entered the talent show and totally failed to humiliate myself, much to the surprise of many, including Greg Mcdonald, who kept looking at me and saying, "You were *good*." Life is like that when you have the voice of Engelbert Humperdinck trapped in the body of Oliver Hardy.

Bermuda itself was interesting. It is undoubtedly the smallest country, both in size and population, I've ever been to. It's about as big as Manhattan, and the island's one and only newspaper, the media giant of a sovereign state, has a circulation of about 16,000.

The buildings are all lovely pastels, with white limestone roofs. The roofs are channeled to catch rainwater, the only source of drinking water on the island. The people are lovely and friendly, and Orania went nuts over the woolen goods available at reasonable prices, with no sales tax to spoil the fun.

But Bermuda is no place to be a mystery fan. For one thing, books are expensive, with American editions of paperbacks going for close to $6.00 (Bermuda keeps its dollar at a one-for-one exchange rate with the U.S. dollar), and British editions of the same books for close to $5.00. Also, the selection is severely limited, except for Agatha Christie, John D. MacDonald, and Dick Francis. Of all the writers on the cruise itself, only Mary Higgins Clark was represented in Bermuda bookstores, and she with only one title. We all said we were just as glad, since this way we wouldn't face any embarrassing tax questions, or have our vacations spoiled by hordes of adoring fans.

I don't know about anybody else, but I was lying.

The best bookstore on the island was a place called Bookmart, in Hamilton, the capital. It's a good thing they named it that, because from the street you can't see any books at all. Three quarters of the place is taken up with health and beauty aids, toys, and things like that. We added another teddy bear to our collection, and Orania scored a kilo of Bournville Dark, a brand of bittersweet chocolate which Cadbury sells in England, and to which my wife developed a serious attachment while we were living there.

The books were in the back, and that's where I found *Break In,* the new Dick Francis. Which brings us to the...

Book Review Section

The idea here is that, since I've got a six-month head start on the American pub date, I can actually write a review for TAD which may appear as the book is coming out. Of course, it would be nicer if I could write a rave for someone who really could use the boost, but I'm writing a rave anyway.

Break In is the story of a jockey who takes action against shady, powerful figures who are out to wreck the business of his brother-in-law, a trainer.

In *Break In,* Francis returns to something he handles better than anyone—non-criminal nastiness. In this book, as in *Nerve* and *Enquiry,* the crimes committed occur well into the book. Francis generates suspense, even menace, by his depiction of the damage a determined louse can do within the law.

In this case, it's an announcement in one of the national scandal rags that a horse trainer is in financial trouble and may not be able to pay his debts. That sets off a chain of events that has our hero fighting two major newspapers, a maniacal millionaire, and the whole hierarchy of the British racing world.

I'd bought Francis's last few books from force of habit. I thought *Twice Shy* an interesting experiment that didn't work, *Banker* quite good, *The Danger* nothing special, and *Proof* pretty bad by Francis's usual standards. *Break In* is one of his best, up to anybody's standards.

J'accuse!

Well, maybe not anybody's standards. In TAD 18:4, Herbert Resnicow, Edgar nominee for *The Gold Solution* a few years back, offered forty rules for writing whodunits.

God had ten rules that would take you to heaven.

By one of Resnicow's rules, *Break In* is a bad mystery, and so are all my other favorite Dick Francis books. So are *The Curse of the Bronze Lamp* by Carter Dickson, *To Love and Be Wise* by Josephine Tey, and *Warrant for X* by Philip MacDonald.

That's from only one rule.

I don't like rules for writers, at least not as far as their actual writing is concerned. Rules like "Have a lawyer look at your option clause" are mandatory. Rules telling you how many subplots you should have are silly.

But the only thing I *seriously* object to in Resnicow's article is his perpetuation of the fallacy that a mystery story is something like a crossword puzzle with characters. It would bother me more if I thought he really believed it. Fortunately, his first and most important rules go on and tell the truth – a mystery story is a real novel about real people trying to preserve life, property, or order by uncovering a secret and dealing with the consequences of the revelations. Those are my words, not Resnicow's, but if you follow his initial advice (I like that better than rules) that's what you'll be doing.

Because I believe one writer *can't* tell another what A Good Mystery contains. For one thing, the second writer might think of something new. You have probably read about the *tsouris* which Agatha Christie got over *Roger Ackroyd.* For another thing, you can tell someone that you like (or don't like) what he writes. You can tell someone how *you* write. You can only mess people up if you try to tell them how to write.

There is a whole lot of good advice in Resnicow's article. There is also, in my opinion (hell, it's my column, right?), a fair amount of baloney. Now, if there were only some infallible, objective way to determine what was which, this would be an easy business. □

RETRO REVIEWS

The Crazy Quilt Murders by H. W. Sandberg. New York: Phoenix Press, 1938. 255 pp.

H. W. Sandberg apparently wrote only one novel, and that was a mystery. Searches in all the usual sources on authors reveal no information. Just who H. W. Sandberg was may be a bigger mystery than the one described in his book.

Sam Markley, a mystery writer himself, inherits from the estate of an uncle, an uncle who apparently hated him and the rest of his relatives as well. Sam inherits more than the others, plus he gets the old man's gaudy crazy quilt. The will is set up purposely to make it profitable for the legatees to murder one another, and one of its stipulations is that all of them spend three days together at Sam's Lake of the Woods cabin.

Of course, the murders start to occur, and all are overshadowed by a slowly creeping peat fire and a broken radio, which mean no outside contact, and the haunting cries of the loons.

The relationships among the characters are not clear. They alternately love and hate one another. The chauffeur's speech is incredible. He uses such phrases as "shootin' off his gab" and "okay, babe." Sam's role as detective seems to be no more than going around accusing each of his relatives of the murders but not getting suitable reactions to his accusations. The others dream up theories, but someone always says he can't believe it, so the solutions are abandoned one after another.

The entire novel is made up of jumbled and fragmented events just like the crazy quilt which finally helps solve the mystery. While the process of getting there is somewhat wearying, the end of the story is dramatic and moving.

One might wonder if perhaps *The Crazy Quilt Murders* were written by someone who just wanted to prove that he could do the job. It will never be a benchmark in literary history, but it makes for a pleasant vintage read. —Cheryl Sebelius Nelson

Retrospective Mini-Reviews

Some Village Borgia by Sidney Hobson Courtier (Hale, 1971) Someone in an Australian village has found a way to induce fatal pneumonia, first in animals and then in humans. An interesting plot spoiled by a last-page surprise twist that comes as no surprise and makes no sense.

Never Come Back by John Mair (Gollancz, 1941) A simple tale of a journalist strangling a somewhat strange young woman escalates into a classic novel of repeated pursuit, capture, and escape in the tradition of *The Thirty-Nine Steps,* as the killer (now the unlikely and unappealing hero) falls into and out of the clutches of a spy ring. Well done!

New Graves at Great Norne by Henry Wade (Constable, 1947) Deaths by accident, suicide, and accident are followed by two murders. Or are all five deaths murders? A link connecting the victims suggests an "avenger from the past." If so, why kill now, and what of the sixth and seventh participants in that past incident? Has a clever killer created a false trail for the police to follow? Starts slowly, but builds to a curiously disappointing double-twist solution that leaves some loose ends for the reader to tie together.

The Six Queer Things by C. St. John Sprigg (Doubleday, 1937) What starts out as a conventional "damsel-in-distress" yarn suddenly leads to an impossible poisoning at a séance, surprising revelations, and a further change of direction into a pure thriller with an unexpected (but unsatisfying) master criminal. The author has mixed together unequal portions of Rinehart, Carr, and Wallace, among others, with the result that several potentially good books have been turned into one fine mess.

While Murder Waits by John Esteven (Doubleday, 1937) An unscrupulous old sea dog expects to be murdered by one of his daughters, each supposedly more evil than the next. Three murders later, when the camouflage of suppressed wills, at least two attempted murders, nocturnal prowling, grave-robbing, and concealed identities is removed, an oh-so-obvious killer is exposed. The pleasure of the trip is marred by the journey's end.

No Business for a Lady by James L. Rubel (Fawcett, 1950) None-too-bright lady private eye finds that her late (courtesy of World War II) husband has a new identity as the spouse of a homely and possessive millionairess who hires her to verify his fidelity. The plot detours into *noir* territory, then straightens out when murder strikes. Unfortunately, an unlikable heroine and too much introspective recapping of who's who and what's what ruin a potentially interesting variation on the classic private eye novel.

Don't Go Out After Dark by Norman Berrow (Ward, Lock, 1950) A young woman receives threatening notes and finds dead animals on her doorstep. Then a voodoo doll with a pin in its heart shows up. The obvious suspect is her ex-fiancé, recently released from prison, but other possibilities include her current fiancé, members of her own household, and a wimpy, admiring co-worker. The first human corpse is the "least likely victim." Although the murderer and the motive become obvious midway through, why the cat was stabbed after death is not revealed until the last page.

The Seven Who Waited by August Derleth (Scribner's, 1943) A lethal will (equal shares to the surviving heirs) brings Judge Peck into a case of multiple murder. This usually sure-fire plot fails to jell for lack of character delineation of the suspects.

The Teeth of the Tiger by Maurice Leblanc (Doubleday, 1914) In one of the best Arsène Lupin novels, Foreign Legion hero Don Luis Perenna returns to France to find the heirs to a vast fortune. (If there are no heirs, Perenna inherits it all.) Two are quickly located and then are murdered practically under Don Luis's nose. He becomes the prime suspect until teethmarks in a piece of cake (sent to a subsequently poisoned police inspector) and an apple (at the scene of the dual murder) point elsewhere. Other heirs surface in most unlikely guises until Lupin (escaping five separate attempts on his life) uncovers a diabolical killer and the astonishing solution to everything. . .almost. Has a superfiend been dupin' Lupin and manipulating his actions? At this point, one-third of the book remains.

Fatal Descent by John Rhode and Carter Dickson (Dodd, Mead, 1939) Considered the definitive sealed-elevator mystery, this classic deserves the praise. A publisher is seen entering his private elevator, which descends to the first floor without stopping. A shot rings out during transit, and he is found dead when the doors open, but there is no weapon to be seen. While the correct solution seems less plausible than two others, and the motive is weak, these are minor quibbles. One wonders, though, which author contributed how much. Also, someone should consider extracting the "hermetically sealed elevator lecture" for reprinting. —Angelo Panagos

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CURRENT REVIEWS

Winter's Crimes 16 edited by Hilary Hale. St. Martin's, 1984. $12.95

This year's selection seems shorter but is no less satisfying than the previous volumes in the series. Although there is no forward or comment stating it, it seems as if the authors were requested to produce something outside the style or type of story for which they are usually known.

For example, Michael Z. Lewin is best known for his Albert Samson hardboiled private eye cases in Indianapolis—yet here he is represented by a story of a young good-for-nothing who gets trapped into being a humorous private eye in rural England. Then there's James McClure, who won immediate fame as a chronicler of apartheid and prejudice in South Africa—his story is almost a police procedural, taking place in San Diego and involving a wide assortment of low-life and down-at-the-heels characters. Is it necessary to say that both stories are of high stature and worth?

Simon Brett's entry is no less humorous (in a down-played manner) than his Charles Paris stories but concerns art rather than the theater. Other entries by Miles Tripp (a particularly sympathetic and touching tale) and Ellis Peters's "Come to Dust" (a tale of relatives and robbery) are also notable. None of the stories is bad, and as a whole the book is another necessary addition to the library of the criminal short story connoisseur.

—Fred Dueren

* * * * *

Down for the Count by Stuart M. Kaminsky. St. Martin's, 1985. $12.95

Toby Peters's newest case involves him with Joe Louis and the boxing rackets during the Second World War. The action and adventure start on page one, with Toby discovering Louis standing on the beach looking at the body of a man who has just been beaten to death. It is not coincidence that the body is that of Ralph Howard, the new husband of Toby's ex-wife.

Kaminsky uses all his usual tricks. Brand-name-dropping and a plethora of detail about life during the War. Inept dentist Sheldon Minck continues to terrify patients. More physical abuse than a normal private eye could take. Angry, exasperated, and heavy-handed cops. In all, it is not inspired, but it is an acceptable, standard chapter in the Peters saga.

—Fred Dueren

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Fallback by Peter Niesewand. NAL, 1983. 440 pp. $3.95

Since its original publication in England in 1981, the late Peter Niesewand's *Fallback* has been lavished with high praise as the ultimate espionage novel of the '80s, probing new technological ground in the genre in much the same fashion achieved by Len Deighton's *The Billion Dollar Brain* (1966) nearly twenty years ago.

A facet of *Fallback* that has been glossed over is its plot segment concerning a medical transplant in a clandestine research center in Maryland. Niesewand intensifies this aspect of the novel to horrifying dimensions as he dexterously integrates it with his main plot. From this perspective, *Fallback* nearly becomes the *Coma* of the modern spy thriller.

Computer specialist Martin Ross is assigned to infiltrate a Soviet computer defense complex deep within the Urals to obtain crucial first-strike nuclear capability intelligence. The initiative approaches oblivion in its administrative phases when Ross's previously undisclosed cancer condition reaches a critical stage and, despite this development, he is indoctrinated for this potentially suicidal mission. In this respect, Niesewand has ventured into the le Carré alley, portraying Ross as a hi-tech George Smiley, desperate yet defiantly overcoming devastating obstacles. Ross is infused with the superior organs of a deceased intelligence director who died from complications arising out of major heart surgery. As such, Martin Ross emerges as a reinvigorated, flesh-and-blood operative to execute his predestined objective. Niesewand has managed to delineate the medical trappings of *Fallback* with chilling, clinical expertise.

The future direction of the spy genre will, of course, have the final word, but, with *Fallback*, Peter Niesewand charted controversial territory that opens up provocative possibilities for the potential of the espionage novel as it is defined today.

A respected correspondent for *The Guardian* who covered the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by infiltrating occupied regions with a group of Islamic rebels and was deservedly awarded for his efforts in 1981 with the British Press Awards, Mr. Niesewand passed away in his Afghan home in 1984.

—Andy East

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The Detonators by Donald Hamilton. Fawcett Gold Medal, 1985. 345 pp. $3.50

If an award were to be presented for the most enduring spy series practitioner, it would surely be bestowed upon Donald Hamilton for his consistently satisfying Matt Helm saga.

The Detonators, the twenty-second Matt Helm caper, marks the twenty-fifth year for the bestselling series, and, in the chaotic climate of American publishing, Helm has remained with the same paperback imprint, Fawcett Gold Medal, since the first two Helm missions, *Death of a Citizen* and *The Wrecking Crew*, were published in 1960.

Appropriately, *The Detonators* scores as the quintessential Matt Helm novel, representing something of a culmination of the themes, characterizations, and specialized interests that have typified this series from the Cold War era.

Still designated as Eric with the wrecking crew, Helm aids the daughter of a retired colleague, Doug Barnett, to clear him of a rigged drug charge. Hamilton features two previous Helm locales in this entry, notably Florida (*The Shadowers*, 1964) and the Bahamas (*The Intimidators*, 1974), although not the familiar haunting grounds of New Mexico and Mexico (*The Silencers*, 1962, *The Ambushers*, 1963) prevalent throughout the series. When Barnett's boat explodes outside Miami Harbor, the seemingly placid complexion of his daughter evolves into that of a tempestuous woman with a past as she leads Helm to the Bahamas, where a PLO-style terrorist network, People for Nuclear Peace (PNP), is based. It is suspected that the PNP is planning to sabotage a nuclear arms conference in Nassau, and the activities of a Greek drug magnate shadow the vicious alleys of Helm's latest assignment.

The Detonators is clearly Hamilton's best Helm book since *The Ambushers*. His lean style has never been more provocative, and he has matured Helm into a seasoned *agent provocateur*. There is less emphasis on gun lore than readers have come to expect, but this is amply compensated with a fascinating excursion into boating, given the settings, as Helm devotees will fondly recall the role played by sea craft early in the series, as exemplified by *Murderers' Row* (1962) and *The Betrayers* (1966). And for once, the Bahamas are realistically depicted as a naked paradise, far removed from the glittering splendor associated with the days of British rule.

Matt Helm has become so accustomed to dealing with insidious global menaces that one gets the impression that a future mission may well involve Helm's glib secret agent in the aversion of Armageddon itself. But not his last one...

—Andy East

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Consider the Evidence by Jeffrey Ashford. Walker, 1985. $2.95

The indefatigably prolific Roderic Jeffries (who also writes as Peter Alding, Hastings Draper, Roderic Graeme, and Graham Hastings), is again disguised as Jeffrey Ashford for *Consider the Evidence*, originally published here by Walker in 1966. Here, he follows the established Jeffries formula closely (see Carol Simpson Stern's analysis in *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers*), but the book is nevertheless well worth reading. The pace is good, and the ethical questions involved are always new

because they are always with us in one form or another.

When a cop is sent to prison for a crime he did not commit, his younger colleague has to consider harsh alternatives: remain true to the letter of the law and let a genuinely bestial criminal go free while an innocent man suffers, or tamper with evidence and achieve some semblance of true justice. Haggard, the criminal, is the kind of psychopathic personality fans love to hate (and fear); Miller (the old-hand cop) and Craig (the idealistic younger officer) are appealing, and readers' sympathies are enlisted with them not only because they are nice guys trying to survive a dirty job but also because they are caught in a major reorganization of the English crime-enforcement bureaucracy.

Because of the reorganization, and because of the imprisonment, Ashford is able to add greater complexity to the insider-outsider pattern most mysteries employ. As usual, the cops are the insiders, the criminals the outsiders, but also some cops are outsiders to the local establishment, and Ashford exacts plenty of tension (and affords himself considerable political commentary) from the old jealousy-between-agencies ploy. And ultimately, of course, Craig, caught between two obsessive men—one a criminal, one a cop—has to decide how much he can compromise inwardly while still remaining the bright young hope of the force on the outside. Ashford raises a dozen questions of loyalty here, and his working out of the answers is absorbing.

—Jane S. Bakerman

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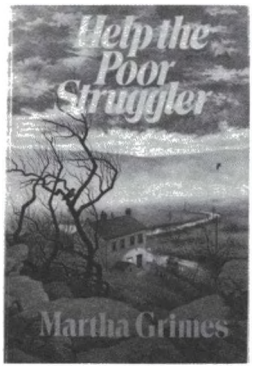

Help the Poor Struggler by Martha Grimes. Little, Brown, 1985. $15.95

The crimes in Martha Grimes's latest Richard Jury/Melrose Plant novel, *Help the Poor Struggler,* draw as much from the individual, personal histories of their perpetrators and victims as they do from general, collective Anglo-American literary-historical antecedents. Grimes, trained as a professor of English, knows her Shakespeare, Austen, Brontës, Hardy, Hawthorne, James, Melville, and even du Maurier well. So do some of the potential victims, as well as the detectives, professional and amateur. And if the reader is familiar with, among others, *Jane Eyre, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Rebecca,* and "Bartleby the Scrivener," the search for the murderer becomes even more chilling and pleasurable, given the wealth of related plots to which Grimes makes allusion.

Thomas Hardy once wrote that there existed only a finite number of plots a writer had at his disposal. That Hardy was more than once accused of appropriating others' plots is germane here (despite his disclaimers, when he chose to raise them, that there really weren't that many possibilities for human interaction, or his explanation that he had "borrowed" but from a source other than that his critics suggested) because much of what *Help the Poor Struggler* is about is men and women living through—and reliving, through crime, memories, and literature's models—others' plots and others' ideas of how life should be lived.

The overt puzzle Richard Jury faces is a series of murders of children near Dartmoor. Twelve-year-old Simon Riley is stabbed in an alley in Dorchester, and ten-year-old Davey White of Wynchcoombe and Angela Thorne of Lyme meet similar fates in a church and on the beach, respectively. The deeper problem goes back twenty years, when Rose Mulvanney was slain at the edge of Dartmoor, with her five-year-old daughter as witness and her fifteen-year-old off on a school trip. The youngest daughter, Tess, grows catatonic and must be committed to a mental institution, and the eldest, Mary, drops out of sight. Obsessed by what he feels to be a false conviction of Sam Waterhouse, a young medical student, local police officer Brian Macalvie relives the Mulvanney crime for years and is convinced, when agoraphobic recluse Molly Singer finds Angela's body on the beach, that Mary Mulvanney has surfaced. The reader, clued to Melville in a description of a cat that always returned, like Melville's Bartleby, "to stare from a window at the blind brick wall," sees Macalvie playing Ahab.

