



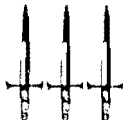
REVIEWS

Steven Bochco

DEATH BY HOLLYWOOD

Random House,

Hardcover



Reviewed by Steven Nester

The detective novel, in all of its forms or sub-genres, has always found a welcome in Hollywood. Crime fiction has long been a staple as material for moviemakers, and plenty of writers have used Hollywood and the movie business as subjects or backdrops for their novels. Either way, when put together, crime and Hollywood are an irresistible combination. They go together like guns and ammo, or money and beautiful women.

Emmy-Award-winning television producer Steven Bochco has checked in with his first novel, *Death by Hollywood*. Not only should readers expect to be treated to a well-connected insider's view of the business, they can also count on a clever plot line and a narrative technique that is a character in itself.

Hollywood talent agent Eddy Jelko has been around and has seen just about everything. He is also a frustrated novelist. Eddy has a story to tell and once he begins there is nothing to do but sit back and enjoy. Screenwriter Bobby Newman, a client, is self-destructing. His wife Vee is having an affair, he is no longer on speaking terms with the Muse, and he can't stay sober. When Bobby witnesses Linda Paulson, the wife of a Hollywood heavyweight, bludgeoned to death Ramon, her Latin lover, fate dumps a bucket of cold water on Bobby. He wakes up and begins to think quick and clever. He breaks into Ramon's house and discovers that Ramon has videotaped many of his romantic liaisons, including one with Bobby's wife, Vee. He makes off with the tapes of Vee and Linda, and with Ramon's Little Black Book.

The Muse that used to speak to Bobby is now the devil. Bobby doesn't want to report witnessing the crime; he wants to use it as a story idea. Into his life, thinks Bobby,

a "Rear Window" has fallen. He attaches himself to Dennis

Farentino, the investigating detective, and begins to play dumb. A bit too dumb, Bobby lets it slip that he knows more about the case than he should. Farentino is onto him and soon a screenwriting partnership begins. Bobby is the writer and Dennis is the experienced, street-smart Muse. If it were not for screen credit, and money and its equitable distribution, there would be a happy ending for all in *Death by Hollywood*.

The main character is really Eddy Jelko. *Death by Hollywood* is his account of the crimes that have occurred but are unknown to all but the participants. Locked in a lawyer's safe, the manuscript is Jelko's insurance policy that wagers he lives long enough to die a natural death. Jelko witnesses nothing yet knows everything; he deduces the characters' motivations and actions and embellishes them into a coherent, cohesive story. He is, after all, a frustrated novelist. The plot twists are so well thought out that nothing seems contrived or placed into the book just for the sake of being clever.

Death by Hollywood is a dark comedy but one that won't put off one's faith in mankind. As a narrator, Jelko keeps his tone light and funny, but his view of the business is brutally cynical. As a man who knows Hollywood inside and out, he keeps one entertained with the inner workings of the movie business. The only real problem with *Death by Hollywood* is its September publication date. With Labour Day gone and the beaches closed, readers will have to hope for a rainy day to complete this entertaining book in one sitting.

Steven Nester is a freelance writer living in Somers, CT. He is also host of Ports of the Tabloid Murder, a mystery author interview show that airs on 91.7 WTHU'S FM.

STEVEN BOCHCO

Bochco is the winner of ten Emmy Awards – six for *Hill Street Blues*, three for *L.A. Law* and one for *NYPD Blue*. In 1996, he was inducted into the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame.