



True Hollywood Noir: Filmland Mysteries and Murders

By Dina Di Mambro

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2014 IPPY Bronze Medal Award. A tantalizing mixture of classic Hollywood nostalgia and true crime, True Hollywood Noir: Filmland Mysteries and Murder, featuring 100 rare photographs, is suspenseful, entertaining, and eminently readable. Uncover true stories of mystery and murder in a dozen different chapters featuring William Desmond Taylor, Thomas Ince, Jean Harlow, Thelma Todd, Joan Bennett, Lana Turner, George Reeves, Gig Young, Bob Crane, Natalie Wood, Robert Blake, and Mickey Cohen. Included in the cast of characters of this book are Johnny Stompanato, William Randolph Hearst, Marion Davies, and Charlie Chaplin. And find never before told mob stories about Ben "Bugsy" Siegel, Virginia Hill, and a host of notorious underworld figures. From 1922 until 2001, explore some of Filmland's most fascinating mysteries, scandals and murders true Hollywood noir lived by the players behind the scenes. Each chapter dissects the various theories in each case, but it is up to you to make up your own mind. From the West Coast mob and city corruption intertwining with Hollywood mysteries on and off the screen, to the plots of noir films pulled from actual happenings in the underworld, get the stories behind the stories, the darker images playing out in living color behind the silver screen. While most of the actors featured here met with untimely tragic deaths or notorious misfortune coloring the remainder of their lives, the talent of these highly creative individuals and the legacy they've left us gives them a timeless immortality.

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

Truth is wilder than fiction in this fast-paced journey through 80 years of Hollywood mayhem. The lives of many Hollywood celebrities were as dark and twisted as the plots of their noir films; sometimes, they even died in a noir-ish explosion of violence. That mirroring of life in art—or perhaps vice versa—inspires Di Mambro's book, a journey through celebrity bedlam, from the fatal shooting of director William Desmond Taylor in 1922 to the assassination of actor Robert Blake's grifter wife Bonnie Lee Bakley in 2001. The author asks: "Could it have been the plots [the stars] played out during the day at the studio that contributed to the sense of drama and roller coaster emotions in their private lives?" Di Mambro has some tough acts to follow, since many of the cases she explores have been the subjects of entire books or lurid TV documentaries, including Taylor's death, Natalie Wood's drowning and the demise of *Hogan's Heroes* star Bob Crane. But in briskly written chapters, she captures much of the scandal and corruption underlying the glamor of Hollywood, a world in which the studios—with the help of the cops, lawyers and prosecutors they controlled—were often able to stifle scandal at the expense of truth. To the author's credit, she doesn't rely solely on secondary sources, getting some of her material from her own interviews. "I could have put an ice pick in her eyeball," Blake confidant John Solari says of Bakley. "I couldn't stand her." Di Mambro also finds cruel irony in the stars' lives. For instance, Gig Young, eventually an apparent suicide victim himself, once lamented, "[Y]ou play a loser long enough, and you end up a loser—at least you are convinced you are a loser.

Review

Noir films showing the seamy side of glittering cities such as Los Angeles were a staple of Hollywood in the 1940s through the early 1960s. But Hollywood has always had its own dark underbelly, with crime, corruption, and murder among both the lowest and the highest. Journalist and film historian Di Mambro guides readers through a walk on the wild side with tales of strange deaths among the beautiful people, from the unsolved murder of director William Desmond Taylor in 1922 to the mysterious death of "Superman" George Reeves to the messy tragedy of actor Robert Blake and his grifter wife, Bonnie Bakley. A number of stories have been told before (there are even whole books devoted to some), but the author is delightful company and includes the latest information on several cases, including the deaths of Johnny Stompanato, Bob Crane, and Natalie Wood. She ends with Mickey Cohen, the famous mobster and friend of Hollywood; the chapter feels a bit tacked on, but the thread of Mafia involvement that runs through these accounts is just enough to tie it in. **VERDICT** An engaging, gossipy stroll through back lots and back alleys that will delight fans of the Hollywood Golden Age as well as true crime buffs.—Deirdre Bray, Middletown P.L Library Journal

In Hollywood, murder and mystery are par for the course, and in this fascinating true crime compendium, Di Mambro explores a host of famous scandals—some as old as the movie industry itself. Sex, drugs, and money have always had incendiary consequences in Hollywood, and Di Mambro provides backstories of some of Hollywood's most sordid affairs—the death of Gig Young, the murder of Bonnie Lee Bakley, and many more—inviting readers to make up their own minds about what really happened. Di Mambro has clearly done her research, and the versions of events she pieces together are entertaining and plausible. While her prose tends to meander at times, readers who are enthusiastic true crime aficionados or Hollywood scandal fans will enjoy this book immensely.

About the Author

Dina Di Mambro is a film historian and award winning entertainment writer who has worked as a research consultant for A&E Biography and "E" Entertainment Television documentaries. She started writing for Hollywood Studio Magazine and other publications while still in her teens. As a journalist, she has interviewed such luminaries as Glenn Ford, Shirley MacLaine and Dyan Cannon. As Dina-Marie Kulzer, she authored *Television Series Regulars of the Fifties and Sixties in Interview*, consisting of twenty-two interviews with classic television stars. It was praised by *The TV Collector* as "the kind of book that will elate baby-booming TV fans. The author has hand-picked a great bunch of classic television people for conversations about their careers—a handy addition to any nostalgia buff's library." She currently lives in Long Beach, California.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carrie Wilson:

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