Jury is brought into the picture by jurisdiction. Plant is summoned by Jury, who, as usual, needs inside information from the very rich that can only be gleaned by a very rich undercover detective, a "plant," as it were. Plant's investigation takes place at the mansion of Jessica Allen-Ashcroft, ward of an Australian uncle, who conveniently appears after the death of her parents. It appears that the families of all three murdered children had connections to one of Jessica's parents, either by blood or by bequest, and Jessica, who is easily worth £4,000,000, could be the next victim.

Jury, who so often relies on psychology, extrapolates that "the killer's actual object isn't the person he kills." And that hypothesis, while not removing the narrative focus from Jessica, opens up other possibilities to the reader, since there are any number of people in *Help the Poor Struggler* who may not be what they seem to be: Ashcroft's housekeeper, who is about the age Mary Mulvanney would be; Ashcroft himself; Jessica's new governess;

and the list goes on. Grimes overlays these uncertainties with deliberate parallels in the lives of both suspects and victims, so that there are multiple Marys, women who drink too much, children whose parents are both dead, agoraphobics, little girls with dogs, first cousins, similar-sounding placenames, and scenes yoked by imagery.

In the end, *Help the Poor Struggler* provides a puzzle that is both psychological and literary, and it is a mystery filled with the same elements that Hardy, Hawthorne, and the Brontës accurately described in human nature: obsession, shame, hope, and self-sacrifice. There are unwanted children, philandering spouses, cross-class liaisons, and horrors that extend over generations. And the name of the pub that gives this novel its title is clearly symbolic, in ways that the pub in Grimes's most recent novel, *Jerusalem Inn,* was. Help the Poor Struggler, an isolated roadhouse favored by Macalvie, is home to an assortment of depressed and depressing—and yet vital—people, echoing with the strains of Elvis Presley at the juke box, and is emblematic of the lives of those irreparably altered but not ultimately destroyed by the twenty-year-old murder of Rose Mulvanney.

Grimes, to my mind, just seems to be getting better and better at what she does, giving the reader solid emotional and intellectual fare in her characterization and plotting, a well-developed sense of place in her descriptions of landscape and architecture, and, in the final analysis, series detection that has so far avoided the formulaic and, hence, predictable. If there is anything to forecast, it is that Grimes's next novel will be just as intriguing and satisfying as *Help the Poor Struggler,* but in an even different way.

—Susan Clark

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The Scoop and Behind the Screen by various hands. Victor Gollancz, 1983. 182 pp. £6.95

The two collaboratively written plays contained in this book were first broadcast over the BBC (*Behind the Screen* between June 14 and July 19, 1930 and *The Scoop* between January 10 and April 4, 1931) and subsequently reprinted as serials in *The Listener.* Hugh Walpole, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Anthony Berkeley, E. C. Bentley, and Ronald Knox each contributed one episode to *Behind the Screen;* furnishing two episodes apiece to *The Scoop* were Bentley, Berkeley, Christie, Sayers, Clemence Dane, and Freeman Wills Crofts.

The first Detection Club collaboration, *Behind the Screen* is the less satisfying of the two; while of interest as a curiosity, it fails simply on the puzzle level. Though Berkeley, Bentley, and Knox (and quite likely more of the collaborators) had agreed upon the solution to be presented, each is so concerned with providing unexpected twists that the solution finally presented departs from a timetable carefully worked out in an earlier episode and depends on information previously unavailable to the listener/reader.

Though not without problems of its own, *The Scoop* is superior to *Behind the Screen*—primarily because of the way Dorothy L. Sayers supervised the planning of the overall story and the preparation of individual chapters. Sayers hoped that *The Scoop* would demonstrate that several writers could produce a perfectly orthodox detective story and, in addition, embody her view that detective fiction could and should be a serious criticism of life.

But apart from incidental jabs, no contributor except Sayers criticizes much of anything, and Sayers's more modest aim of reproducing the atmosphere of a newspaper office also goes agleaming as the action speedily moves away from the offices of the *Morning Star* and into the field. Even the process of determining the identity of the murderer depends far more on coincidence than on Sayers's careful plotting; the complex but convincing scenario which she sets forth in her unpublished notes seems to have proved more than a collective effort could manage.

Even with their flaws, both plays are good entertainment as well as reminders of the high quality of radio drama available during the Golden Age. This volume is certainly worth a look by anyone with more than a passing interest in the classic British form of detective fiction.

—William Reynolds

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Sound Evidence by June Thomson. Doubleday, 1985. $11.95

Many mysteries rely on plot twists, overdone descriptions, and flashy characterizations to capture readers' attention, but *Sound Evidence* reaches the same end through the controlled techniques of precise writing, understatement, and quiet attention to everyday detail. If Barbara Pym had written mysteries, I rather suspect that they would read not unlike passages of *Sound Evidence* do: unhurried, centered on the random, but related, emotional details that make up relationships.

The plot of *Sound Evidence* deals with the investigation of the murder of one Ray Chivers, a young homosexual electrician who has been briefly involved with Hugo Bannister, a British senior civil servant in the Foreign Office, who has not—nor wants to—come out of the closet. The overt complications of the truncated affair are blackmail of Hugo, the theft of some Krugerrands, and the police investigation of burglaries in which Ray and unknown accomplices may have been involved. The covert mystery concerns why Hugo was attracted to Ray in the first place, despite their dissimilarities, and why investigating officer Detective Chief Inspector Rudd forms *his* professional alliances in the way he does, temporarily favoring a newcomer, Munro, over his long-time assistant, Boyce. In the final analysis, *Sound Evidence* becomes a novel of the consequences of male bonding: why men get on with each other, form working relationships and friendships—and sometimes more—and maintain these ties or fall out with each other. Thomson's conclusion is that buddies and enemies exist both in the crime world and in the law enforcement agencies that try to root out crime and bring criminals to justice. Thomson's interest is in seeing how Ray becomes a sacrifice and how Rudd and Boyce come to see Munro as the odd man out.

So male-oriented, in fact, is *Sound Evidence* that women must be extraordinary to warrant any attention from the males caught up in the camaraderie of crime-committing or crime-stalking. One, staff pathologist Marion Greaves, catches Rudd's notice, even though he thinks that her involvement in the case is "unsuitable for a woman" (shades of P. D. James's novel). As Thomson sketches it, Rudd's detective world is as off-balance as is Bannister's quiet life: neither is entirely comfortable with the newcomer who has caught his attention, be it Marion or Munro in Rudd's case or Ray in Hugo's case.

Thomson's eye for detail in the meshings of human relationships forms merely one of the novel's strong points. Her depiction of landscape is equally powerful. Both Bannister and Rudd are sensitive to the sweeps of English countryside around them, while the men who pander to them and then work to undermine them are not. The vistas Thomson creates are not modern-day Egdon Heaths, but rather twentieth-century equivalents that serve as a physical backdrop for the emotional sterility which both criminal and crime-solver experience: "The landscape emerged from behind the hedges, curiously static after the ferment of the nearer view. Beneath a sky of dark, layered grey, the countryside lay sullen, pieced together with trees and hedges picked down to the bone by the wind which seemed to have scoured the whole countryside clean so that it lay empty before him, a patched vista of ploughland and fallow, some fields still blackened where the stubble had been burnt after the harvest." The final chase over this landscape—and its emotional counterpart—is thoroughly gripping. *Sound Evidence* is a thoughtful contribution to an ongoing

tradition of detective fiction novelists' interest in the relationship between criminal and victim, criminal and detective, and interior and exterior landscape.

—Susan Clark

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He Done Her Wrong by Stuart Kaminsky. The Mysterious Press, 1985. $3.95

Only Los Angeles in the 1940s could host such a cast of characters as populates Stuart Kaminsky's latest Toby Peters mystery, *He Done Her Wrong*. "Her," in this case, is the inimitable Mae West, whose rough-draft autobiography "sort of in fictional form" has been stolen by a frustrated actor recently escaped from the Winnings Institute, a mental hospital. Jeffrey Ressner, who could have been a star, threatens Mae's life as well as her literary effort. Enter Toby Peters, the epitome of the hardboiled detective, whose brother Phil Pevsner, a homicide detective, is an old friend of Mae's.

Thus the beginning of a good story that gets better with each page turned. With Toby we attend a party at Mae West's house, a Mae West party at which all the guests must dress as Mae West—and all, except the hostess, are male. Toby's most riotous adventure is his romp through the Winnings Institute, where he becomes even more entangled in the family feud that the escaped Ressner has stirred up and where he becomes friendly with patients (wonderful characters) whose antics are not so very different from the behavior of Toby's saner acquaintances.

These highly improbable but—thanks to Kaminsky's skillful writing—wholly believable characters fit their time and their city and their actions, also believable, are delightfully unpredictable. There are the familiar faces: Sheldon Minck, the dentist who shares Toby's office, whose advertisements attract only customers from his past—who want to sue him; Jeremy Butler, a poet and former pro wrestler whose physical strength is as invaluable to Toby as his loyalty;Gunther Wherthman, a three-foot Swiss linguist and translator, like Toby one of Mrs. Plaut's boarders, whose staunch loyalty tells much about Toby's own feeling for his friends. Besides playing emergency chauffeur, Gunther helps Toby through the ordeal of his ex-wife's wedding, no small feat.

Part of the core of this novel is Toby's relationship with his brother Phil, whom Toby loves well enough to know that they are most comfortable with each other when most at odds with one another. When Phil is depressed from yet another murder linked to Ressner, Toby goads his brother until Phil punches him in the stomach, because Toby knows that the action will "wake Phil up."

Phil keeps secret his relationship with Mae, commanding confidentiality from Toby—for Mae's sake, he says. Yet Phil's wife Ruth knows about the friendship, which blossomed before their marriage, and she is content to know without having Phil know she knows: an understanding and loving woman. Toby, being Toby, respects Phil's and Ruth's discretion.

Other sterling Kaminsky characters abound, notably Rosie, the practical, self-sufficient proprietess of Rosie's Rodeo Auto Hotel, who loans Toby money, rebandages his wounds, and gives him her absentee husband's cast-off clothing. She is a "smiling balloon of a woman" who is delightful because of her straightforward, matter-of-fact approach to life in general and to Toby in particular.

Delightful, too is Jeffrey Ressner, a villain whose intelligence and warped sense of humor, one that complements his misperception of life in general, make him a cunning and likeable opponent and a well-conceived foil for Peters. Yet there is more, much more, to Ressner's campaign against Hollywood than meets the eye. Surprise and suspense, to the end, are all.

Were we to read only this or any other Toby Peters mystery, we would be entertained and satisfied and more than willing to admit that Stuart Kaminsky is a writer who knows how to concoct a good story and how to control tone and language effectively, a writer who creates zany but believable characters and places them in an era and in a city he obviously knows well. It will be better still, however, to read other Kaminsky novels, *Death of a Dissident*, for example, which will astonish with its complete change of style—characterization, language, point of view, all exquisitely suited to the novel's subject, political murder in Moscow, and to the novel's protagonist, Soviet police inspector Porfiry Rostnikov. Mystery readers, whether entranced by Toby Peters or intrigued by Porfiry Rostnikov, owe much to such brilliant and imaginative writers as Stuart Kaminsky.

—Mary Frances Grace

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Goldilocks by Ed McBain. Pinnacle, 1985

The surface issue in *Goldilocks* (this 1985 reissue of McBain's 1976 mystery) is divorce, but the underlying anguish which the book communicates ties directly to misogyny. The cover artist seems to have caught on to the idea of woman's central role in the book (we see a naked blond clutching a pink satin pillow) and perhaps on to the stereotypical way McBain views women. The story McBain tells indicates that women can be changed as often as sheets—and that they are, in fact, interchangeable. In the world of divorce, every "other woman" is Goldilocks, always accessible when the wife or the ex-wife is not, always the "second chance girl" who will provide the fairy-tale solution to a problem.

Accordingly, both detective (attorney Matthew Hope) and client (Dr. Jamie Purchase) are involved in affairs with women other than their wives: Matt wants to divorce Susan and go to Agatha, but Jamie hasn't really decided yet to leave Maureen for Catherine. As McBain puts it, "It was a philanderer's nightmare." Jamie's wife and two daughters are brutally murdered, and Matt's job is to find out who did it. What Matt finds is what he has read in fairy tales: a woman is the killer. "It occurred to me that Betty [Jamie's ex-wife] would probably never realize she was as guilty of committing those murders as was her daughter. Karin had wielded the knife, but she had also been her mother's surrogate. The day Betty affixed the label 'Goldilocks' on her husband's new wife was the day she'd first planted the seed of murder. Nor would she ever understand that over the years she herself had become what she considered Maureen to be—the intruder, the other woman: Goldilocks for sure." Woman as killer, woman as enticer, woman as daughter who will grow into both, that's the McBain female in *Goldilocks*.

Over and above the misogynist portrait of female nature, McBain must be faulted in this book not merely for his traffic in females but also for his prose style, which drags when it is trying to be taut, mostly because of the details that are supposed to communicate so much and do not. McBain, for example, enumerates what characters wear to such an extent that the reader wonders if this is supposed to mean something crucial—but the fact that the detective was wearing "a loud plaid summer-weight jacket and dark blue trousers, blue socks and brown loafers... [and] a wine-colored polo shirt...open at the

throat" is extraneous. The real problem is that McBain creates one-dimensional figures, places them into a "fairy tale" framework, and then expects the reader to find the tale interesting.

—Susan Clark

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The Black Ice Score by Richard Stark. Avon, 1985. 140 pp. $2.75

Mystery reissue projects are currently thriving—i.e., the Lockridges' Mr. and Mrs. North for Pocket Books and Berkley's paperback revival of Ian Fleming's first ten James Bond novels. Now you can add yet another series of equal stature to this exclusive clique: Richard Stark's professional thief, Parker, for Avon Books.

The Black Ice Score, the eleventh entry in this memorable series, is the twelfth Parker thriller to be reactivated by Avon, with additional titles slated for future distribution. The Parker series consists of sixteen books.

Writing as Richard Stark, prolific Donald Westlake initiated the Parker saga in 1962 for Pocket Books with *The Hunter* (released as a feature film for MGM in 1967, retitled *Point Blank* with Parker renamed Walker, and starring Lee Marvin as Stark's amoral protagonist), and continued until 1974's *Butcher's Moon.*

The Parker series exhibited a darkly pulsating tone, with Westlake's character consistently depicted as a grim, elusively vengeful figure in the violent landscape of the underworld. In general terms, Westlake-Stark once described his creation as "the most emotionless character I could find."

Parker's newer acquaintances may not be aware that *The Hunter* was published as *Point Blank* in Great Britain. Fawcett Gold Medal issued *Point Blank* as a tie-in to the 1967 MGM film, acknowledging *The Hunter* as the original title.

Early in the saga, notably in *The Man With the Getaway Face* (1963), Parker undergoes plastic surgery after being targeted by the mob. As the series progressed, Westlake embraced various mystery genres within the taut Parker format.

The Jugger (1965) is conveyed in the caper mold. A young boy probes the residence of a retired associate of Parker's, with the objective of unearthing spoils from previous robberies. In the course of his search, the boy unmasks details of Parker's current cover identity, as well as evidence in an old murder case in which Parker was involved. Subsequently, Parker brutally slays the youth and buries him in the house's cellar.

The Handle (1966) reflects the series's diversion into espionage, a fashionable genre at the time. Allying with a U.S. agent, Parker attempts to confiscate valuable diamonds from a Nazi war criminal on his formidable island hideaway.

The espionage theme is perceptibly more subtle in *The Green Eagle Score* (1967), in which Parker conceives and executes the audacious robbery of the monthly payroll at a U.S. Air Force base.

The subject title of this review, *The Black Ice Score* (1968) signified a full-circle development in that it reverted back to the calculated caper formula of the early Parker thrillers. General Coma, the tyrannical leader of the new African nation of Dhaba, has seized a cache of the country's diamonds and cloaked the gems somewhere in New York. The general's political opponents approach Parker to locate their "hot African ice."

The lean, relentless style of *The Hunter* and *The Man With the Getaway Face* is intensified in *The Black Ice Score* and as a result signifies the turning point in Westlake-Stark's classic saga, being a culmination of the mystery and espionage themes of the earlier entries. Opinions may differ among Parker fans, but in terms of style, characterization, and plotting, *The Black Ice Score* seems to qualify as Stark's definitive Parker novel.

As noted previously, Pocket Books began the Parker series in 1962 with *The Hunter* at a time when the paperback publisher was featuring the diverse suspense talents of Agatha Christie (Pocket's sole survivor in the '80s), Ellery Queen, Van Wyck Mason, Erle Stanley Gardner, and Ross Macdonald, among others, on their mystery list.

Fawcett Gold Medal continued the series in 1967, instantly identifying each successive entry with the consistent stamp of "Score" in the title (i.e., *The Rare Coin Score, The Black Ice Score*). This practice had been initiated some years earlier by Fawcett with their enormously popular espionage series properties under the Gold Medal banner, notably Edward S. Aarons's Sam Durell-"Assignment" thrillers, Philip Atlee's Joe Gall-"Contract" books, and the last five installments in Stephen Marlowe's Chester Drum series, each bearing the designation "Drum Beat." The last four installments of Parker's history were published in hardcover by Random House.

The Parker series in general, and *The Black Ice Score* in particular, demonstrated the incomparable versatility of Donald Westlake as Richard Stark, considering the dark images conveyed by Parker throughout the series. It is intriguing to realize that the same author penned such self-parodying efforts as the Dortmunder capers, chiefly *The Hot Rock* (1970), *Bank Shot* (1972), and *Jimmy the Kid*(1974), as well as *Spy in the Ointment* (1966).

Reading Donald Westlake, especially his lethal excursions into the world of Richard Stark and Parker, is to view his genius as a mystery writer. *The Black Ice Score* provides escapist fare on all counts, and Avon is to be highly lauded for having the vision to undertake the task of reissuing the Parker thrillers.

—Andy East

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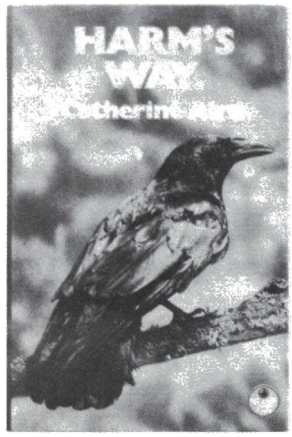
Harm's Way by Catherine Aird. Doubleday, 1984. $11.95

As Detective Inspector C. D. Sloan points out, much of police work in Calleshire, England, involves lost dogs, and "there was only one thing worse than lost dogs and that was escaped budgerigars. Little old ladies seemed to think that these were easier to capture than professional criminals and they weren't." What occupies Sloan in *Harm's Way* is precisely where an errant parakeet *might* perch: a lone finger is dropped by a crow on a cross-fields path in front of the advance guard of the Berebury Country Footpaths Society.

Great Rooden, inhabitants as well as local constabulary, is thrown into an uproar, and speculation is rife at the local pub, the Lamb and Flag. The police are slow but sure, and even the Berebury Country Footpaths Society is enlisted to stomp about and look for evidence. It is some time before the body is found (and in a *most* unusual place), and,

even when it is discovered, the identity is still in question. The male corpse is headless, and several males are conveniently missing. Is it Andrina Ritchie's husband, who, according to the abandoned wife, has "walked out, gone. Vanished. . . . Her name...is Beverley"? Or perhaps Ivor Harbeton, a financial wizard who likes to take over others' companies? Or perhaps Tom Mellot, who is conveniently absent, presumably on holiday with his family (the Spanish *au pair* reports that they cheerily said "they'd see her when they see her"), just after Harbeton failed in his take-over of Mellot Furniture?

Aird peoples the Great Rooden area with ample suspects, numerous observers of suspicious behavior (a finicky, quarrelsome foothpath society member and the local grocers—says Mabel Milligan, "no mean trencherwoman herself," "A man is what he eats. . . . You see everything from behind the counter"), and a criminal investigative team that includes a pathologist with delightfully morbid humor and an assistant constable with surprisingly off-the-wall associative faculties. *Harm's Way* is as funny as a provincial murder can be, in the English tradition, and as fundamental as the rural ballads that illuminate the crime. Aird is



thoroughly in control of her medium—the true "country" English mystery—and *Harm's Way* is a pleasing contribution to the body of classic British rural puzzles.

—Susan Clark

* * * * *

Hair of the Sleuthhound by Jon L. Breen. The Scarecrow Press, 1985. $15.50

Charlie Chan, Philo Vance, Ellery Queen, Hercule Poirot, Lew Archer, and many other renowned crime investigators must be turning over in their literary graves.

