

EXTRACT FROM LETTER FROM ARTHUR MACLEAN DATED 22/2/59

"DEADLINE FOR DANGER" and "ROADHOUSE GIRL" (both based on stories by A.L.Martin) and "VICTIM UNKNOWN" (based on a story by Lee Roberts) were, in their original form, Gold Medal Books published as paperbacks by Fawcett Publications of New York in the years named for their copyright declaration. The original stories were not Blakes, of course. They featured various private eyes, were 50,000 words long, were set against U.S. backgrounds, and were extremely sexy.

The three stories were purchased for adaptation by a senior executive of Amalgamated Press (not W.H.B.) in a moment of mental aberration. There was at the time a severe shortage of Blake scripts and the senior executive thought to satisfy this shortage with re-writes. He was of the opinion that there was not much work involved and that what there was could be done quickly. He was quite wrong.

I did the work on all three. It wasn't easy and, as the price paid Fawcett Publications for the adaptation rights had been high, my reward was meagre. I swore then and there that I would never do any of this kind of work again, and I never have. You will readily appreciate that Blake's character is not the stereotyped one found in the hero of American private eye stories. Consequently, in these tales, Blake had to be literally written in, and the old hero written out! A place had to be found for Tinker and the rest of the team. The stories had to be de-sexed and shortened. In the end, only the plotline was retained. It was all a terrible waste of time and money. This particular experiment has not been repeated.

Two of these books appeared as "Desmond Reid's". The third appeared as "Arthur Maclean" simply because there already was a "Desmond Reid" scheduled as companion novel of the month. The title has been dropped from 'Titles also written by' because it isn't a true Maclean at all.

I have since then done other re-writes - but none of the "previously published in America" kind. All, with one exception, have appeared as "Desmond Reids". One (in collaboration with W.Howard Baker) appeared as "William Arthur" (MURDER WITH VARIETY).

I wrote the story (again a re-write) which appeared in lieu of (James Stagg's) "PANIC IN THE NIGHT". The author of the original script was, if I remember correctly, a chap called T.C.H.Jacobs but I wouldn't be certain of this. It was sub-standard in its original form and my job was to insert, and twist, and characterise, to produce something publishable. Of SCANDAL STREET and PANIC IN THE NIGHT (originals) there were, in fact, several thousands printed, but all were destroyed. Not even a proof copy remains. The reason why this happened is something I will possibly tell you in a later letter when I have more time and space. Suffice it to say, for the present, that it is a chapter A.P. would prefer to forget.

(2)

On the history of FLASHPOINT FOR TREASON, this, if memory serves me correctly, was written by a chap called Lamb. Again I wouldn't be sure. I am sure he is an Aussie. (EVC's note: Bill Lofts refers in letter dated 17/2/57 to a new Blake writer named Fred Lamb - real name - using pseudonym of "Miles Hampden") The original story ran to 150 odd pages of typescript and did not concern rockets at all. Nor did Rymer appear in it. It was bad. What I did with it was to throw away the first 100 pages completely and preserve only the background of the remainder. I have never been to Australia - though W.Howard Baker has and he gave me more background from his recollections of the place. The final story was, in my opinion, the worst thing I ever wrote. For this reason: that, after finishing it, large sections were considered too "meaty" for the public and were expurgated. Consequently, the published yarn was reduced to an extended chase sequence, little more. In places, it didn't even hang together properly.

I must make one further confession. Until I began to write Blake stories, I had never read one in the whole of my life! I had tried to read one - you can probably place it - "THE DOPE DEALERS" - I think it was by Hunter? (EVC's note: This could refer either to SBL 263 THE CASE OF THE DOPED FAVOURITE by Hunter or SBL 270 THE CASE OF THE DOPE DEALERS by Martin Frazer, probably the latter.) I thought it dreadful, and couldn't get past the first couple of pages.

A previous editor of S.B.L. (who shall be nameless) used to conduct the affairs of the Library from a Fleet Street pub where he would take delivery of manuscripts from his favoured authors, glance at them fleetingly, and then pass them straight over (without alteration or consideration) to the printers. This happened. It went on for years. WHB doesn't work like that. He works. The other can't have done the series any good. Obviously authors and readers alike are concerned to keep this series alive. Authors particularly have a vested interest. That is why I think W.Howard Baker is the best thing that happened to A.P. in a very long time!

EXTRACT FROM LETTER FROM BILL LOFTS DATED 12/11/56

The reason why Anthony Parsons' yarn "THE DANCE HOSTESS" did not appear in SBL was because all manuscripts at that time were destroyed by orders of the Directors, as they considered them rubbish. Baker was made Editor and had to start from scratch.