

The writer with no hands

Matthew Alford

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Alford completed a PhD, which became the book *Reel Power: Hollywood Cinema and American Supremacy* (London: Pluto, 2010). His central thesis of that is that large budget, mainstream American movies,

'...almost always express the notion that in its foreign policy, the endless wars in which it engages, America is always right, well-intentioned and frequently the victim.

That this fantastic lie is in the films owes something (how much isn't clear) to the Pentagon and CIA liaison operations with the studios. "Wanna borrow a submarine? Talk to the Navy guy." If Alford isn't quite describing the corporations and the state running joint psy-ops, it will do until joint psy-ops come along.¹

While trying to finish *Reel Power*, he came across the strange story of a major Hollywood script writer, Gary Devore, who disappeared and was found a year later, still in his car which was submerged in a river, strapped in his seat belt but minus his hands. Or so it seemed: hands or no hands is among the many elements in the story which is never quite nailed down. Devore, it was reported, had died just after finishing a politically radical script, which had also disappeared. Was he assassinated? The book describes the author's attempts to find out, while juggling unemployment, job searches and a failing marriage. The following quote is on p. 13, just as he begins to feel the pull of the Devore story, and gives a sense of the book's style:

'I didn't have time for this. I had a book to finish, a child to raise, a marriage to endure, a cat to worm, and work to find.'

This personal material didn't interest me, though it is quite

¹ <<http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster60/lobster60.pdf>> p. 148. Alford also co-wrote an article in the *Guardian*, 'An offer they couldn't refuse' on this subject. See <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/nov/14/thriller-ridley-scott>>.

well done.

Researching the Devore story he encounters a striking collection of con-men, dodgy internet 'journalists', spooks, private eyes, actors and a director – plus the dope-smoking widow of Devore – and creates a vivid portrait of the difficulty of researching a subject with Hollywood, the CIA and the Pentagon among the *dramatis personae*.

He does *not* prove that Devore was murdered (after a year under water the autopsy was inconclusive), though it seems *possible*. If he was murdered it seems *possible* that it was because the script he was working on, *The Big Steal*, apparently dealt with the US invasion of Panama – during which a lot of murky stuff is alleged to have taken place: new weapons tested, unreported large-scale slaughter of Panamanians, and a multi-million dollar theft by US personnel. This last item *may* have been the central subject matter of Devore's plot – 'the big steal' – but the complete script was never found. Devore's widow claims she was warned off the Panama angle after his death.

This is an entertaining read with many interesting parapolitical leads uncovered, none of which get pursued completely or resolved. He dips his toes into Iran-Contra, Panama and JFK's assassination. He muses on the difficulties of parapolitical research and then *illustrates* those difficulties through endless beating of the bushes around his subject. For example: was Panama's President Noriega hosting and filming orgies for US personnel and then blackmailing the US? *Maybe*. Did US military personnel steal \$45 million from a US slush-fund in Panama? *Rumoured*. Within this book there is the outline of where a serious reinvestigation of the events in Panama might begin.

But I was reminded of an old joke about the naive Polish actress who went to Hollywood, got a minor part in a movie and fucked the writer. Would a *script* get you killed? Alford's earlier book about Hollywood describes an entertainment industry in which the US military and intelligence are thoroughly integrated, a system in which a really radical script simply wouldn't get made. So who would bother to kill the

writer when a word in the right ear would get the project dropped or modified? The answer to this may be that a criminal conspiracy within the US military would. But of that conspiracy there is no evidence.

Robin Ramsay