For Jon L. Breen, who confesses to early influences by *Mad Magazine*, Sid Caesar, and James Thurber, has adopted the great detectives as clownish heroes in a series of side-splitting parodies and pastiches. With chutzpah, tongue-in-cheek, and sporadic, faint hostility, Breen has undertaken to lampoon some of the most honored practitioners of detective fiction.

The style, mannerisms, and plot maneuvers of such classic Golden Age authors as S. S. Van Dine, Agatha Christie, and Arthur B. Reeve are slyly imitated, side by side with hardboiled Dashiell Hammett, Ross Macdonald, and Michael Avallone. Espionage writers like Ian Fleming and Donald Hamilton are treated acidly. Sardonic darts are aimed at the horseracing milieu of Dick Francis and at E. W. Hornung's gentleman-burglar Raffles. Even Isaac Asimov's Black Widowers and Ed McBain's 87th Precinct squad serve as targets.

Most of the Breen pieces were published originally in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and are now collected in book form. Two parodies—one poking fun at philosophical Charlie Chan, whose initial appearance was in the 1925 novel *The House Without a Key* by Earl Derr Biggers, and one kidding the macho stance of Donald Hamilton's super-spy Matt Helm—appear here in print for the first time.

Writing pure parody is an elusive task. Many take-offs on the sacred cows of suspense fiction lack the grace and ease that are mandatory for successful pastiches. Most attempts have illustrated how difficult it is to strike a beguiling balance in the art of satire. There are only a few entertaining pastiches of detective literature, most notably *A Case for Three Detectives* by Leo Bruce, *Murder in Pastiche* by Marion Mainwaring, *The Julius Caesar Murder Case* by Wallace Irwin, and various affectionate spoofs of Sherlock Holmes.

Jon L. Breen joins that illustrious company. He demonstrates a wide and authoritative knowledge of the mystery genre. He writes with stylish finesse, immaculate taste, and genuine fondness for the original material. He manages to avoid the trappings of heavy-handed humor, imitation points that are too frequent and too obvious, and his plotting is up to par with the works he is satirizing.

Among the more enjoyable pastiches are "Frank Merrivale's Greatest Case," lampooning not only the once favorite gambit of committing a murder during the "big game," in front of thousands of spectators, but also America's hero-worship of sports figures; "The Dewey Damsel System," a lighthearted satire with an obvious nod to *The Maltese Falcon;* "Gillian's Tact," which pokes fun at the police procedural series of John Creasey's Commander Gideon of Scotland Yard; and "The House of the Shrill Whispers," winking at the impossible crime problems concocted by John Dickson Carr.

Jon L. Breen wrote to those authors who had been targets of his parodies, requesting pro and con comments. Their responses are included in the book as afterwords which follow some of the stories. It is a novel and amusing idea (at least one author expresses the hope that he will catch Breen in a dark alley someday), the crowning touch of an unusual collection which serves not only to devastate detective fiction but, simultaneously also to pay it homage.

—Amnon Kabatchnik

* * * * *

Wedding Treasure by David Williams. St. Martin's, 1985. $10.95

Nobody likes Kit Jarvas—certainly not his ex-wife Amanda nor her current husband, manufacturer Jack Figgle; nor Orchard Hotel greenskeeper Dick Clay, who knows of his wife's past affair with Kit and Kit's current outrageous flirting with daughter Rose, who minds the hotel desk and dispenses golf clubs; nor the vicar of the church in the village of Much Marton, where Amanda's and Kit's daughter Fleur is to marry that bright but not too scrupulous young entrepreneur, Jonas; nor Fleur's maternal grandparents, the Wares, who fear that Fleur may be repeating her mother's past mistake by marrying a bounder, albeit a charming one. When Kit announces his wish not only to attend Fleur's wedding but also to give the bride away, the assembled relations are thrown into a tizzy. And when Kit shows his typical form as the charming fifty-year-old lecher, cadger, and exploiter that he is (as well as a bit of a crook, as he and Jonas work out a deal involving Fleur's inheritance), tempers are further ruffled. Then comes the last straw. In the words of Mr. Ware: "Now he's gotten himself killed [by] walking into a golf ball."

The Treasures—Mark, a banker with Greenwood, Phipps, and Molly, a popular West End actress—witness the houseparty

shenanigans at close hand, for Mark has been invited to propose the wedding toast for the happy couple. As in the other mysteries in the Treasure series, Mark is as good at sniffing out shady financial dealings as Molly is at spotting dissembling. Between the two of them, aided by Jonas's American uncle and the village doctor (who is "a failed and very frustrated haematologist," a drinker "who scarcely knows half his patients by sight but can tell you their blood group from memory. And the groups their parents could or couldn't have had"), Mark and Molly unravel a tangle of questionable paternity, past and present infidelity, and messy doings involving considerable sums of money.

Despite all the dark motives virtually every character has for dispatching Kit Jarvas, *Wedding Treasure* amounts to a very funny book. Mark and Molly exchange cultured and sometimes acid witticisms, and author Williams follows the polite British tradition of using names to pun (Jonas, for example, is discovered pawing an attractive bridesmaid called Alexi Bedwell, and a representative question in passing is, "can Clay be Fleur's father?"), of employing startling juxtapositions (some of the events here read in the spirit of the very early Allingham), and of utilizing red herrings adeptly (as the murder weapon is a golf ball, the reader is treated to family dogs chewing them, villagers pocketing them surreptitiously, and greenskeepers recycling them by attaching them to stakes and stenciling hole numbers on them—the golf balls are literally everywhere!). Williams, in the final analysis, writes a thoroughly well-crafted mystery with much to recommend it in terms of puzzle and people—a book that really is, as the title prods the reader, a special find.

—Susan Clark

* * * * *

The Ace of Spades by Dell Shannon. Mysterious Press, 1984

In *Ace of Spades* (originally published in 1961), Luis Mendoza is intrigued by an unidentified body at the Los Angeles morgue, in part because the victim, a presumed junkie because of his fatal overdose of heroin, doesn't look like an addict, and in part because of the small scrap of paper found on the body, which reads: "Nymphs and a small dolphin." Mendoza, he of "the orderly mind, place-for-everything-and-everything-in-its-place," decides to investigate, despite his assistant's comment: "As you please, but it's just another dope case. Or are you going to have one of your hunches about it and say he's the heir to a Bulgarian millionaire assassinated by the Communists?" Mendoza replies: "Once in a while I read a detective novel—and once in a while I wish I was in one. Everything made so easy for those boys, such complicated problems that inevitably there are only a couple of possible answers. I don't think there are any Bulgarian millionaires left."

Mendoza *is* in a detective novel, and the case undergoes new complications and developments when his steady date, Alison Weir, has her car stolen and when it appears that the corpse, one recent Greek immigrant named Stevan Domokous, was tied to what appears to be an insurance scam involving an ominous foreign widow and ancient Greek coins, one of which was conveniently found in Alison's recovered car. In real life these connections are verging on the miraculous, not only the interlocked crimes but, practically speaking, Alison having recovered her car at all, and so quickly, and without it having been stripped. Yet this is Dell Shannon's world, in which the multiple crimes always relate and, more importantly, always get solved.

After having read a number of volumes in Shannon's Luis Mendoza series, I've identified the source of the mixed feelings I invariably have about the tidiness of Shannon's solutions. Like many girls who came of reading age in the mid-'50s, I devoured Nancy Drew, Judy Bolton, Cherry Ames, and Vicki Barr, as well as those earlier-in-the-century series recounting the exploits of Beverly Gray, Grace Harlowe, and—my favorite—the Lingernots. All of these mysteries for girls had the same ordered tidiness, but displayed unabashedly up-front, that Shannon's novels have at their core, despite the overt chaos and mayhem that a city such as Los Angeles can offer. What Shannon does in *Ace of Spades* is related to the scheme enacted repeatedly in the Nancy Drew books, but Shannon does it for an adult audience. Still, it was with a start that I figured out Shannon's *Ace of Spades* (linking the black widow—the ace in the card deck—with the "deck" of heroin that surfaces in the plot) by utilizing those same techniques that enabled me to make the connection between obsidian keys, the piano keyboard, and one of the Florida Keys *(The Black Key)* when I was ten years old (reading the Nancy Drew series before it was modernized and the "mysterious mansion" of the book by the same title lost its '30s ring and harbored explosive oranges destined for then Cape Canaveral). Still, it was a thrill, and it is owed to a steady diet of teenage mysteries. Many of us mystery readers and critics were weaned on that diet. Maybe that's why I read Dell Shannon with interest. I want to see how she does it *this* time, how all the ends get tied up and knotted together, because Nancy Drew and her sleuthing sisters nurtured these expectations in me. *Ace of Spades* is an astute re-issue of a classic in more than one sense.

—Susan Clark

* * * * *

Never Cross a Vampire by Stuart Kaminsky. The Mysterious Press, 1984. 182 pp. $3.95

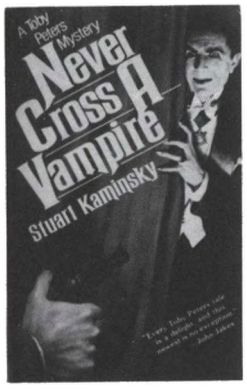
Suddenly, Toby Peters has more work than he can handle in *Never Cross a Vampire.* The day after he agrees to track down the person who has been sending Bela Lugosi threatening notes and dead bats with tiny stakes through their hearts, he is asked to defend none other than famed Southern author William Faulkner on a murder charge. Perennially financially strapped, Peters realizes that he is not likely to make much money on either case, since the film star (for whom "dying is his living") has played nothing for five years but "mad doctors who get torn up in the last reel" and since the writer of *Sanctuary* is trying to eke out a living as a screenwriter when he'd really rather "join a few friends in a hunt for raccoon or squirrels... spend a night in the woods by a lake eating Brunswick stew and washing it down with lots of bourbon while we play nickel poker." But a job is a job, and Peters, who lives in a seedy rooming house next door to a midget who translates from seven languages, can't be too selective: "I had failed as a Glendale cop and a Warner Brothers security guard and I had only twenty-five bucks and an overdue bill on my office rent to show for nearly a half a dozen years as a private investigator."

Peters's investigations take him to the "lair of the Dark Knights of Transylvania," the basement of a decaying Los Angeles movie theater where a group of cape-clad, fang-wearing vampire fans gather to do homage to horror films, as well as to the Beverly Hills mansion of the murder victim, theatrical agent Jacques Shatzkin, where the widow puts on a show of grief that doesn't convince Peters. He interviews scriptwriters and sociology professors who research "cults that

use the occult as a focal point," tangles with cops—one of whom is his brother—investigating the Shatzkin murder, and amorously encounters part-time vampire Baroness Zendelia (Bedelia Sue Frye in her real-life incarnation), who shows up unannounced in his room and whispers seductively, "It is after midnight, when the blood runs free, and passion rises with the full moon." Peters's assessment, "Lady, I think you are a little screwy," applies to most of the characters that flit through *Never Cross a Vampire*, but therein lies one of the book's strengths and certainly a good measure of its charm.

Kaminsky's larger view is that the controlled movieland craziness in Peters's Hollywood is a relatively harmless microcosm of the ominous macrocosm which fills the background of this period mystery: the murderous chaos of World War II. Compared to Americans' fears of a Japanese invasion of the West Coast, a few vampires are pretty tame. And the period detail that Kaminsky pulls from 1942 Los Angeles adds a texture which only increases the reader's enjoyment of the puzzle Peters unravels over several bowls of Kix, Grape Nuts, and Wheaties, between radio broadcasts about Corregidor and the Joe Louis–Buddy Baer rematch, and in spite of bad vampire jokes: "My friends, do you know what is worse than a werewolf who had to get rabies shots? A vampire who has to get braces."

Throughout, the personality of Toby Peters dominates the narrative, for Kaminsky is right on target with the wisecracks and ruminations of a 45-year-old shamus



involved in something screwy that just might be fatal: "There are times in every man's life when he has to decide whether he is going to face the Green Knight, Grendel, or Trampas. Most of us decide that we can do without the encounter. But when one is getting paid. . ." In short, Peters does his job. He can't be bought ("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") and keeps his nose clean. Peters is a series detective who doesn't take himself entirely seriously and is, as a result, never boring:

" 'Life gets ted-jus, don't it,' I said.

'That is an idiom?' Gunther said seriously, perched upon the toilet seat.

'Line from a song by a guy named Bert Williams,' I said, pulling myself out of the tub. 'And now to work.' "

—Susan Clark

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Hardboiled (magazine) edited by Wayne Dundee and Tod Moore. Published by HB Enterprises.

In the wake of the deaths of *The Saint* and *Mike Shayne*, we have the appearance of *Hardboiled*, a magazine dedicated to publishing stories with a hardboiled theme. If the first issue is any indication, this will be a cleverly managed, interesting, and informative publication.

The premiere issue (cover price $2.50) is an 8½"×11", decidedly "unslick," magazine which has not skimped on its contents. Professional authors Max Collins and Ed Gorman have contributed their considerable talents, and editor Wayne Dundee has wisely included a private eye story of his own, one he sold to *The Saint*, only to have that magazine fold before it could be published. There is an article on Jim Thompson and one on author Robert J. Randisi, along with poetry by Tod Moore and book reviews by the editors. In future issues, there will be stories by Bob Randisi and Paul Bishop and an interview with Loren D. Estleman.

What puts this magazine one up on the slick *New Black Mask Quarterly* is the fact that Dundee and Moore care about what they are doing, because, along with being professionals, they are "Fans" of the form. In their small way—small as regards budget, not content—they are doing what they can to showcase a style of storytelling that they truly care about. As long as they believe in what they are doing, the "appearance" of the magazine will continue to be secondary to the content. But for the appearance to improve—and the editors themselves would like it to—they need the support of subscribers.

Anyone interested in subscription information can write to *Hardboiled*, 903 West Jackson Street #8, Belvidere, IL 61008.

—Jack Miles

* * * * *

Nightcap by J. C. S. Smith. New York: New American Library, 1984.

Quentin Jacoby, a widower who has recently retired from the New York City Transit Police ("the mole force" that patrols the subways), reluctantly agrees to help out Gloria Gold, an old high-school friend, who has a business problem. Gloria owns Global Security, which has just landed a night-watchman contract at the Pinnacle Room, the posh restaurant high up the Interdine Tower, neighbor to the twin skyscrapers of Lower Manhattan's World Trade Center. As Gloria explains it, manager John Lombardo "'wants a guard, and he wants him tomorrow, but he insists on having someone *intelligent*. Someone with a sense of *style*.' Gloria stressed the words like they were in a foreign language, which I guess they were for her usual trade." When Jacoby demurs ("One of the first things I learned about being retired is that everybody right away assumes you are available for any kind of time-wasting chore that happens to come along"), Gloria outtalks him, Lombardo is murdered, neatly shish-kebabed, as it were, with a restaurant skewer. All of this happens after hours, while Jacoby is on break and wolfing the gourmet midnight snack left for him by the kitchen staff: "A hunk of cold salmon with cucumber sauce. Another plate with some cold beef and carrots and tiny little pink potatoes all frilled up with parsley." Jacoby has seen his share of dead bodies before, but he's never found one in such elegant circumstances, nor has he ever been suspected of doing the killing; in short, it's a long way from Co-op City in the Bronx to downtown Manhattan, and it is not just physical distance but also state of mind. Jacoby is more accustomed to going to the track with his neighbor, Sam Fuentes, than dealing with the types who run the fancy restaurant at the Interdine Tower—Pierre, the wine steward, ambitious assistant manager Robert Lyder, glamorous black hostess Janine DuPage (one of her best lines comes as a reaction to learning Jacoby's name: "My word. And I thought Janine DuPage was a silly name"), Lombardo's male lover Angel, and even owner Blount Harwell, who looks as if he outfits himself from L. L. Bean catalogues and who actually has a wife who breeds dogs in Virginia.

Lombardo's murder is clearly an inside job, and Jacoby realizes that it is somehow related to after-hours thefts of wine ("something was missing, and it wasn't just a six-pack of Bud," Jacoby reasons astutely), Lombardo's active, bisexual love-life, the financial health of the Pinnacle Room and the Interdine Corporation, and an employee who improbably moonlights as Spider Man. But these events and characters—and even the "good cop"/"bad cop" team that alternately aids and frustrates Jacoby—are cast in relief against the New York skyline, which virtually becomes a fully realized character itself in *Nightcap*. As Jacoby crisscrosses The City, he communicates the frustration, tolerance, and affection which New Yorkers and even out-of-towners feel toward the Big Apple and its inhabitants, and Smith's eye for both large views and details is such that Jacoby's fellow characters are believable and, for the most part, realistic. Jacoby himself proves to be immensely likable, both competent and klutzy, wary and trusting, analytical and intuitive. He's not mean-spirited, and, despite his protestations to the contrary, he's not as jaded as he would like to appear. Jacoby may be cast in the tradition of urban hardboiled detectives and their cases (which are actually thinly veiled insights-on-society-while-walking-those-mean-streets), but he's more self-always *Holmes* they want!" cries the Proprietor. "Oh, we got a pervert once wanted to rent Nancy Drew for unnatural purposes, but nine times out of ten...")

Unfortunately, all are malfunctioning. Father Brown, for example, has become an atheist...never mind.

On his own, Space starts a chase involving rocket racing on the Moon, talking mice on Saturn who worship the Great Mickey (creator of Walt Disney), a hand-to-hand combat with a Spidermaster whose extra arms and legs make him the System's most feared martial-arts expert, a kindly scientist who performs medical experiments to improve the lot of humanity upon anyone idiotic enough to volunteer (does Sam? guess), a frame-up for murder, and a gorgeous vanishing redhead.

Critics making a deep textual analysis of confidently and ungrudgingly funnier than Marlowe or Sam Spade ever were, and he's nearly as funny as the early Spenser, although arguably less literate, urbane, and comfortable in the kitchen. In the final analysis, Smith, author of *Jacoby's First Case,* has written a second volume featuring a detective who clearly bears further acquaintance, a verbal portrait of a vital city and its often eccentric inhabitants, and a well-paced crime investigation. Poor Lombardo, the victim who anticipates a nightcap and ends up with "the big sleep," but lucky reader, who gets a good read before bed...and perchance sleep!

—Susan L. Clark

* * * * *

Time Out for Space by William F. Nolan. New York: International Polygonics, 1985. 188 pp. $4.95

Does one good (Edgar-winning) novel deserve another?

Damn right it does, and William F. Nolan has given us another wild, way-out (to the far galaxies), mixed-up parody of the hardboiled detective story (combined with science fiction) in *Time Out for Space.* This is the second case for Sam Space, private eye operating out of Bubble City, Mars, the great-grandson of another private eye, Bart Challis of old Earth in the 1970s and '80s. The first, *Space for Hire* (Lancer, 1971), received an Edgar Allan Poe Special Award in 1972.

Sam's latest goof (uh, case) begins with a somewhat spooky client, Brother Thaddeus of the Universal Cosmic Church, a tall, stork-like man with "Colorless deadman's hands and a zealot's eyes, ringed with dark pouches. His white hair...seemed he explode from his high skull."

Brother Thaddeus has a problem. You gotta watch your asteroid (it's that kind of a universe), and he hasn't; his most recently purchased asteroid is missing. Oddly, it's not worth much, lacking any rare or valuable elements. Can Space find the thief and restore the asteroid?

Space (perhaps wisely) seeks expert help from a museum of robot detectives programmed and powered to possess the abilities of their fictional counterparts, trying to rent Sherlock Holmes. ("Holmes! Holmes!...it's the previous novel have often felt that its background of empty, echoing, dimly lit interstellar gulfs had its counterpart between Sam's ears. That was unkind. Actually, Sam comes up with a couple of rather ingenious ideas here. One is a new way to get past a room-guarding robot programmed to keep him out that would interest Asimov. Another is a way of getting into a ganglord's carefully patrolled castle on the Moon (namely, get invited). Unfortunately, it involves wrecking a Moonboat ("Windsculpted, with flared podcock and raked tweeters") worth 18,000 solarcredits, but, what the hey, it's the client's money.

Not that it's all *easy,* mind. Outside of the frame-up and several murder attempts, Sam has another small problem not faced by most detectives. Teleported back to Earth, his body is reassembled not quite correctly: the head is on backward and it'll be a couple weeks before the process can be reversed...

Impishly, Nolan parodies everything in sight, from Parker's Susan Silverman to TAD and "Hu Albin" to Nolan's own work, with a climax that kids one of the most famous endings in mystery fiction.

Occasionally, too, amid the fun, there is a hint of that nightmarish power Nolan puts in his serious, often macabre work—the prison ship, the *Damned Soul,* traveling silently, without lights outside or in, among the stars; a scene out of a black dream in which a witch corners Sam, swinging an axe and cackling, "Hi diggidy dun . . . it's time for blood to run!" to the secret humanitarian medical experiments.

The book reads with such rocket speed that it's a bit startling to realize that it's a full-length novel of 188 pages. Ingenious ideas flash out—"my body heat...activate[d] the doorcall"—and the future-slang is newly minted, bright and clear: "The alertpill kept me at combat status." Printed on a higher grade of paper than most paperbacks, the book is priced at $4.95.

Tired?

Depressed?

Need a laugh?

Take a case of Space. (The first Space case is being reissued simultaneously with this one—same format, publisher, and price.) But don't call me in the morning—you'll feel great! Giggling is the best medicine.

—Frank D. McSherry, Jr.

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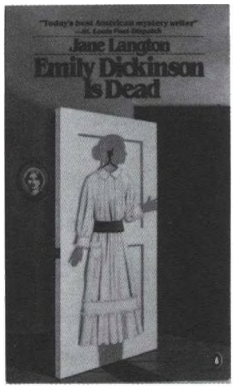
Emily Dickinson Is Dead by Jane Langdon. New York: Penguin, 1985. 247 pp. $3.50

Not only is Emily Dickinson dead, but she is about to be one hundred years dead—a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for English Department Chair Dombey Dell to convene that particularly grisly post-mortem known as a scholarly conference. Dombey Dell is just the sort of pretentious bully that his name suggests, and he bullies his colleague Owen Krasnik (a mild-mannered, internationally recognized Dickinson expert) into participating in the tacky academic extravaganza chastely called "The Emily Dickinson Centennial Symposium."

In addition to the supercilious Dell and the saintly Krasnik, the cast of characters includes: Winnifred Gaw, a grotesquely obese graduate student who worships Kraznik with pathological devotion; Tom Perry, the youngest full professor at Amherst College and rather full of himself; Alison Groves, a stunning sophomore English major and the current object of Professor Perry's extra-curricular activities; Ellen Oak, M.D.,



Perry's plain but virtuous fiancée; Peter Wiggins from Pancake Flat, Arizona, eager to advance his career *via* a questionably "authentic" photograph of the reclusive poet; and finally, Homer Kelley, "distinguished Thoreau scholar and professor of American literature and ex Lieutenant Detective for Middlesex County."

Ever anxious to ingratiate himself with the powers that be in higher education, Dombey restricts the participation of women in the conference to Alison Groves's impersonation of the Belle of Amherst. This provokes a takeover of the Dickinson homestead by A.W.E.D. (the Amherst Women's Emily Dickinson Association). Professor Kraznik ends the siege by graciously inviting amateur historian Tilly Porch to speak on Dickinson's family tree, and pathetic Winnifred Gaw to deliver her confused and tedious paper on Emily Dickinson's method of capitalization. (So much for including *bona fide* feminist scholars. The tokens are content to represent the trivial.)

Before the event is over, one murder is accomplished and a few more are attempted. The perfidious are exposed and the ridiculous are embarrassed. At least one couple stands a chance of living happily every after. There are no real surprises—Langdon's characters are never more than their presenting symptoms.

While the moral of the story is the evil which attends the appropriation and exploitation of helplessly dead literary figures, the novel is mildly guilty of the very vice it condemns. This book will probably stimulate the innocent pleasures of reminiscence for those who have made the tourist pilgrimage to the Amherst shrine, and it may amuse persons who prefer their Dickinson in manageable snatches. As a contribution to the serial development of the Kelley couple, it is likely to disappoint readers. Homer Kelley has a rather annoying minor role, and Mary makes only a cameo appearance in the novel.

—Patrice Clark Koelsch

* * * * *

A Classic Death by Amy Marsland. New York: Doubleday, 1985. $12.95

The title of Amy Marsland's second crime novel is well chosen in that it refers to a detective fiction archetype developed in the Golden Age: "The English country house, the closed list of suspects, tout à fait classique, n'est-ce pas?" The suspects in the crime are, if not members of a time-honored English houseparty, jolly vacationers at a French Atlantic coastal resort, but the evaluation of "classic" nevertheless is fitting, for each of the seemingly carefree tourists/suspects at the pension Brise de Mer at Pontaillac-Royan has justifiable cause to have murdered Edith Lemay, a former music hall strip-tease artist, known in her prime as "The Girl in the Black Velvet Hat" and in her dotage as "The Madwoman of Pontaillac." Wearing clothes of sixty years earlier and behaving bizarrely, Edith Lemay seems harmless enough, and her death at first appears to be the violent consequence of a robbery gone awry. But complications develop, and the seemingly unrelated vacationers are seen to be tied to Edith Lemay in ways that none of them want revealed.

Marsland's detectives are two Parisian couples on holiday, policeman Marc Tavernier and his wife Marie-Gisèle, and lawyer François LeBreton and his American wife Laura, around whose perspective the narrative is centered. Laura and François are semi-public figures, as their involvement in a previous crime case gained them front-page publicity and name and face recognition. In between excursions to Romanesque churches, beaches, wineries, and seafood restaurants, and over discussions of French history and human nature, Marsland's four European-style Yuppies detect in a leisurely fashion, drawn into the crime because the Madwoman left a will inexplicably appointing François as executor of her estate, which includes a valuable and unusual emerald necklace bequeathed, equally curiously, to Laura.

Marie-Gisèle, easily the most frivolous of the four and the one who most frequently feels out of her depth in the group's sometimes philosophical discussions, is nevertheless the one to make some kind of psychological sense out of the Madwoman's will: "You know, Marc, connections sometimes only make sense indirectly. Do you remember the day your mother arrived unexpectedly, and I walked in carrying her favorite madeleines in my bag? 'You're psychic,' she said—she was really impressed by that. But it was only that I saw some geraniums almost as splendid as hers in a window box, and I was on my way to the *patisserie* anyway, so when I walked in subconsciously I just chose them . . . The same thing here in all probability. Something caused the Madwoman unease, but she could not define it. Seeing Laura, François, gave her comfort, but she could not define that. Fear made her think of death, death of wills, she made a gesture—the LeBretons on my will will protect me."

Initially, the Madwoman's connection to Laura and Marc appears as obscure as her relation to any of the suspects: an aging professor of philology and his splendidly preserved wife, a hard-up journalist and his grasping wife, a prominent industrialist bent on a cabinet post and his much younger spouse, and the two charming young men so ready to play tennis or go boating or have affairs with willing ladies. Add to this profusion of suspects jewel thieves reputed to be in the neighborhood, and that makes for good detecting on the part of the four Parisians, as well as on the part of the reader, who looks over Laura's shoulder as the mystery is solved.

But it is not only the ample opportunity for speculation that makes *A Classic Death* such a class act, such a pleasure to read, for Marsland belongs very much to the school of detective fiction writers which believes that the immediate crime is but a part of a larger puzzle faced by her detectives. Accordingly, the philosophical/psychological discussions that interlace with the actual detection are not only interesting but also integral to the plot progression. Moreover, Marsland writes for an educated, traveled reader, and Francophiles in particular will enjoy the rhythm and vocabulary, always subtle and never overdone, of the Parisians' English and thought processes. The alert reader will find the solution to *A Classic Death* in references to

literary classics, classic French history and literature vignettes, and the class distinctions that mean so much to the suspects. Marsland, finally, believes in the "classic" tradition in her adherence to the "fair play" principle, whereby no clues are withheld from the reader, and that in itself is a welcome treat. *A Classic Death,* a well-wrought mystery with a decidedly Gallic flavor, comes well recommended.

—Susan L. Clark

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The Fourth Deadly Sin by Lawrence Sanders. New York: Putnam, 1985. $17.95

There are two things you can say about Lawrence Sanders. The first is that he sticks to his schedule. *The First Deadly Sin,* featuring Captain Edward X. Delaney of the New York Police Department, appeared in 1973. The second in the series, with Delaney now retired and serving as a consultant in a difficult murder case, came out in 1977. In 1981, *The Third Deadly Sin* was published, and now, four years later, *The Fourth Deadly Sin,* still starring Delaney as the indispensable retiree called back to solve a case on which the regulars are making no progress. The other thing about Sanders is that his books are invariably popular. This newest one hit the *New York Times Book Review* bestseller list immediately, as did the other three, and at the time of this writing (early September 1985) is still high in the rankings despite some impressive competition.

The Fourth Deadly Sin is straight mystery-detection, with almost nothing revealed until the big unmasking of the murderer close to the end. In a short introductory scene, we are permitted to watch as Dr. Simon Ellerbee opens the door of his Manhattan psychiatry office for a late-evening appointment, to witness his surprised horror as he faces his visitor, and finally to see him struck down by the unidentified assailant. Thus the reader is given just enough information to put him slightly ahead of the police without having an actual clue to the real solution. This is the approach Sanders used in *The Second Deadly Sin,* wherein the reader witnessed the stabbing of the noted artist but was kept in suspense until the conclusion regarding the name of the murderer. The first and third books of the "Deadly Sin" series, however, are "inverted" stories: in the first, we are allowed not only to know from the beginning that Daniel Blank is the series killer but also to watch Delaney's growing sense of identity with him, conscious of their shared sense of pride, and in *The Third Deadly Sin* the reader is permitted to follow step by bloody step as Zoe Kohler proceeds through a series of some of the most savage murders in recent crime fiction. Of course, both approaches can be fully effective, but the reader of *The Fourth Deadly Sin* may sense the absence of suspense such as was created in *The Third Deadly Sin* through a skillful use of the techniques of postponement, concealed clues, hints, and suggestions.

The big center of interest in *The Fourth Deadly Sin* is still Edward X. Delaney, who retired from the New York Police Department with the rank of Captain and assignment as Chief of the Detective Division shortly after the conclusion of *The First Deadly Sin.* As in the past two stories, the Deputy Commissioner, an old friend, asks Delaney to serve as unpaid "consultant" in the investigation of the Ellerbee murder, which means that Delaney will be expected to take charge of a case that has already defied solution. Delaney, who has mellowed a little from his iron stance in *The First Deadly Sin,* is still the thorough professional who hides his eyeglasses before a meeting with his task force and also the canny cop who knows there are times when a policeman has to throw the rulebook out the window. Delaney, however, is by no means your run-of-the-mill ex-flatfoot: at one point, he compares the situation in the story to a Henry James plot, and at another he makes a casual reference to the English painter J. M. W. Turner. Two things, though, save him from coming across as a pedantic bore: his sandwiches and his sense of humor.

Delaney has joined the list of fictional detectives who can make the reader's mouth water with descriptions of delicious foods, and he is becoming the sandwich specialist of the world of mystery. The recipes in this book range from his elaborate U.N. Special (Norwegian brisling sardines in Italian olive oil on German schwarzbrot, Spanish onions, and French dressing) to an improvisation with Christmas leftovers, composed of marbled rye, sliced smoked turkey, kosher dill pickles, and a dousing of Tiger sauce. "Wet" sandwiches such as the U.N. Special, it should be noted, are intended to be consumed only over the kitchen sink. Delaney's sense of humor comes through in the description of the taste sensation of the after-Christmas sandwich: "At first taste it was sweet-and-sour. A moment later, sweat broke out on your scalp and steam came out of your ears."

Delaney is assisted in the Ellerbee case by two series standbys, Sergeant Abner Boone, whom Delaney rescued from alcoholism in *The Second Deadly Sin,* and Patrolman Jason T. Jason, the big black cop who assisted Delaney in that novel. Boone is shaping up very satisfactorily under the guidance of Delaney, who characterizes him as "very perceptive." Jason is growing too: when he wants to shy away from a library-research assignment because he has never done anything like that before, Delaney tells him, "Then it's time you learned," and he performs very well.

There is one episode in the story that effectively illustrates the plight of the police-woman in the man's world of law enforcement. Detective Helen K. Venable, a member of Delaney's task force, has come up with an important lead, but she hesitates to report it because she knows from experience that the men will take the follow-up out of her hands and get the credit for themselves.

As a mystery, *The Fourth Deadly Sin* is the weakest of the series to date. It has none of the complex thematic development of *The First Deadly Sin,* nor the formidable mystery of the second one, nor the skillful suspense of the third one. The reader may be inclined to wonder whether Edward X. Delaney has enough momentum left to carry him through three more deadly sins.

—George N. Dove

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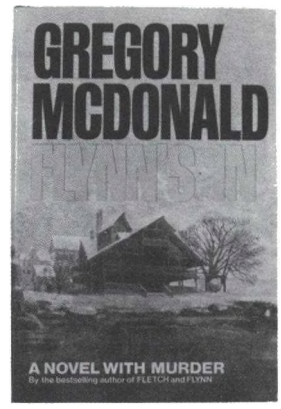

Flynn's In by Gregory Mcdonald. New York: The Mysterious Press, 1984. New York: Popular Library, 1985. 262 pp. $3.50

Some years ago, I read a review of the spy film *Our Man Flint* (1966) which contained a memorable piece of commentary: "The more something borrows, the more original it becomes."

In the course of absorbing Gregory Mcdonald's latest Inspector Francis Xavier Flynn mystery, this line came back to me with such intensity that, with proper respect to Mcdonald's inimitable flair, I thought that a little rephrasing of that artistic axiom suited the tongue-in-cheek landscape of *Flynn's In:* "The more something borrows, the more classic it becomes."

The glowing reviews of Mcdonald's previous efforts, including *Flynn* (1977) and *The Buck Passes Flynn* (1981), as well as his eight extant "Fletch" books, have called attention to his gift of inventively invoking the likes of Agatha Christie and Ellery Queen while exhibiting his distinctive style of taut mockery.

In his third outing, the indomitable Flynn is assigned by the Boston Police Commissioner to investigate the murder of a prominent Congressman at the Rod and Gun Club, an exclusive men's club situated outside Boston. With the sly assistance of Detective Walter Concannon (Retired)—affectionately known as Cocky—Flynn penetrates the shaded intrigues in this restricted hideaway. Probing the blue-chip backgrounds of the Rod and Gun rank-and-file—which would no doubt give the editors of *Fortune 500* an identity crisis—Flynn unmasks enough motives to resurrect Dame Agatha from her grave.

Mcdonald intensifies the suspense level of *Flynn's In* to an unbearable fever-pitch. Further, the locked-room complexion of the book suggests a contemporary variation of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (or *Ten Little Indians* to the more film-

oriented) as the privileged corpse count mounts. (This would really give the boys at *Fortune 500* something to write about.)

Flynn's In succeeds not only on the general mystery level but also in its insolent attitude toward the affluent. And Flynn's chess contest with Cocky throughout the book adds the spice of diversion to the proceedings, not to mention the startling revelation of the murderer. Although Fletch is not present in this Flynn entry, the allusion to (Governor) Caxton Wheeler, who figured prominently in *Fletch and the Man Who* (1983), imparts a nice escapist touch.

Reading *Flynn's In* and recollecting the recently successful film version of *Fletch* inevitably leads to the question: "Who will play Inspector Francis Xavier Flynn?"

In this humble reviewer's mind, *Flynn's In* would make a slam-bang movie.

—Andy East

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Murder Is Academic by P. M. Carlson. New York: Avon. $2.95

Murder Is Academic is marketed as something it patently is not: "For pretty coeds on this upstate campus...the new course was Terror 101 and the final exam was murder. And unless amateur sleuth Maggie could catch the killer, the next marks she got would be A for absent, B for buried, and D for very, very dead." The old coed-cum-slasher motif supposedly sells books, but Avon shouldn't need the "Sorority of Death" screaming leader to peddle this book, nor the back-cover references to fraternity men and "a real killer [who] had made terror a part of the curriculum." *Murder Is Academic* should move on its own merit, for it is a realistic look at murderous motives in academe as well as the murderers which academia attracts.

The varying narrative perspectives of *Murder Is Academic*—now social science graduate student Mary Beth, now the Freeway Slayer, now untenured professor Jane Freeman, and often the amateur detective, statistician graduate student Maggie Ryan—all speak to an intimate knowledge of academia. There is the free-floating paranoia of the assistant professor up for tenure, the generalized anxiety of the graduate student uncertain of an academic future, and the "I-could-care-less" attitude of the undergraduate interested more in socializing than in education. But, more than that, *Murder Is Academic* is written from a feminist perspective that includes the detrimental effects of sexual harassment, nonencouragement of women's abilities, and rape—both physical and mental. "An insightful look at women in academia" probably didn't tempt Avon as a back-cover eye-catcher, but that is what *Murder Is Academic* is, and it scores high for verisimilitude and suspense.

One reason that *Murder Is Academic* works derives from the university convention that academicians hew hard and fast to the truth—which, in reality, they do not, despite lip service paid to the contrary, as I can attest from my twelve years' apprenticeship in the groves of academe, where I have seen graduate students mutilated, female assistant professors slandered, and male instructors packed off when the ghosts of Ph.D.s they never earned came to haunt them. Ultimately, *Murder Is Academic* treats violation of truth in tandem with assault and rape—true violations of person, mind, and body—and presents a cogent case for the inviolability both of persons and truth. Data altered and subverted from the basis of, motivation for, and solution to one crime in this novel, and careful observation of method, provides the answer to the other multiple-murder puzzle that immobilizes most of the police force around the upstate university community that is part Ithaca and part Fredonia. Maggie Ryan, statistician, proves that one can alter, but, in the final analysis, not suppress data, and that is the murder-mystery writer's dictum. P. M. Carlson has spent time in academia, obviously, but has emerged with not only a healthy attitude toward female scholarship but also toward the necessary inviolability of truth.

—Susan L. Clark

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Accidental Crimes by John Hutton. London: The Bodley Head/Merrimack, 1983. New York: NAL, 1985. 254 pp. $3.50

If John Hutton's *Accidental Crimes* had appeared twenty years ago, it would have made a superb Hitchcockian cinematic exercise or even a belated diversion into *The Twilight Zone*. This latest addition to NAL/Signet's new Mystery Series is a masterfully executed study in ambiguity and provocatively displays John Hutton's talent for depicting the haunting side of coincidence.

Conrad Nield, a dedicated school evaluator for a select number of English counties, is targeted as the principal suspect in two savage murders with overwhelming sexual connotations. Hutton meticulously balances Nield's repressed character with the tenacious fiber of Sergeant Rosen, the detective assigned to the slayings. It is not so much a contrast as rather a conflict of moral viewpoints.

The mystery element is flawless throughout *Accidental Crimes*, which is all the more striking given its traditional leanings. Hutton's gift of narrative darkness, however, could earn him the reputation of the British Cornell Woolrich. The English settings are hypnotically pulsating, and Hutton's conception of Conrad Nield as a man trapped by his own failures is classic.

Kingsley Amis nominated Hutton's first novel, *29 Herriott Street*, as a candidate for the 1980 Arts Council National Book Awards.

—Andy East

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Monsieur Pamplemousse by Michael Bond. New York: Beaufort Books, 1985. 192 pp. $13.95

Marketing experts know that the book-buying public regularly ignores the maxim "You can't judge a book by its cover." Thus the peach colored dust jacket of *Monsieur Pamplemousse* declares it to be "a gastronomic mystery," the enthusiastic pre-publication blurbs are from the Diners Club magazine and *Good Housekeeping*, and author Michael Bond is proudly identified as the creator of Paddington Bear. The prospective book buyer knows that the only hardboiled entities in *Monsieur Pamplemousse* are eggs.

The "mystery" covers six days in the life of Aristade Pamplemousse, a restaurant reviewer for *Le Guide*, and his accomplice in culinary detection, the bloodhound Pommes Frites. Pamplemousse's assignment is to determine whether the provincial Hôtel-Restaurant La Langoustine should be recommended for *Le Guide's* ultimate mark of distinction, a third stock pot. Although Pamplemousse usually works incognito (as befits a former member of the Sûreté), his mission is known to the industrious proprietors of the establishment, Auguste and Sophie Douard. Consequently, when Pamplemousse orders the house specialty, Poulard de Bresse en Royale (the "Vessie Royale" is a pig's bladder), he hardly expects to find a human head substituted for the truffled chicken.

The cooked head turns out to be a plastic facsimile of another diner who is so agitated that he breaks crockery with his lobster-like steel hands. Pamplemousse consoles him with perverse one-upmanship, claiming—falsely—that he has wooden legs. News of Pample-

mousse's ambulatory misfortune arouses the sympathy and the imagination of Madame Douard. She surprises him in bed—by her presence and her methods. Her idea of erotic frisson involves sandpaper, which, naturally enough, results in Pamplemousse's sneaking into the women's lav in Sophie's negligee. The village constabulary is not amused.

Various attempts on the detecting gourmand's life are foiled by an improbable assortment of inanimate objects: an inflatable dog kennel, a lewd public fountain, and a battery-operated sexual surrogate. The inevitable revelation that Pamplemousse's legs are flesh and bone is interpreted locally as the miraculous intervention of a higher agency.

The sexual slapstick and physical humor are more visual than verbal; the plot is merely the occasion for stock comedy sketches about bossy wives, henpecked husbands, and the digestive apparatus of dogs. Laxatives are dispensed as aphrodisiacs. One can easily imagine the late Peter Sellers playing Pamplemousse as a fey Clouseau clone.

The promotional material for *Monsieur Pamplemousse* promises that this book will be the first of a series of culinary capers involving the hound and his master. It would appear that the marketing people are convinced that there are enough junk-food readers willing to consume a steady diet of french fries and pudding.

—Patrice Clark Koelsch

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The Smooth Face of Evil by Margaret Yorke. New York: Popular Library, 1985. 208 pp. $2.95

Actually, several characters hide their evil ambitions beneath attractive, pleasant appearances in *The Smooth Face of Evil,* originally published in the U.S. by St. Martin's in 1984. Here again, as she has in the past, Margaret Yorke addresses the plight of an elderly woman, widowed and lonely, beset by younger folk—a hard-hearted daughter-in-law, a wimpy son, and a young man and woman who are wicked to their cores. A few of Alice Armitage's new acquaintances and family members mean well but are ineffectual; a shocking number mean her ill, and eventually murder results. In the end, justice is served, but it is served with the grim (but satisfying) twist for which many readers admire Yorke's work.

Mrs. Alice Armitage has sold her home and invested the proceeds in the impressive, expensive country house her daughter-in-law finds necessary as a showplace for her decorating business. It doesn't much matter that the "granny flat" to which Alice is remanded at Harcombe House is miserably uncomfortable or that, living there, she is cut off from her old friends and exiled from any useful involvement with her son's family. It doesn't even matter that Giles Armitage is merely an appendage to his wife and a worry to his mother. What matters is Helen Armitage's success, such as it is. This is one menage wherein dissolution is the only solution.

The agents of change, like Helen Armitage, wear smooth faces of evil. They are Terry, a flashy young fellow who regularly preys upon older women and selects Alice for his next victim, and Sue, who views men not only as a source of sexual gratification but also as the surest means of making herself economically more comfortable. Terry and Sue both embrace the concept of upward mobility with a passion, and they don't care who gets hurt on the way up. Having learned that her current lover, Jonathan, is still tied to his estranged wife and children, Sue turns to Terry for enchantment and to Giles for gain. Nobody gains much; indeed, three people die, only one of them, perhaps, an "innocent" victim, but all are well and truly victims—if only of the fates they helped design for themselves.

Yorke often depicts the high cost of selfishness by contrasting the values of older characters with the lack of values (and the viciousness) of younger ones, but her plots are rarely predictable, and, happily, she avoids preaching in favor of brisk, intriguing action. *The Smooth Face of Evil* is no exception. Alice Armitage is an interesting character who must learn that she can function on her own, must accept the fact that her only child is a poor stick indeed, and must confront evil when it invades her life. Is it her fault that she gets a little confused along the way? Yorke apparently thinks it's not. According to the dynamics of this story, Alice eventually does learn her lesson, and, with the best intentions in the world, helps impose the hardest lesson of all—that life is almost *never* fair nor logical—upon one who surely needs to learn it and pays the ultimate price to do so. All it need cost Yorke's readers is a few hours of real enjoyment. Take heed!

—Jane S. Bakerman

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The Elvis Murders and **Murder at the Cheatin' Heart Motel** by Art Bourgeau. New York: Charter, 1985. $2.95

Never one for the "good-ol'-boy" school of mysteries, I have recently been converted, at least to the "good-ol'-boy" novels of Art Bourgeau.

These two books are actually the fourth and fifth in a series featuring Snake Kirlin and his buddy F. T. Zevich. In these novels, Snake is a writer and F.T. a photographer for a girlie magazine called *Ultra Suede.*

In *The Elvis Murders,* they are assigned to cover an Elvis Presley look-alike contest in Eldorado, Tennessee. They run across Radio Johnson, the ultimate Presley impersonator, who is like Elvis is every way—good and bad. When someone kills Ace Feldman, the man responsible for the contest, and shoots Radio Johnson, Snake and F.T. sign on as bodyguards in order to stay close to the story, and find themselves once again—as in past books—playing detective to find out who wants the fake Elvis dead.

In *Murder at the Cheatin' Heart Motel,* Snake's Aunt Effie Kirlin is brutally murdered and Snake inherits her only asset, the Cheatin' Heart Motel. Sheriff Caspar Denny tries to pin the murder on Snake and F.T. and uses torture to try and get them to confess. They survive the attempt, are released, and then set about trying to find Aunt Effie's killer or killers themselves, assisted by the sheriff's two beautiful sisters.

These novels are written with a wry humor that is very appealing. There is a tendency to get preachy in some sections, but Bourgeau's sense of humor and fast-moving style minimize any adverse effects it might have on the story or the pace.

I'm looking forward to more of Bourgeau's detective team of Snake and F.T., and to the author's very readable and enjoyable style.

—Bob Randisi

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Junk on the Hill by Jeremy Pikser. New York: Carroll & Graf, 1985. $13.95

Joe Posner is a transplanted New Yorker now plying his trade as a private eye in Bergentown, New Jersey. Posner is hired by sixteen-year-old Melody Gold to find an antique amethyst and amber box that she says was stolen from her. Her blonde good looks and a thousand dollars persuade Posner to take the job. Before he can get started on it, however, Melody turns up dead. Posner returns the money to her parents but is nevertheless drawn toward investigating her death, because the police are writing it off as a drug overdose.

His investigation takes him to Melody's school, something called the Human Learning Space, where he runs into an unusual

array of students and teachers, all of whom seem to be involved in one way or another with drugs—but does this mean that they are involved with murder? This is what Joe Posner sets out to discover after narrowly escaping being a dead innocent bystander in a mob rubout—a situation for which he is sure he was set up!

Jeremy Pikser knows New Jersey and Manhattan and manages to bring them both alive in this excellent debut. Posner is an appealing P.I., thirty, Jewish, at times inept, at times intuitive, guilty about having lewd thoughts concerning some of the teenaged girls he encounters. Joe Posner is basically a nice man who is probably in the wrong business, but he plods on determinedly until the almost-bitter end. He is a character worthy of being reprised.

The only drawback in the book—and it is a slight one—is the author's unfortunate habit of referring to his character as "Joe Posner" rather than simply calling him "Joe" or "Posner." He doesn't do it all the time, but enough times to be...distracting. (There is even a character in the book who calls the P.I. "Joposner.") Aside from this bit of nitpicking, this is a well-written debut, skillfully sprinkled with humor and cynicism and very much in the tradition of good P.I. fiction.

—Bob Randisi

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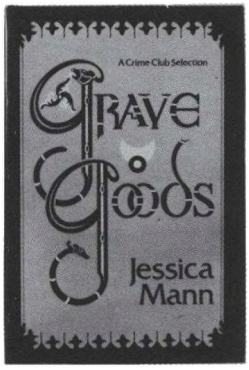
Grave Goods by Jessica Mann. New York: Doubleday, 1985. $12.95

Dr. Tamara Hoyland is a British archaeologist who does the occasional bit of secret service work for the government. In *Grave Goods*, her professional abilities and governmental assignment mingle, for the manuscript of a friend's women's history project is somehow bound up in the impending cultural exchange between England and East Germany, which is to be kicked off with an exhibition of Carolingian artifacts. The ninth-century chalice, crown, sword, and "True Cross" relic to be part of the much-heralded exhibit have been passed down in the von Horn family for generations, and Tamara comes gradually to suspect that these artifacts actually made their way to England in the mid-nineteenth century and that those in the East German display are fakes.



Tamara comes to this conclusion over the course of reading Margot Ellice's study of Englishwoman Artemis Bessemer, who died in 1863 after having married into the von Horn family. Mann interlaces Artemis's narrative into the ongoing action (a robbery/assault at Ellice's flat, a fire of suspicious origin, and multiple murders), and the events in Artemis's life form an eerie counterpoint to those in Tamara's. As Margot puts it: "You are a contemporary example of the type of woman I'm writing about, the woman who would have been at a man's mercy a hundred years ago. A graduate. High up in the Civil Service, self-supporting, and making your own decisions. If you'd been born when Artemis Bessemer was you'd have been a chattel as long as your father or husband was alive, and destitute without them . . . Now Artemis, you see, she's merely an example. I'm using her life story as an epitome." Mann writes perceptively about Artemis's powerlessness, particularly when the son of her morganic marriage with Joachim von Horn cannot inherit and when the young bride is consumed with loneliness, overwhelmed with the strictures of von Horn's Prussian household, and frightened by life-threatening accidents.

Artemis's twentieth-century parallel, Tamara, seems overtly better able to cope with the dangers in her more fast-paced life but in the final analysis finds herself as stymied by the attitudes of the men around her as did Artemis in her day. Just as Artemis cannot comprehend the Prussian attitude that placed military status above other values, so Tamara cannot fathom the outlooks of her superiors and adversaries, men who, on the one hand, will sacrifice truth for appearance and who, on the other hand, stop at nothing short of murder in order to acquire what they want. Mann, well known for several mystery novels and her *Deadlier Than the Male,* brings a welcome sense of thoughtfulness to this well-structured crime novel.

—Susan L. Clark

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The Cellar at No. 5 by Shelley Smith. Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1985. 160 pp. $3.95

There are few surprises but many pleasures in *The Cellar at No. 5* by Shelley Smith (Nancy Hermione Courlander Bodington). One of Academy Chicago's reprints of golden oldies, *Cellar* was originally published in 1954, and some fans may know it under its English title, *The Party at No. 5,* an inverted mystery well told.

It takes quite a long time to arrive at the murder around which the story centers. Smith sets up the basic conflict firmly and in some detail. Luna Rampage, an elderly widow living alone, becomes the object of concern to her efficient, well-meaning niece, Cissie Getaway (name imagery gets a little heavy-handed here). Mrs. Getaway rounds up a poor-but-honest clergyman's widow (a character who turns out to be not quite out of stock) to live with her aunt, keep her company—oversee her. Mrs. Roach, the companion, takes her obligations seriously in more ways than one. Trouble brews, thickens, boils over into murder.

There are some very nice touches. Smith contrasts the grumpy, reliable, fifty-year-old friendship between Lu Rampage and Henrietta Purvis, "her closest friend, her crony . . . no one else in the world . . . knew as much about them as they knew about each other," and the frustrated, intense, gushy friendship between Norah Roach and Eleanor Fielding, who have a great deal to learn about one another. In fact, possessiveness toward people and toward objects and money is a major

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Death Set To Music by Mark Hebden. New York: Walker, 1985. $2.95

Death Set To Music is one of those mysteries the title of which only tangentally refers to events in the plot. "Orchestrated murder," suggests Evariste Clovis Desiré Pel's assistant, as the record needle clicks on a disk of *Rigoletto* that was undoubtedly playing when Madame Chenandier was bludgeoned to death, but music really has very little to do with the crime. There are, however, suspects aplenty, including the victim's husband (a wine exporter), daughter, housekeeper, and neighbors, as well as good interaction between Pel and his assistant, Darcy, who is very much the ladies' man.

Pel is quite his usual self: dour, chain-smoking, and obsessively concerned with monitoring his bad moods. He obviously does not relish the task ahead of him: "Attacks with blunt instruments were messy and usually necessitated tiptoeing round the corpse like a cat on wet pavements, while everyone in the department, the whites of their eyes showing like a startled foal's at the horror, get themselves on edge over the amount of blood there was about. Attacks with heavy instruments were never neat and tidy and the blood went everywhere—on the walls, the furniture, the carpets, even on the ceiling. They were untidy affairs and, a tidy man at heart, Pel didn't like untidy murders." Grumbling throughout, Pel methodically begins to run alibis to ground, to double-check forensic work, and to trust his intuition, and *Death Set To Music* presents a fine puzzle for his tidy intellect.

—Susan L. Clark

theme. Often lonely, Mrs. Rampage lavishes her attention and affection upon the junk-shop "treasures" she buys, convinced that they are all antiques of great value—and perhaps some are; we can never be wholly sure. Denied a home, a family, any sort of security, Mrs. Roach yearns for comfort, pretty things, a safe income, and independence. No characters, least of all themselves, fully grasp the depths (or all the motivations) of either woman's desires.

Smith also does a good job of depicting Luna Rampage. She is not terribly likable, but she is very clearly and understandingly portrayed. She misses her only child, a daughter now living in the Far East; she's a hoarder; she's selfish; she's penurious; but she's also feisty, independent, capable, and determined to hang on to the life she has made for herself, lonely or not. Though Mrs. Roach's motivations and goals are quite clear, her characterization is neither so vivid nor so convincing as that of Mrs. Rampage. When Norah Roach's scheme begins to unfold, it is all too evident that Smith has not laid the groundwork for the shift in character carefully enough—and besides, Norah's machinations are not nearly so funny nor so inventive as Luna Rampage's. They are potentially deadly, though, and the double irony of the outcomes of the women's plots against one another is satisfying if expected.

Cellar treats some serious problems: the duty younger family members owe older ones; the ease with which urbanites who live alone can slip from sight before anyone is aware; society's willingness to accept stereotypical assessments of senior citizens; and the vulnerability of almost everyone to insidious suggestion and manipulation. Though she offers no solutions to these problems, Shelley Smith persuades us to consider them afresh in this entertaining, compelling story.

—Jane S. Bakerman

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The Master Key by Masako Togawa. Translated by Simon Grove. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1985. x + 198 pp. $13.95

It is 1951 in Japan, and a series of uncommon events takes place. A young man, disguised as a woman, is killed in a traffic accident. A four-year-old child, the son of a U.S. Army major and his Japanese wife, is kidnapped. A dead child is secretly buried in the basement of an apartment house exclusively for women.

Years later, a highway project makes it necessary for the apartment house to be moved, and the master key to every apartment in the building is discovered to be missing.

All this occurs in the first 23 pages of a brilliant novel from Japan, *The Master Key* by Masako Togawa. Untangling the relationships among these unusual events provides the reader with the solution to a fascinating puzzle.

Togawa, a former nightclub singer, writes in a highly literate style and is sometimes called the Japanese P. D. James. In this novel, she tells a strange, complex story about the residents of an all-female apartment house. The other major characters are two ladies who are employed in the building as desk clerks. There is no professional detective, although a resident named Yoneko Kimura, a retired schoolteacher, acts as an amateur sleuth. She attempts to solve the novel's central mystery, the case of the kidnapped Amerasian child. Important to the plot are a valuable Guarnerius violin and, of course, the master key. The presence of a religious cult that holds séances in the building adds to the eerie atmosphere.

Using multiple points of view, Togawa takes us into the minds of her characters, revealing their past lives and intimate secrets. Although basically a crime novel, with an ending full of surprises, the book is also a penetrating study of loneliness and eccentricity.

The Master Key is Togawa's first novel and the only one so far to appear in English. It was originally published in 1962 as *Oinaru Gen'ei* (literal translation: *The Vast Illusion*), then was expertly translated by Simon Grove and published in Great Britain in 1984. A recent Japanese mystery novel, *Murder at Mt. Fuji*—also by a female author, Shizuko Natsuki—received generally negative reviews in the United States. It will be interesting to see if *The Master Key* gets a better reception. Both novels were outstanding bestsellers in Japan.

Masako Togawa, whose only other work in English is a short story in *Ellery Queen's Japanese Golden Dozen* (1978), certainly deserves greater exposure to English-speaking readers. I hope that translations of her other novels are forthcoming.

—John. L. Apostolou

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Ten Years Beyond Baker Street by Cay Van Ash. New York: Harper & Row, 1984. 339 pp. $14.95

Subtitled "Sherlock Holmes matches wits with the diabolical Dr. Fu Manchu," this novel returns us to the nostalgic days of Sax Rohmer and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Highly faithful to its turn-of-the-century style, it reads as an entertaining literary work in its own right and need not be viewed as an imitation so much as a continuation of the genre.

Van Ash, now 67, is Rohmer's literary protégé, having first made Rohmer's acquaintance in the 1930s. In 1972, he published a biography of Fu Manchu's creator, entitled *Master of Villainy,* in collaboration with Rohmer's widow, Elizabeth.

Author of over fifty works of fiction on the exotic and the occult, Sax Rohmer's literary career spanned a half-century. It is interesting to note that, unlike Conan Doyle and perhaps a few other pioneering writers such as H. P. Lovecraft (of *Weird Tales* magazine fame), few literary "cults" sprang up in Rohmer's wake. Part of the reason for this can no doubt be explained by Rohmer's own literary longevity; whereas Conan Doyle passed away in 1930, and Lovecraft in 1937, Rohmer continued to pen his Fu Manchu stories (and other equally entertaining thrillers) until 1959.

Besides his prolific output, Rohmer had the reputation of being a scholar and took a highly original approach to his thrillers. As his biography pointed out, "...when Sax wrote [of] exotic curiosities...readers could take for gospel that these things existed." It is a fitting tribute to Rohmer's genius that more than two decades have passed before anyone has produced a successful facsimile of a serious Fu Manchu novel.

Ten Years Beyond Baker Street begins in the early months of 1914. Three years earlier, the Manchu dynasty has been overthrown and China proclaimed a Republic—all the more reason for Fu Manchu to seek his revenge against the British. Although aged and weak from surgery, the devious doctor is still healthy enough to make plenty of mischief, aided as always by his sinister Asiatic minions of the Si Fan organization: Burmese dacoits, Thugs, Tibetans, Koreans, and other fanatical assassins.

The story is told in the first person by Dr. Petrie, who in earlier Fu Manchu novels served as protagonist Nayland Smith's own Dr. Watson. Smith—the traditional nemesis of the evil doctor—does not make an appearance, having been taken captive, along with Dr. Petrie's lovely Egyptian fiancée Kâramaneh, by Fu Manchu. Dr. Petrie manages to enlist a retired and very reluctant Holmes to assist in a rescue attempt.

Most of the book's scenes take place in the coal-mining towns and along the misty coast of Wales. Throughout the adventure, Van Ash demonstrates an intimate familiarity with the writing styles of both Conan Doyle and Sax Rohmer. Punctuated by an occasional informative footnote, *Ten Years Beyond Baker Street* mixes exotic elements of the Near East and China. The book itself is both stylistically consistent with vintage "Sherlockiana" (the vigil in a darkened room is right out of "The Adventure of the Speckled Band") while being original and at times even humorous. And, like vintage Rohmer, Fu Manchu uses plenty of noxious creepy-crawlies, which, in Van Ash's own words, make mysteries of this type "not so much of a 'Whodunit' as a 'How'dhedoit'."

While the book remains remarkably faithful to the form throughout, this reviewer was pleased to note a few improvements. Van Ash is far more intimate with Asia than was his mentor, and as such he is able to fill us in on previously untold aspects of the famed Devil Doctor. For example, at long last we learn not only the probable derivation of Fu Manchu's unlikely name, but even the Chinese character by which it is supposedly written.

And as for Fu Manchu—who has been around making trouble for 72 years, since his literary debut in 1913—Van Ash has proved that there's still life in the old boy yet.

—Mark Schreiber

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The Crozier Pharoahs by Gladys Mitchell. London: Michael Joseph, 1985. $12.95

Over the more than fifty years of her literary existence, Dame Beatrice Lestrange Bradley has not changed tremendously much. To be sure, her smile is a bit more "reptilian" than it was, and she "cackles" more frequently, but she's still in infuriatingly good form in *The Crozier Pharoahs*. It's hard to *like* her—one wonders why Laura Gavin puts up with her and concludes that the pay must compensate—but it is not hard to appreciate how she routinely works her way through tangles of motives to determine the murderer's identity.

When the Rant sisters, who are breeding Pharoah hounds in the tiny village of Abbots Crozier, deposit a raving young man at Dame Beatrice's consulting room, the psychiatrist can only assume that they need help and not the man ("I am Ozymandias, king of kings"), who walks out before he can be examined: "I don't think I'll stay any longer. I wish you well." The Rant sisters are on edge because of a dog theft, a dead body in a nearby river, a prowler, and the unexplained behavior of their surly kennelmaid, and the disturbed young man showing up on their doorstep, attracted by the nameplate of their late physician father, proves to rattle them even further. Gladys Mitchell goes in for multiple murder, and practically no time goes by before another corpse turns up on the moor. As Dame Beatrice and Laura detect their way to the murderer's identity, Mitchell displays her workmanlike technique in matters of plotting, for which notables such as Edmund Crispin and Philip Larkin have praised her over her long career. Unlike Christie, who became in her dotage as embarrassing as her aging creations—Poirot and his tiresome vegetable marrows to name one—Mitchell has kept much of her edge, but not all of it, for *The Crozier Pharoahs* could use a good editing. It's talky in an annoying way, in a way that many of her earlier efforts are not, and slow getting started to boot. Still, the crime is plausible, the suspects fleshed out, and the motive believable. Finally, a kind of timelessness infuses Mitchell's last effort, published posthumously, so that the reader cannot tell if it is 1935 or 1985. It does not really matter, for Mitchell is not out to make any sort of social or moral statement. She is, rather, concerned with producing another work of formula detective fiction in the rural British tradition. *The Crozier Pharoahs* fits that bill.

—Susan L. Clark

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An Unkindness of Ravens by Ruth Rendell. New York: Pantheon, 1985. $15.95

Few suspense authors of today have the talent for successfully combining prosaic police work with deep psychological elements. Rendell is a master and, in *An Unkindness of Ravens*, leads the reader into precarious feminist areas, with shocks along the way. While the victim in this case is an immoral man, the solution to his murder is as complicated as the more than double life he led.

Chief Inspector Wexford, Rendell's literature-quoting police officer of Kingsmarkham, soon finds himself in deep water as the women in the victim's life emerge. Wexford is involved unofficially when a neighbor, Rodney Williams, seems to have disappeared, although Williams's wife Joy expresses little surprise, suspecting his involvement with another woman. Wexford almost finds himself in sympathy with the missing Williams after speaking with Joy, a rather slovenly television addict whose greatest pride is her son Kevin, away at university. Her teenaged daughter Sara is tolerated with ill grace. Williams, employed as a traveling salesman for Sevensmith Harding, a paint manufac-

turer, left his home on a Thursday evening and was expected to return on Sunday. Two weeks later, when Wexford questions her, Joy has made no attempt to contact her husband's employer, a fact which Wexford finds strange. He advises her to do so and dismisses the matter from his mind until two months later, when Williams's body is found in a shallow grave.

Officially this time, Wexford and his assistant Burden return to the depressing household and find alibis galore, despite obvious motive. A check with Williams's employer sheds the first light on the victim's duplicity, revealing him to have been a well-paid district manager rather than a traveling salesman of limited income. The next complication arises when a second Mrs. Williams, Wendy, surfaces. Her household, only a few miles from the first Williams home, differs completely, with a younger wife who dresses smartly, is house-proud and very protective of her only child Veronica, who is of an age with Sara and strongly resembles her. Wexford and Burden now find themselves faced with almost identical circumstances: Williams's supposed employment as traveling salesman for another manufacturer, a suspected liaison with a younger woman, motive, and alibis.

At this point in the investigation, the police are faced with a series of non-fatal stabbings of men by young girls. Women continue to plague the two inspectors as they learn of a feminist organization with radical overtones that exists in the local schools. The latter, while essential to the plot, becomes almost an overload and distracting to both the police and readers.

By this time, male readers are shaking their heads and crying "Foul," but Rendell and the inspectors press on through a veritable sorority of stonewallers. Wexford's often-frustrated investigation eventually leads to solutions of the murder and stabbings but not before we are all given a full dose of the complexities of female intelligence and emotions. Rendell often ventures far afield, and *An Unkindness of Ravens* is a chilling look at some aspects of female behavior which are perhaps examined too closely and at times unfairly.

—Miriam L. Clark

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Wicked, Loving Murder by Orania Papazoglou. New York: Doubleday, 1985. 182 pp. $12.95

The detective is Patience Campbell McKenna, an anorexic, guilt-ridden blonde who lives in an eleven-room apartment with no furniture and who has saddled herself with a boyfriend who is saving himself for marriage. She is a moderately successful writer who can't help getting involved in murders. Dead bodies seem to fall right on top of her.

Through contacts with various romance writers, McKenna gets herself involved with a sleazy magazine for writers which is publishing a special romance edition. Bodies start appearing, and one really does fall out of the closet on top of her. The description of her physical and emotional reaction to this is the best passage in the book. Drugs and embezzlement centering on a bizarre publishing family round out the plot. The end of the story is satisfying. The mystery is eventually solved with the appearance of a few spare dollar bills and a pair of dirty hands. Not only is the murderer caught, and just in the nick of time, but there is an epilogue to let us know just how everything turned out for everyone involved. If the accountant ends up keeping books for a firm that produces whoopie cushions, the reader deserves to know.

Wicked, Loving Murder probably qualifies as a bibliomystery. There is lots of information here about magazine publishing and a sympathetic view of what it is like to be a romance writer. Papazoglou says that romance writing takes hard work, talent, and intelligence but that "romance writers know the bogeyman in the closet is the fiction editor of the *New Yorker*." Along the way, she takes a few shots at shoddy businesses which give bad advice and misinformation to would-be writers. She speaks with conviction.

Only a few of the characters in this novel come off as real. The women generally are drawn with more vividness and understanding than are the men. In fact, the two main male characters in McKenna's life, the boyfriend and the police lieutenant, cry out for

more development. If they are so important to her, if they are going to keep reappearing in the McKenna books (and this is the second), they should have more personality. The one male who does seem real and even likable is, strangely, the dope addict and possible guilty party, Stephen Brookfield. The scene between him and McKenna in the men's room is very graphic; it is real and readable; it has natural dialogue, and the descriptions are evocative. This is how it feels for a woman to enter the men's room uninvited.

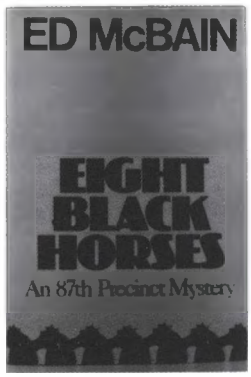
Wicked, Loving Murder is not compelling, not of consistent quality. It does, however, show that Orania Papazoglou has real promise as a writer. The clear depiction of certain characters and events leads the reader to hope for more and better.

—Cheryl Sebelius Nelson

* * * * *

Eight Black Horses by Ed McBain. New York: Arbor House, 1985. 250 pp. $15.95

The 37th adventure for the cops of the 87th Precinct matches them once again with their recurrent foe, the Deaf Man, who attempts this time, first, to rob a department store safe of its Christmas receipts, and second, to revenge himself in one spectacular act on all his enemies at the 87th Precinct. Compared with the recent novels in the series, *Eight Black Horses* falls below the level set by the trimly structured *Ghosts* (1980) and *Heat* (1981) and the suspenseful *Lightning* (1984) and entertains only about as well as the longer and more plodding *Ice* (1983). But the series on the whole is so strong that even a below-average outing by Ed McBain offers its pleasures. Here they may be found in the



puzzling crime with which the book begins—the nude body of a young woman discovered in a park—and the diligent police work that eventually supplies clues for finding her killer.

The improbabilities start to mount when the Deaf Man enters more prominently into the plot. Ed McBain has mentioned in *The Craft of Crime,* a book of interviews by John C. Carr, that one of the challenges in using a villain like the Deaf Man is to make the threat he poses formidable and yet not have the police stumble about too obviously and all but deliver themselves into his hands. The author does not entirely avoid this problem in *Eight Black Horses.* The Deaf Man's planned revenge requires that all the police be present at the same place, but the gullibility of the cops throughout the later scenes which lead to this climax strains belief and mixes awkwardly with their shrewder, more workmanlike procedure of tracing clues to find the culprit earlier in the book. Even worse, as the Deaf Man waits anxiously on the big night to see if all the cops have taken his bait, the tension of the finale is weakened by, of all things, an abrupt mini-lecture by the narrator on Alfred Hitchcock's theory for achieving suspense. This unsuspenseful telling rather than showing deflates the ending, although it does provide Ed McBain (Evan Hunter in private life, who scripted Hitchcock's *The Birds* [1963]) with a chance for a good, if misplaced, in-joke: "The Deaf Man admired [Hitchcock's work] greatly—except for *The Birds,* that silly exercise in science fiction." (One other in-joke deserves mention—the use of a photograph of Evan Hunter himself in one of a group of wanted circulars that is reproduced on p. 133.)

Although the dust-jacket description to the novel as the "sexiest" of the 87th Precinct mysteries, a fan of Ed McBain's realism and raciness would not have to be a prude to substitute "coarsest" for the publisher's euphemism. It is not only that the sex and vulgarities are more persistent and explicit here than in the other installments in the series but also that they are accompanied by at least one other gratuitous scene describing a child molester's on-the-job behavior as a department-store Santa. Perhaps the combined tone of these scenes accounts for the summer release of this Christmas-time novel.

—Glenn Hopp

* * * * *

Wavecrest by Bill Knox. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Chief Officer Webb Carrick of the Scottish Fishery Protection Service is given his own command, the patrol boat *Tern,* in Bill Knox's latest series book. Leaving behind blustery skipper James Shannon and the *Marlin,* which figured in the previous eleven Carricks, the character sails into readable but familiar territory.

On his first tour of the islands outside the fishing village of Dumbrach, a body is recovered, floating in an oil slick. In short time, a boat repair yard in the village burns, Carrick is shot at, and the mystery is under way. Carrick, his sidekick, Petty Officer "Clapper" Bell, and the local constabulary, including a fetching woman detective, are led to believe that a Viking treasure may be behind the crimes. But the motive turns out to be much more modern.

Knox is a solidly professional writer, juggling four mystery series printed under three pen-names in this country. Besides the Carricks, with their rugged Scottish setting, there are the Thane and Moss police procedurals, the Jonathan Gants (as by Noah Webster), and the Andrew Lairds (as by Michael Kirk).

The writer's sea scenes ring true; the Glasgow resident, in fact, served in Fleet Auxiliary small craft while in his teens.

The only shortcoming to the book comes if you have read the previous entries; Knox does not stretch the formula at all in this one. For anyone who has not read a Carrick novel, it is as good an introduction as any. The books are welcome departures from other procedurals due to the setting and often creative murders.

—Bernard A. Drew

* * * * *

Private Eyes 101 Knights: A Survey of American Detective Fiction 1922–1984 by Robert A. Baker and Michael T. Nietzel. New York: Popular Press, 1985.

Private Eyes 101 Knights is a welcome volume to the private eye fan, providing fascinating details about some 202 fictional series. Beginning with the obvious beginning—Hammett, Chandler, Macdonald, MacDonald, and Spillane—the writers look at ops by time period, from the older standard bearers (Pete Chambers, Michael Shayne) to the new crusaders (Matt Scudder, Mitch Tobin, Nameless, Amos Walker, Dave Brandstetter) to women, futuristic investigators, and parody private eyes.

The book places each private eye series in perspective, outlines the characters' fictional careers, and throws in details about the authors. It's nice to see some long-neglected favorites and many newcomers included here, from William Ard's 1950s hero Timothy Dane to Robert J. Randisi's 1980s Miles Jacoby.

There is at least one drastic information gap in the Michael Shayne entry. No mention is made that, in the late 1960s, Robert Terrall took over the writing of the series. Ryerson Johnson also ghosted some of the books. These are noted in Allen J. Hubin's *Crime Fiction 1749–1980.*

While the authors knew they could not include everyone, they have tried hard. They challenge the reader to come up with 101 more names. I can offer several from the 1950s, beginning with Carter Brown's (Allan G. Yates) Rick Holman and Mavis Seidlitz. Also another M. E. Chaber character, Kim Locke (written under the author's real name, Kendell Foster Crossen). And Jack Baynes's Morocco Jones; Spencer Dean's Gil Vine; Robert Dietrich's Steve Bentley; Joe Rayter's Johnny Powers; Nick Quarry's Jake Barrow; Dan J. Marlowe's Johnny Killain; Many Wellman's Jackson Yates; Wilson Tucker's Charles Horne; Lee Thayer's Peter Clancy; Robert O. Saber's Carl Good; Hugh Lawrence Nelson's Jim Dunn; A. A. Marcus's Pete Hunter; Floyd Mahannah's Riley Waddell; J. Lane Linklater's Silas Booth; Carlton Keith's Jeff Green; John B. Ethan's Victor Grant; James Duff's Johnny Phelan; Roland Daniel's Buddy Mustard and Michael Grant; and Frances Crane's Pat and Jean Abbott.

But to at last have the 202 detectives who are included together in one book is a considerable achievement.

—Bernard A. Drew

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PAPER CRIMES

By David Christie

Happy Are the Meek by Andrew M. Greeley, Warner Books, 1985, $3.95. **Jack & Susan in 1953** by Michael McDowell, Ballantine, 1985, $3.50.

One might well regard **Happy Are the Meek** with some initial misgiving, for, as its preface explains, Father Andrew Greeley intends it as the first in a series of mystery novels based on the Beatitudes, the lessons Jesus is said to have taught in His Sermon on the Mount. A reader can perhaps be excused for accepting religious instruction for the sake of a mystery story with all the enthusiasm of a child who eats spinach—"It's good for you!"—to be sure of getting dessert.

Yet the book's didacticism is not its problem. Although the detective is Monsignor John Blackwood Ryan, and although his investigation has a religious rather than a criminal basis, the religious lesson in *Happy Are the Meek* is sufficiently understated that one might almost be unaware, if one had not been forewarned in the preface, that "the principle characters of the story begin, however tentatively, to embrace the practice of...meekness only after they have experienced through one another a touch of God's passionate and implacable love." To accomplish his purpose, Greeley is obliged to explain what a Roman Catholic theologian means when he uses the term *meek*. Gradually, an impression rather than a definition emerges: The meek are far from submissive, but they "are in harmony with the processes of life," they surrender ego to a trust in God. It will surprise almost no one that Greeley is considerably more liberal than his church, and that his theology is therefore unorthodox. As a result, Greeley's explanation of meekness and the book's religious content generally are fascinating, even for a reader raised in another faith.

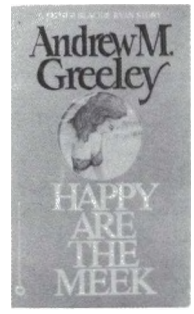
Instead, the problems with *Happy Are the Meek* lie in the mystery story. One feels like the child who has eaten the spinach and found it unexpectedly appetizing, only to discover that rice pudding is being served for dessert.

The story revolves around the death of Wolf Tone Quinlan, a furniture maker and self-made millionaire who is found impaled in a locked room in his home. He was barbarous in his lifetime—a crass and self-absorbed alcoholic and womanizer who beat his wife and children. Although he had been a Roman Catholic for most of his life, he spent his final years as a member of a devil-worship cult. He was therefore denied burial in consecrated ground. On the night of his death, not only his wife and two children, but also five guests, were present; all eight had reason to want him dead, and the leader of the devil-worship cult is suspect as well. But Ryan, known better as Blackie, is called in not so much to investigate whether the official verdict of accidental death is wrong, or to uncover a murderer, as because Quinlan's wife believes she has evidence that Quinlan's ghost is haunting her house, and she would like his remains reburied in consecrated ground to placate the ghost.

The structure of the novel is unusual. When it opens, Quinlan has already died, and during its course Blackie interviews each of the eight involved people to learn what he can. Consequently, the narrative voice shifts from one character to another, with each of the eight suspects serving as narrator for one or more chapters. Blackie, however, does the lion's share of narrating, providing background information, analysis of what the other characters have to say for themselves, and speculation on events they haven't covered.

This structure has its advantages, but its disadvantages outweigh them. On the plus side, one sees the principle characters not merely as they would present themselves, nor from the point of view of a single observer, but from many points of view. And so characterizations are richly complex and distinct, even though characters have too great a tendency to talk alike. In the characterizations of Quinlan, his wife Suzie Wade Quinlan, and their friend Lawrence Burke, Greeley presents a compelling argument for feminist values, an argument that is perhaps especially welcome in both mystery fiction and Roman Catholic theology.

But on the minus side, the reader is often challenged to solve the murder mystery. Although he is brought in to render a theological judgment, Blackie soon becomes interested in solving a potential killing and, by hinting repeatedly at having figured out things that he won't disclose, suggests that the reader should also have worked them out.



The reader who accepts the challenge, however, finds that all of his information comes at second hand; there is no first-hand information on which to base a judgment. Moreover, many mystery writers manipulate their readers (no matter whether they do it "fairly"), but, by having Blackie analyze what the other characters say as soon as they say it, Greeley manipulates a little too obviously; he literally tells you what you're supposed to think about each character. Before long, one despairs of solving anything, and, even though the writing is often suspenseful, by the time Greeley reveals the killer, one has just about lost interest in his/her identity.

Two more faults: The locked-room trick is too easily solved, and, because its solution reveals nothing about a killer's identity, the whole question of the locked room seems superfluous. And the supernatural element—the business about Quinlan's ghost—is so unconvincing that it comes across only as a clumsy device by which a clergyman might become involved in a murder mystery.

Although theological questions and characterizations are interesting enough to make *Happy Are the Meek* readable, the book is ultimately flawed and disappointing.

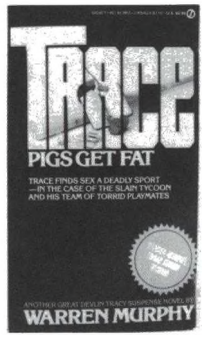
Michael McDowell's **Jack & Susan in 1953** is less a suspense novel than it is a comedy of manners that turns suspenseful near the end. By far the lion's share of the book takes place in Manhattan, where Jack Beaumont is an investment counselor with a Wall Street firm,

one principal client of which is Libby Mather, who in turn is voluptuous, opinionated, closed-minded, snobby, and richer than many countries; her father left her a lot of money that he had made in oleomargarine. Libby has it in mind to marry Jack, but Jack loves Susan Bright, a slim-but-attractive museum tour guide who once loved Jack but now considers him slightly less attractive than rotten fruit. When Jack and Libby happen upon Susan in a Greenwich Village restaurant as the book opens (Libby "looked around with ostentatious misgiving" at the restaurant, Greenwich Village, and everything between 34th and Wall Streets, for that matter), Susan is in the company of a mysterious Cuban man, Rodolfo Garcia-Cifuentes, who seems everything Jack is not. He is handsome where Jack is too tall and gangly, well-mannered where Jack is impetuous, exotic where Jack is very much a known commodity. As Libby presses harder to marry Jack, and as Susan seems more and more likely to marry Rodolfo, McDowell occupies himself with such pressing questions as precisely how many ways Jack will injure himself in his farcical attempts to thwart fate, how often Jack will resort to his favorite antidote to depression, a plate of hot dogs smothered in mayonnaise, and who will end up in possession of Woolf, a stray dog that wanders into the middle of things.

Suddenly, however, the scene shifts to Cuba and the tone shifts radically as well. Questions of marriage are settled, and the same four characters find themselves embroiled in the murder of Susan's Uncle James, the wealthy owner of a Cuban plantation. To complicate matters, Jack and Susan are accused by Cuban authorities of committing the murder, although the reader knows them to be innocent. Suddenly, McDowell is concerned with only one question, and it's pressing indeed: Will the murderer be found before the Cuban authorities find Jack and Susan?

The reader, however, concerns himself with another question as well. Not whether the Manhattan portion of the novel is entertaining. If one is not likely to laugh out loud very often, one is nevertheless likely to be consistently amused, for McDowell is adept at creating situations in which small misunderstandings somehow escalate to comically improbable proportions. When Jack, for instance, attempts to interrupt Rodolfo's proposal of marriage to Susan, he ends up somehow hanging from a window ledge, 23 stories above the ground. But even in such a life-or-death situation, one is encouraged more to see humor than danger. McDowell is fond of ending his chapters as cliffhangers, but the stakes are usually much smaller—Libby might demand of Jack that he ask her to marry him—the situation always tinged by absurdity, and the characters seem always to work things out.

Nor is the question whether the Cuban section of the novel is suspenseful. It remains somehow low-key, but it holds the reader's interests. Situations are still faintly absurd, and McDowell still enjoys his cliffhanger



endings, but now the stakes are automatically higher and the characters have to work a good deal harder to extricate themselves; one no longer assumes that they will do so automatically.

Rather, the question is how these two sections can co-exist in one book. By and large, the characters remain true in Cuba to the behavior they had established in Manhattan, which tends to smooth the transition from one section to the other. But Jack is an exception—he becomes purposeful where he had been bumbling—so that this smoothing influence is disrupted. And stylistic differences between the two sections are both great and sudden enough that one has the impression almost that McDowell set out to write one sort of book, got tired of it, and switched suddenly to another genre.

One last point in the book's favor: McDowell's evocation of the era about which he writes is convincing. Someone in Libby's station today might very well despise Greenwich Village, regarding it as overdeveloped and overrun by tourists. Libby despises it, however, for precisely what made it famous and, eventually, attractive to tourists: In 1953, when the book is set (as the title indicates), the area is underdeveloped, rents are cheap, and it is beginning to be populated by people who, in Libby's view, only imagine themselves to be artists, musicians, poets. This is but one example of how McDowell renders not only geographical and social features of the era, but also how those features shape the attitudes of his characters.

And so, despite the rather awkward stylistic lurch from comedy to suspense, *Jack & Susan in 1953* remains idiosyncratically entertaining.

In Brief: **Trace: Pigs Get Fat** by Warren Murphy, Signet, 1985, $2.95.

The latest in the Trace series finds Devlin Tracy, an Irish-Jewish insurance investigator, and Chico Mangini, a Japanese-Italian blackjack dealer and part-time prostitute, on vacation in San Francisco. They and Chico's mother are there to attend a convention of Japanese-Americans, where it turns out that everyone but Trace speaks Japanese, and the program comprises a seemingly endless assortment of lectures concerned with the Japanese and their role in a changing society, followed by screenings of movies that vary only in the number of samurai featured in their titles. Before very long at all, Trace elects to do two things (in one) that he is normally very loath to do: work, as a favor for Walter "Groucho" Marks, an officious and detested insurance-company vice-president. Consequently, he begins to search for a missing real-estate executive. As in the past, Trace's investigation is uninspired and self-indulgent but ultimately effective, his relationship with Chico is peculiar but endearing, and the book is both deceptively well plotted and funny. Very entertaining indeed. □

Minor Offenses

By Edward D. Hoch

The biggest short-story news of these past three months was the demise of *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine,* which ceased publication with its August 1985 issue, completing exactly 29 years of life. It had declined greatly in quality and circulation over the years, but it still publjshed more than a hundred new stories a year, and its passing leaves a large gap in the short-story scene. Under the editorial direction of the late Cylvia and Leo Margulies, it was always interesting reading, and, if it never attracted quite as many "name" authors as EQMM or AHMM, it still could boast of stories by Craig Rice, Hal Ellson, Kenneth Fearing, Robert Bloch, William Campbell Gault, Fletcher Flora, Octavus Roy Cohen, Theodore Sturgeon, Richard Deming, Veronica Parker Johns, Lawrence Treat, John Jakes, Harlan Ellison, Cornell Woolrich, John Creasey, Roy Vickers, Henry Kane, Helen McCloy, Julian Symons, and many others in its early years. The ghost-written Mike Shayne novelettes varied as greatly in quality as did the magazine itself, and continued to appear long after Brett Halliday's death, to the magazine's

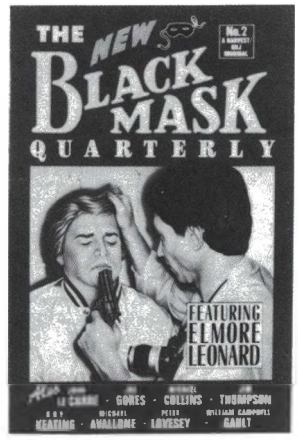
final issue. We're sorry to see it go, and we hope some publisher will preserve the best of its stories in a future anthology or two.

Even as MSMM was fading from the mystery scene, a new magazine began publication. After some initial distribution problems, the first issue of the *New Black Mask Quarterly* finally appeared, with two more issues promised for late 1985. Despite the "Quarterly" in its name, NBMQ is more of an anthology series than a true magazine. Sold through bookstores as a trade paperback at $7.95, it carries no date of issue. The stories in its 226 pages would fit comfortably into an issue of EQMM or AHMM with space left over. The first issue is a mixed bag, featuring an interesting interview with Robert B. Parker that's padded out somewhat with an eleven-page excerpt from an early Spenser novel, *Promised Land*. Perhaps this novel was chosen because it was used as the pilot for the new *Spenser: For Hire* television series, though the reprinted scene does not appear in the TV version.

Next in NBMQ comes the first of a four-part serialization of an unpublished novel by the late Jim Thompson. On the basis of the first episode, *The Ripoff* does not seem to be prime Thompson, but it's still good to have it in print, and I hope NBMQ is around for four issues. (I'm old enough to remember a 1953 magazine called *Verdict*, which offered a five-part serialization of Rex Stout's *Fer-de-Lance* and then died after four issues.)

The issue also contains a brief screen treatment by Raymond Chandler, previously published in a limited edition, a reprint by Nelson Algren, a non-criminous anecdote by George V. Higgins, and new stories by George Sims, Arthur Lyons, Loren D. Estleman, and William F. Nolan. In all, a promising rather than a memorable beginning—but I'll be watching for the second issue.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine has instituted a reader award for the best EQMM story of the year. The results will be known by the time you read this, based upon voting with a ballot printed in the Mid-December issue. Reviewing the first twelve issues of the EQMM year, I'd be tempted to predict that some of the top vote-getters might be Reginald Hill's "The Worst Crime Known to Man" (April), Clark Howard's "Animals" (June), Ruth Rendell's "The Convolvulus Clock" (August), or Stanley Ellin's "Unacceptable Procedures" (December). However,



a strong story in the year's final issue (Mid-December) will be freshest in the readers' minds and could walk off with the award. I hope to report on the result of the voting in my next column.

Speaking of Ellin's story in the December EQMM, it's one to seek out even if you're not a regular reader of the magazine. A completely realistic, even mundane, tale of a New England town meeting of the Board of Selectmen, the story manages to convey perfectly a feeling of distant horror with just a touch of fantasy. I can think of no writer, except possibly the late Shirley Jackson, who could have done it as well.

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine has been taking advantage of the recent television revival of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. The December issue reprinted a memorable tale by Henry Slesar which was televised in the early 1960s. Coincidentally, two new books make excellent companions for watching the revived series. Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and Martin Harry Greenberg have edited *Hitchcock in Prime Time* (Avon, $9.95), a fine anthology of twenty stories dramatized on the original series. And John McCarty and Brian Kelleher provide a complete guide to the shows in *Alred Hitchcock Presents* (St. Martin's Press, $12.95). Both books are trade paperbacks.

There's little space remaining for the other good anthologies of the past three months, but I do want to mention *Ellery Queen's Prime Crimes 3*, edited by Eleanor Sullivan (Davis, $3.50), the only anthology of all-new mysteries to originate in America during 1985. Bill Pronzini and Marcia Muller have edited *The Deadly Arts* (Arbor House, $15.95), containing 23 mystery and suspense stories about both fine arts and the popular arts.

Two final notes for espionage fans: The November 1985 issue of *Espionage* is one of the best, containing a lengthy interview with author James Atlee Phillips by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., a reprint of a radio play by John Dickson Carr, the start of a two-part story by Josh Pachter, and several other new stories and features. Worth seeking out in bookstores is a new hardcover anthology *13 Short Espionage Novels* edited by Bill Pronzini and Martin H. Greenberg (Bonanza, $7.95), containing Ian Fleming's "Octopussy," Leslie Charteris's "The Sizzling Saboteur," and eleven others. □

DIAL N FOR NONSENSE

By Louis Phillips

In what well-known twentieth-century novel (made into a motion picture in the 1980s) does the following passage occur:

"Yes, Rafi's the great man," said Hamidullah, rubbing it in. "Rafi is the Sherlock Holmes of Chandrapore. Speak up, Rafi."

ANSWER: *A Passage To India* by E. M. Forster

* * * * *

If you do not wish to know the ending to *Witness for the Prosecution*, read no further. I warn you. I'm going to reveal the ending. Well, not me alone. On reading Robert Lewis's autobiography, *Slings and Arrows: Theater in My Life* (Stein and Day, 1984), I was astonished to see how easily Mr. Lewis (who directed the play on Broadway) gave away the ending:

"The part of the young man who, in the startling finale of the play, turns out to have been the murderer, proved the toughest to fill. It was essential that no one in the audience believe he could have hit that nice old lady on the head with a 'cosh' and killed her" (p. 236).

That paragraph should do in future productions for Lewis's readers. At the end of his discussion of the play's rehearsals and opening, he adds: "Starting with the suicide of one of the cast members and the death of the wardrobe mistress, over half a dozen of the actors died during the run of the play or shortly thereafter. It was material for an Agatha Christie mystery." Any takers?

Doug Fetherling, in his biography of Ben Hecht, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht,* tells us that Hecht wrote a mystery novel, *The Florentine Dagger,* in 36 hours:

"As Hecht tells the story, he made a $2,500 bet with Charles MacArthur's millionaire brother Alfred that in two days he could write a book that would be critically praised and sell more than twenty thousand copies. The dictation took thirty-six hours, he claims, and he won the wager."

* * * * *

Do you know the name of the first magazine for the general mystery reader? If you answered *The Armchair Detective,* you are loyal but, alas, mistaken. In *Mystery Fanfare: A Composite Annotated Index to Mystery and Related Fanzines (1963-1981),* edited by Michael Cook and published by Bowling Green State University in 1983, Cook states that: "Commencing with a prospectus issue in August 1967, this special issue (of *The Mystery Lovers/Readers Newsletter*) predated even *The Armchair Detective* as the first mystery fan-oriented magazine; the first twelve issues were published as *The Mystery Lovers Newsletter,* changing with the October 1969 issue to *The Mystery Readers Newsletter.*"

* * * * *

Would it be permissible for a critic of mystery/detective fiction to say that Mike Hammer is as tough as nails?

* * * * *

In Princess Anne County, Virginia, there is a gravestone marker that reads:

Here lies the body of Henry Moore
Who got in the way of a .44.

* * * * *

"Mrs. Griggs, the senior bedder of A Staircase. . ."

—*Darkness at Pemberly*
by T. H. White

Is a senior bedder
A better bedder
Than a junior bedder?
If the senior bedder
Bought her
A better bed,
Would a bitter bedder
Bet a better bedder
To make a better bed?

* * * * *

The 1944 edition of *Current Biography* contained an essay on Erle Stanly Gardner in which it was pointed out that Gardner had "in his possession correspondence from a prosecuting attorney in Phoenix, Arizona, which is a revealing sidelight on Gardner, the author as a lawyer. The Arizona attorney, faced with a seemingly insurmountable legal technicality in prosecuting a man for murder, had decided to dismiss the case. Then the evening before the trial he found in a Gardner story that Perry Mason had met and circumvented the same legal difficulty. The Arizona man was able to apply the Mason techniques in court the next day and to secure what had seemed to be an impossible conviction."

* * * * *

In 1941, Charles Woessner published a book of anecdotes called *In Other Words.* The stories in the collection are all supposed to be true and were, most likely, culled from newspaper articles. Anecdote 297 goes:

"Twins are not the only ones who look alike. In this instance a no. 1 desperado of society was at large. Another man almost identical in appearance was arrested several times. In fact it became necessary for him to present himself to the local police each time he entered a different city to stay for any length of time. Regardless of his willingness to cooperate, he was arrested 17 times, forced to spend 33 days behind the bars, and fingerprinted almost 75 times."

Does any reader know the source for this story?

* * * * *

Speaking of true detective stories, it is good to know that Mark Twain was drawn to the world of mystery and sleuthing. In a footnote to *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (a work which is held to be much inferior to the original *Tom Sawyer*), he tells his readers: "Strange as the incidents of this story are, they are not inventions, but facts—even to the public confession of the accused. I take them from an old-time Swedish criminal trial, change the actors, and transfer the scenes to America. I have added some details, but only a couple of them are important ones."

* * * * *

"Skullduggery" must rank as one of the most colorful words in the vocabulary of mystery and detection. The *American Heritage Dictionary* claims that the origin of the term is unknown, but Laurence Urdang and Nancy La Riche, in their *Picturesque Expressions: A Thematic Dictionary* (Gale, 1980), claim that the word is derived from the Scottish word *skulduddery,* a term meaning "illicit sexual intercourse; obscenity."

* * * * *

If you have ever wondered how to say *The Armchair Detective* in the international language known as Esperanto, you need look no further. It is *La Braksego Detektivo.* Mystery is *Mistero.* Clue is *Signo.* The noun "murder" is *Mortigo.* I wonder if there are any mysteries that have been translated into Esperanto?

* * * * *

"If there's one thing I can't stand, it's a nice *healthy* murder." —John Dickson Carr

* * * * *

Great Moments in Crime Detection

POSSE FOOLED;
MAN HUNTS SELF

Constance, Kentucky. October 25, 1934 (AP). A posse that combed hill and hollow looking for Arthur Halstead charged with burglary and housebreaking, looked for some little time before they found their man. Then they discovered why he had been so elusive.

He had joined the posse to search for himself.

* * * * *

Great Moments in Crime

Manilla, Philippines. May 22, 1950. Three armed men held up a warehouse last night. Their loot was 576,000 buttons—probably the largest button robbery in the history of the world. The buttons, valued at $4,000, had been purchased for delivery to the Philippine Army.

* * * * *

Great Moments in the History of Crime

THEFT GIVES
POLICE HEADACHES

Chacago. August 16, 1932. Detectives were getting headaches today puzzling over Chicago's great aspirin mystery. Three tons of the tablets were stolen from a warehouse. The watchman is also missing.

Great Moments in the History of Crime #2

"THE WATCHDOG"
STOLEN FROM EXHIBIT

Chicago. August 16, 1932. Detectives were getting headaches today puzzling over Chicago's great aspirin mystery. Three tons of the tablets were stolen from a warehouse. The watchman is also mission.

* * * * *

In September 1985, the American Stamp Dealers' Association held its Stamp Festival 85 in the exhibition rotunda of New York City's Madison Square Garden. For me, the highlight of the Festival was the national and international award-winning exhibit called Philately and Murder. Assembled by Charles M. Fitz, the exhibit displayed postage stamps depicting Murder Victims and Murderers, Methods of Murders, Motives for Murder, and Mysteries in Murder. The stamps and information collected by Mr. Fitz were arranged in the following categories:

I. Methods of murder
   A. Assassination by treachery
   B. Coup d'etat
   C. Political martyrdom
   D. Political-religious murders
   E. Religious martyrdom
   F. Racial martyrdom
   G. Regicide

II. Murder by suicide (self-murder)

III. Murder by genocide
   A. Perpetrators
   B. Victims

IV. Motives for murder
   A. Love triangle
   B. Political aims
   C. Greed-avarice
   D. Espionage

V. Mysteries in murder
   A. Murderer unknown
   B. Corpus delecti – undiscovered
   C. Suspected homicide – unproved

Perhaps Fitz's topical collection will inspire detective and mystery fans to follow in his footsteps and give close scrutiny to the collection of postage stamps.

* * * * *

The great English actor Robert Speaight, in his autobiography *The Property Basket*, recounts the following anecdote:

"Only a few years ago I was one of a rather large dinner-party in Minneapolis. We sat at different tables, and when the meal was over a tall and rather melancholy figure came over to me from the other side of the room. He was a very distinguished physicist who had won the Nobel Prize for the discovery of Cortisone. 'Do you see anything odd in my appearance?' he asked. He seemed to be impeccably and conventionally dressed, and I replied that I could see nothing odd about him at all. 'My tie,' he persisted. I looked closer and discerned what might have been the emblems of a hat and a pipe woven into the silk. 'The Sherlock Holmes Society,' he went on. 'I have made all my important scientific discoveries by applying the methods of Holmes.' "

* * * * *

If you ever journey to the Nayland Churchyard in Suffolk, England, keep your eyes peeled for the gravestone of the notorious Essex Highwayman, Ned Alston. His epitaph reads:

Here sleepeth in dust,
NED ALSTON,
The notorious Essex Highwayman,
Ob. Anno Dom. 1760
Etat 40

My friends, here I am – Death at last has prevail'd.
And for once all my projects are baffled,
'Tis a blessing to know, tho', when once a man's nail'd,
He has no further dread of the scaffold.

My life was cut short by a shot thro' the head,
On his Majesty's highway at Dalston –
So as now "Number One" 's numbered one of the dead,
All's one if he's *Alston* or *All-stone*. □

THE PAPERBACK REVOLUTION

By Charles Shibuk

LAWRENCE BLOCK

The nineteen short stories (nine from AHMM, two from EQMM, one from MSMM) that appear in *Like a Lamb to Slaughter* (1984) (Jove) fully attest to this popular author's great versatility, but, alas, the endings of a sizable proportion do not fully satisfy this demanding reader.

(NOTE: Series characters Chip Harrison and Matt Scudder each appear in one story; the enigmatic Ehrengraf in two.)

JANE DENTINGER

Plot, characterization, pace, wit, and hidden villain are all satisfactory in the entertaining *First Hit of the Season* (1984) (Dell), but this second novel really shines in its depiction (by a professional actress) of the glittering New York theatrical scene, as a prominent and acerbic drama critic mistakes strychnine for cocaine and writes his own death notice.

SIMON NASH

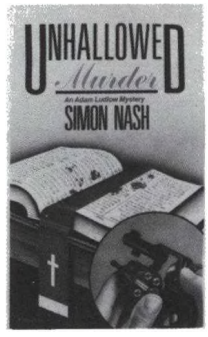
Perennial continues to reprint the problems in deduction of Adam Ludlow and Inspector Herbert Montero.

Nash's debut novel *Dead of a Counterplot* (1962) concerns the campus murder of a female student whose body is found in the room of Ludlow's most promising male student.

The murder of an aged vicar (with a passion for collecting rare books) in his London church involves the usual parish rivalries, and a group of Satanists, in *Unhallowed Murder* (1966). This is Nash's last novel, and it stands up to the best of his work. Barzun and Taylor have called it "a first rate affair."

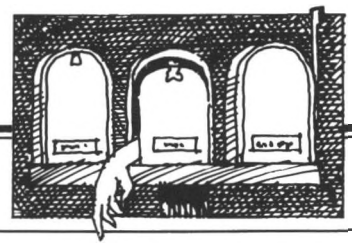
FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR. and MARTIN HARRY GREENBERG (editors)

The trade paperback *Hitchcock in Prime Time* (Avon, 1985) consists of twenty short stories (mostly from AHMM and EQMM) that have been adapted for the various Hitchcock TV series. An illuminating introduction by Harry Slesar, notes by many of the authors (and Mike Nevins), and production data are also presented. Many of the stories are familiar, but qualities such as "suspense, irony and a droll twist at the end" are high. Authors include Ellin, Woolrich, Queen, Brown, Bradbury, Hoch, Ritchie,



John D. MacDonald, and Clark Howard. Thomas Burke's masterpiece "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole" – one of the really great short stories – can also be found here. □

LETTERS



From Walter and Jean Shine:

The Penzler series on "Collecting Mystery Fiction" continues to be outstanding. The details, the analyses, and the photographs are absolutely first-rate. The discussion of Robert Parker's celebrity and his generosity in making himself available to the public [TAD 18:3] is particularly welcome in view of the persistent backbiting to which Parker has been subjected.

The illustrations accompanying the Greeley article on the Ellis Peters books about the medieval detective were fascinating. Such devotion to detail. Splendid! (They were marred only slightly by the failure of the photographer to remove the unsightly price stickers from the books shown on p. 243.)

One nit to pick: you have a production assistant who prepares the boxed quotations, in boldface type, extracted from the text. See pp. 242 and 244. In both cases, that person mistakenly shows the possessive of Ellis Peters as "Peters'," although Greeley correctly writes it as "Peters's." Apparently the same hand was at work on p. 253, when it wrote "Warren Hawes' concerts." Not so elsewhere when the name Grimes (pp. 262–66) and Burt Reynolds (p. 302) are correctly shown in the singular possessive form.

A bibliographic detail you may be interested in: Penzler refers several times to a printing designation as follows:

"The copyright page employs the series of numbers to indicate the printing history; copies of the first printing begin with the number 1 and run up to 10."

In preparing a history of the 900+ printings of the John D. MacDonald books (soon to appear), we wrote publishers, librarians, collectors, and others to determine how that system developed and what it was called. No one knew, although many use the system, until we learned from the *printer* of the Fawcett books that the system, for printers' convenience, began in the 1940s (although not used in the JDM books until the 1970s) and is known in the trade as the *printing key*. (If you publish this letter, this will be the *first* mention of this name in print. TAD scoops the world!)

✓ The boxed quotations—known as "callouts" in the trade—are selected to be a part of the magazine's graphic design and are prepared by the Art Director, there being, sadly, no production assistants in the TAD hierarchy. Believe it or not, though, the possessive form used was deliberately chosen by yours truly, and is in fact part of TAD's considered and consistent style for headlines, callouts, and most advertising copy. While dropping the final "s" would never be considered proper in the body of the article, the style is tolerated in certain circles and is more pleasing in such "display" contexts. The form is employed solely for its aesthetic, and not for its literary, impact.

The improper use of "Hawes'" was strictly an editorial oversight, and no such excuse for it can be made.

It is, however, gratifying that a reader now and then notices the editorial hand at work. A great deal of thought and effort goes into keeping TAD's literary tone a high one, a fact which becomes apparent only when the process falters. They also serve who sit and pick nits.

—Jack Tracy

* * * * *

From Doug Greene:

Baker and Nietzel's "The Science Fiction Detective Story" (TAD 18:2) was very interesting. I am especially fond of Asimov's Wendell Urth and Garrett's Lord Darcy (*not* D'Arcy) tales, though I wouldn't call the latter an "SF detective." Incidentally, one previously uncollected Darcy case appears in *The Best of Randall Garrett* (Pocket Books, 1982), in which Darcy meets his Forensic Sorcerer Sean O'Lochlainn. This collection also contains "A Little Intelligence," an excellent science-fictional detective story by Garrett and Robert Silverberg. TADians may be interested that Nolan's *Space for Hire* was reprinted in Spring 1985 by International Polygonics as a trade paperback. IPL has also published a second Space extravaganza, *Look Out for Space*, which is of special interest for its references to TADD (The Automated Deductive Detective) and its founder, Hu Albin. Hu has been renting "Robo" detectives, but something has gone wrong: "Philo Vance began exposing himself again. . . . Father Brown turned atheist. Bulldog Drummond started barking. Boston Blackie wet his bed. Charlie Chan became a nudist and Travis McGee got waterlogged when his boat sprang a leak. . . . Holmes . . . spends all his time chasing Dr. Watson. Says he wants just 'one little kiss.' Disgusting!"

I have some personal interest in mentioning IPL's books, as I am now "Series Consultant" to that publisher's John Dickson Carr reprints, contributing introductions to books by Carr and others. *The Sleeping Sphinx, Death Turns the Tables,* and *Till Death Do Us Part* appeared in Spring 1985. *Hag's Nook* and *The Burning Court* were scheduled for October, and *The Three Coffins* and *He Who Whispers* for 1986. Perhaps most exciting is the IPL publication, due the end of 1985, of the first new Lillian de la Torre book in about 25 years, *The Return of Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector.* IPL has already reprinted the first two Dr. Sam collections, and a fourth volume, *The Exploits of Dr. Sam: Johnson,* will be published this year. Among other IPL originals is the first collection of S. S. Rafferty's breezy Chick Kelly tales, *Die Laughing and Other Murderous Schtick,* as well as the Hammett comic strip, *Secret Agent X-9.*

IPL has also begun reprinting some Golden Age classics. Hake Talbot's extraordinary *Rim of the Pit* is due in October 1985, as is Darwin Teilhet's little-known masterpiece of detection in Nazi Germany, *The Talking Sparrow Murders.* If arrangements can be made, this year will see new editions of Queen's *Tragedy of X,* Boucher's *Nine Times Nine,* Palmer's *Penguin Pool Murder,* and Rawson's *Death from a Top Hat.* IPL books seem to be well distributed in the mystery specialist shops and the independent bookstores. Fans who have only the chain stores to depend on might want to write directly to the publisher, International Polygonics, Ltd., Madison Square P.O. Box 1563, New York, NY 10159.

Jon Breen's "What About Murder?" has already become one of your best columns. It's rare to find a critic who is both witty and well informed.

* * * * *

From R. E. Briney:

In case no one has answered Larry Gianakos's question about Harold Lawlor [TAD 18:3], Lawlor was an American who started writing short stories in 1942, after deafness put a stop to his hopes of becoming a concert pianist. His first story was "The Eternal Princess" in the April 1942 issue of the pulp magazine *Fantastic Adventures.* The same issue contained a biographical sketch and photo. After four more stories in *Fantastic Adventures,* Lawlor switched to *Weird Tales,* where 29 stories appeared from 1943 through 1953. (One story in a 1958 issue of the British *Phantom* magazine was a reprint.) He was a careful craftsman, and his stories do not deserve their neglect by anthologists. His only mention in the standard reference works seems to be the brief paragraph in Mike Ashley's *Who's Who in Horror and Fantasy Fiction* (Taplinger, 1978).

Some further (much delayed) comments on the Winter TAD: one of the best things in a very entertaining issue was Jon Breen's "What About Murder?" I look forward to many more installments, and especially to his comments on Walter Albert's *Detective and Mystery Fiction: An International Bibliography of Secondary Sources* (Brownstone Books, 1985). Many past and present TAD contributors were involved in the compilation of this massive work. Everyone should rush out and buy a copy, or at least persuade his library to acquire it. Incidentally, neither Jon's nor Walter's work qualifies as the "Queen's Quorum of nonfiction" mentioned by Frank McSherry and Joe Christopher. A nonfiction QQ would be selective rather than

comprehensive, listing the compiler's choices of the best or most important works in the field. I don't know of anything published to date that takes this approach.

I'm afraid that I stopped reading the Jim Thompson article at the end of the first paragraph when the author joined the long list of people who have misused the word "gunsel." Or perhaps that's only an excuse: I have to be in just the right mood to read Thompson's books or commentary on them.

William F. Nolan's checklist on Charles Beaumont is most welcome. It is good to be reminded of the extent and quality of his work. The information on pseudonymous and ghost-written work is especially interesting. (One small error on page 45—the easiest kind to make and the hardest to see afterward: the book *The Circus of Dr. Lao* was the work of Charles G. Finney, not Jack Finney.)

Enjoyed John Croydon's reminiscences of filming Edgar Wallace. I was especially interested in seeing the names of D. A. Clarke-Smith and S. J. Warmington, which I have encountered several times in connection with stage and radio adaptations of Sax Rohmer's works.

I guess the qualifying phrase "on the whole" gets the authors of "The Science Fiction Detective Story" [TAD 18:2] off the hook in their assertion that "Mystery fans... tend not to read science fiction, and *vice versa*." There is, in fact, a considerable overlap in readership between the two genres. The annual Bouchercon mystery convention and the journal *The JDM Bibliophile* were both founded by science-fiction fans. Among others, TAD contributors Frank McSherry has written extensively on mystery/fantasy crossovers (including sf). Regarding the bibliography on p. 150: can the authors prove that there is a book called *Miro Hetzel* by Jack Vance? Hetzel is the protagonist of Vance's *Galactic Effectuator* (Underwood/Miller, 1980), but I have never seen any other reference to a second book about him. An earlier private eye of Vance's, Magnus Ridolph, might also have been cited.

* * * * *

From Judith Wanhala:

Perhaps you may be interested to know why I am not going to renew my subscription to TAD. I received my original subscription as a gift last Christmas and looked forward to a year of interesting reading about new and familiar mystery writers. Each issue as it arrived deepened my disappointment. The source for my disappointment may be summarized in a simple question:

Where are the women?

A quick glance over the titles of the articles published in the past year will document the assertion that almost all of the articles are about male mystery writers written by male article writers. Given the prominent role of women in the field of mystery fiction, I don't understand why you have not found a better balance in your selection of articles.

I'm not sure, however, that your current editors have the capacity to rise above their male chauvinism to respond in a fair way to the women mystery writers, especially the feminist mystery writers. Allen Hubin, for example, dismisses Amanda Cross with a comment about the distracting polemicism of *Sweet Death, Kind Death*. He's so inattentive to this "tract on leftward feminism" that he can't even get the title right, calling it *Sweet Death, and Kind*.

I assume that you will dismiss these comments as the rantings of another one of those "leftward" feminists. I am personally delighted that my subscription has ended and that I don't have to waste my time in disappointment, frustration, and anger.

* * * * *

From Ed Hoch:

I really must call your attention to a typographical error which appears in my "Minor Offenses" column in TAD 18:3.

It's on p. 328, column 3, line 16. It reads "a few unfortunate *types*," but my typescript reads "a few unfortunate *typos*."

Yes, you typoed the word *typo*. What more can I say?

It was a good issue anyway. I especially liked Lucy's interview with Mary Higgins Clark.

* * * * *

From Marvin P. Epstein:

I have been planning to write an article about true methods of divination, but could not figure out where to send it—until now. The letter you published which uses biorhythm to determine the birth year of Lillian Hellman proves to me that *The Armchair Detective*—not *The National Enquirer*—is the appropriate place.

Let all followers of divination, biorhythm, astrology, Tarot, etc. be informed that the only valid ways to foretell and divine are gematria and haruspication.

Gematria, an ancient form of numerology, can easily fix the birth year of Lillian Hellman, given that the year in question is between 1902 and 1907, inclusive. All one need do is add together the digits of numbers, then add the digits of the answers, continuing until a single digit is obtained. Thus, adding the digits of 1902 gives 12, and 12 when added gives 3. Similarly, 1903 leads to 4, 1904 to 5, and so on, until 1907 leads to 8.

For names, one merely substitutes the number in the alphabet for each letter (a is 1, b is 2, etc.) and then proceeds as above. Thus, Lillian becomes 12, 9, 12, 12, 9, 1, 14, which sums to 69, which sums to 15, which sums to 6; Hellman becomes 8, 5, 12, 12, 13, 1, 14, which sums to 65, which sums to 11, which sums to 2. Finally, the 6 from Lillian and the 2 from Hellman sum to 8, the number for 1907, which must have been the year of her birth.

For a second opinion, we can consider only those letters in each name which do not appear in the other names. Thus, in Lillian, we would consider only ii, which becomes 9, 9, which sums to 18, which sums to 9. In Hellman, we consider only Hem, which becomes 8, 5, 13, which sums to 26, which sums to 8. The 9 from Lillian and 8 from Hellman sum to 17, which again sums to 8, the number for 1907! This proof is irrefutable.

Unlike your previous correspondent, however, I am not sending these calculations to Bill Nolan.

Actually, this has not been true gematria, just modern numerology. If I had used the full powers of the ancient system, I could have proved my thesis even *more* irrefutably.

I will not discuss haruspication here, as I intend to publish a complete monograph on the subject as soon as Watson returns from Tibet, where he is looking for me.

* * * * *

From Robert J. Randisi:

Just a few comments on the things I liked about TAD 18:3...

"The Uneasy Chair": couldn't agree more with this topical installment of the always interesting editorial. Ross Thomas certainly deserves the acclaim now accorded Elmore Leonard and Robert Parker. As a man who "just" has questions, Michael Seidman always proposes interesting—and pointed—ones.

Found the O'Brien piece... interesting.

Enjoyed the regular columns and the unusually bountiful letters page.

Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine has finally bitten the dust, after the longest lingering illness in history. That means we've lost Shayne, The Saint, and possibly *Espionage* all in one year. To replace them, we have a slickly packaged mag that needs work on the contents (*New Black Mask Quarterly*) and a not-so-slickly packaged magazine that makes up for its appearance in heart (*Hardboiled*).

PWA and St. Martin's Press have instituted a "First" Private Eye Novel Contest. Anyone interested may write to PWA, P.O. Box 1930, Longwood, Florida 32779 for further information.

I was glad to read that, although Jon Breen cannot bring himself to like the work of the Mick, he does have high regard for the work of Pronzini, Estleman, and Max Collins, as have I.

Suggested reading for anyone who's interested: *Doubting Thomas* by Robert Reeves, certainly to be in the running for Best First Novel Edgar consideration (Crown), and *Rough Cut* (St. Martin's) by Ed Gorman, another fine first novel. If you like horse-racing, you can read the Reeves novel, and *Rain Lover* (Ballantine) by Dave Burkey—also a first novel.

Looking forward to further issues. □

A CATALOGUE OF CRIME

By Jacques Barzun
and Wendell Hertig Taylor

S297 Fraser, James
A Cockpit of Roses
Herbert Jenkins 1969

Because it is hard to find, and because an early critic declared it to be ingenious, this second tale by Fraser has been sought for and admired *in absentia*. Actually, it is a poor thing. What started the ballyhoo is the opening, which finds Inspector Aveyard, unconscious from drink and his genitals exposed, lying close to the body of a girl presumably raped. After that dubious scene, the story meanders with increasing improbability through a number of unmotivated deaths, unappetising types, and recurrent vulgarisms. Among other absurdities, the author confuses *embolism* with *aneurysm* and *emanation* with *emission*. In short, the faults of his first book are multiplied in his second. Only later did a modest improvement take place.

S298 Morgan, Janet
Agatha Christie
Knopf 1985

The serious biographies of writers once deemed not serious goes on, and in this latest work on Mrs. Christie the reading public is fortunate. It is agreeably written, well illustrated, and solidly put together from all available facts, published and unpublished. The treatment of the main subject, her family, her husbands, and her notorious "fugue" or flight from relatives and friends is judicious and sympathetic. Best of all, her many-sided writings and her attitude toward them are clearly as well as critically set out. The resulting portrait is that of a writer who, without being great, was representative and influential, and of a woman who, without being heroic, was admirably modest and staunch.

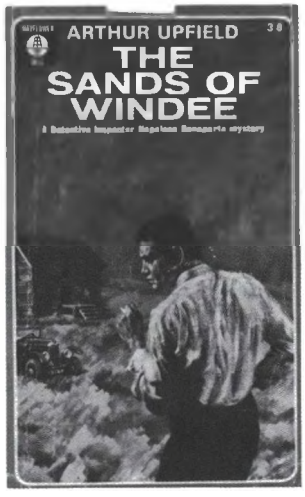
S299 Paul, Barbara
The Renewable Virgin
Collins 1984

With a good deal of "go," but little power to diversify the speech of her characters, the author tells her story in chapters each of which presents the experience of a different person. The tale revolves around a ravishing TV star, whose prospective lover gets killed, after which his mother proceeds to shoot at and miss another star, for reasons that seem academic. A second lover and other miscellaneous figures quickly complicate a plot in which speed and picturesque detail conceal improbability. Social and intellectual comments are sprinkled over the whole for the sake of spice, and the reader is pleasantly fooled.

S300 Malcolm, John
A Back Room in Somers Town
Scrib 1985

There is much to admire and enjoy in this first-person tale about Tim Simpson, the assistant in his friend Jeremy White's insurance office. White is not only a broker but also an investment counselor, and Tim's role is to furnish miscellaneous information about everything from private scandal to famous paintings. The murder here is linked with art, and its sequel takes Tim to a perfume factory in Brazil, where the other half of the plot has its roots. Right here are the regrettable parts of the story: the business investigation is dull and the lecturettes on English painting are excessive. Otherwise, the author shows judgment, wit, and a pleasant narrative style.

A later book, *The Godwin Sideboard* (1985), has the same qualities and defects, though there are signs that the author is getting a stronger grip on plot. He is worth watching.



S301 Thomas, Ross
The Backup Men
Morrow 1971

Both under this name and under that of Oliver Bleeck, this gifted writer has an enthusiastic following. His specialty in both incarnations is violence and wisecracks, which is not exactly a novelty, but it must be admitted that he plays the old song with something like a new voice. The prose is economical without being staccato, even though the incidents have the quick jerkiness of primitive films. It is hard not to feel that the combination yields only an imitation of suspense. For true suspense, continuity is essential—a sense of the flow of life within which parts may be missing that we hope will turn up later. And the bits that are present ought not to repeat each other or those in other books. To say this is to point to flaws in the Thomas-Bleeck saga. In the present tale, the agents McCorkle and Padillo, protecting the young pretender to a throne, go through their motions with success from *their* point of view, but not from that of the discriminating reader. □

S302 Symons, Julian
Portrait of an Artist: Conan Doyle
Deutsch 1979

Perhaps this slim volume should be called Portraits, in the plural, for it is illustrated with more photographs and drawings of its subject than will be found elsewhere between covers. What the text attempts is to do justice to Doyle as a man and writer and not merely as the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Symons is a first-rate biographer and literary critic, and he was right to apply his great gifts to this figure, which vulgar fame has distorted into the mere author of sixty crime tales who ended up as a spiritist. But the result is disappointing. The scale of treatment is too small and such things as the many brilliant short stories outside the Holmes canon are not even mentioned in the seven-page chapter entitled "The Author." Doyle's exploits in real life are similarly skimped. What we have, therefore, is a well-edited picture book, nothing more.

S303 Upfield, Arthur W.
The Sands of Windee
Hutchinson 1931

This third book by the author was probably the first to appear in this country, and it shows inexperience, together with the fundamental traits of both Inspector Bonaparte and his creator. In this expedition, Bony is seconded from his post in Queensland to the "blue bush" of New South Wales, where he wants to find out how a visitor disappeared without a trace two months before. Disguised as a horse trainer, Bony finds the traces, of course, but gets involved with the family and the village where he works, as well as with a neighboring tribe. The plot is good, the detection also. What is regrettable is an excess of detail in the description of scenery and exaggeration in the psychologizing of Bony. His dealings with his black congeners are excellent and functional but, again, overdone. The book is for Upfielders who want to know it all from the beginning. □

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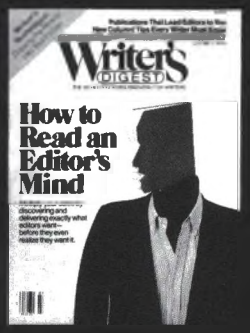

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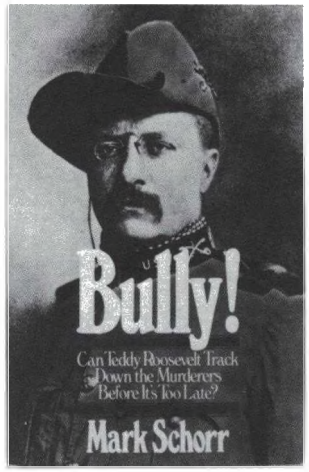

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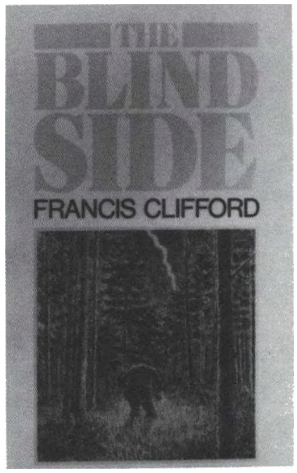

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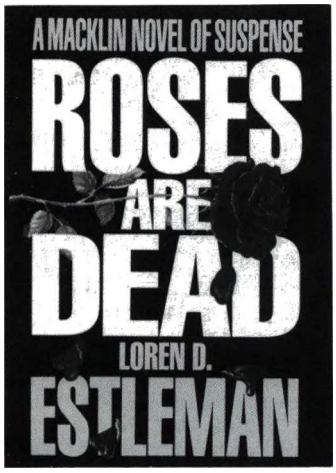

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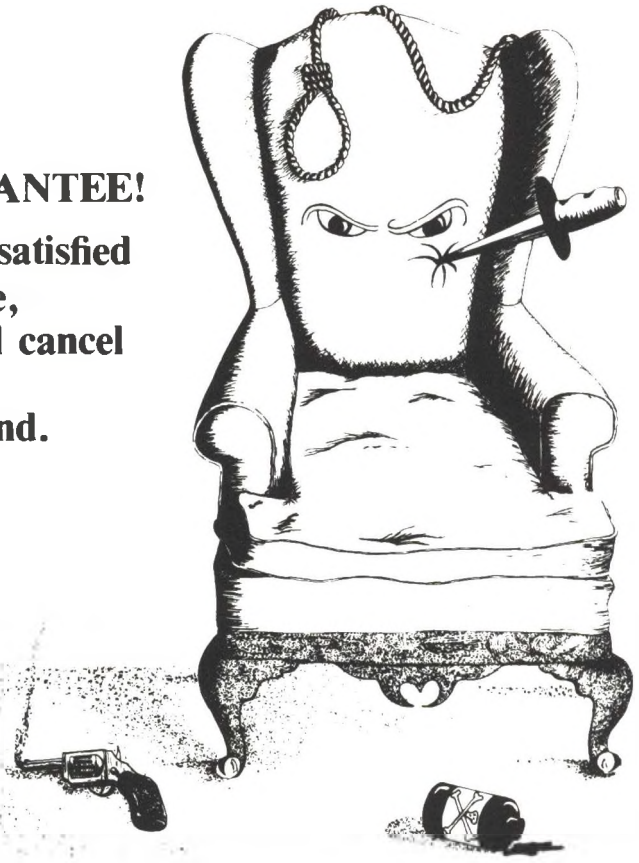

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