

Infernal Machines

by Edward Conlon

ent from most actors. Usually they walk away from the set whining, saying they didn't do it right. Not me. I always think I did it great.

I strolled over after the reading to visit the room where I was cast for *Honeymoon in Vegas*. There were a few people there. I asked if I could be in the next Lobell/Bergman movie, about a policeman who gives a waitress a winning lottery ticket as a tip.

"Sure," said a young man. "Why not?"

I often think about how all the generals are back in Washington fighting the "culture wars," and I'm the only foot soldier who's actually made it to the front lines. But surprise, surprise, it's fun here at the battle for the hearts and minds of America. Come on out, people. I can't get you work, but you can get it yourself if you try. Come on down.

Friday

Another audition, this one at Sony/Columbia, which definitely used to be MGM. Today it's sunny with a slight haze. There's a mild onshore breeze. I walked down Katharine Hepburn Avenue, past the Spencer Tracy Building, along the side of the Bacall Building, past the James Cagney Building, and into a gorgeous late 1930s building. Maybe that's the one that used to be named after Robert Taylor.

I walked up the stairs to the casting room. SURPRISE!!! The casting director is an old pal named Alan, whose nickname is "The King" (no one knows why). He actually gave me advice on how to read the part of a nebbishy wedding photographer. It was great advice, and I did a great reading. As I walked away, The King came after me down the hall. "You're a real actor now," he said. Then he applauded.

Oh, happy day. I'll happily let the folks I went to Yale with run the country. I just want to be free to roam the studios night and day. When I die, I want to come back as a ghost on a studio lot.

Preferably Sony/Columbia. There's something about that old MGM spirit that lingers in the air and smells as sweet as the jasmine that's in glorious bloom all over town.

Make fun of L.A. all you want. Tell me another city that actually smells like sweet flower blossoms for weeks at a time. □

Like most New Yorkers, James J. Falihee watched the reports of the explosion at the World Trade Center with mixed feelings of pity, anxiety, and dismay, but when Channel 2 News announced that it was suspected that a bomb was the cause, his reaction may have been unique. He shouted, "Oh, you stupid ass!" at the anchor and considered calling the station to complain, but the damage, all around, had been done.

James Falihee has taught at John Jay College for twenty years, and for the fifteen prior, he was technical director of Faurot, Inc., which manufactured crimi-



nal detection equipment. But for twenty-one years before that, he was with the New York City Police Department, retiring in 1958 as Supervisor of the Bomb Squad.

Born almost eighty-three years ago in Harlem, Falihee moved to the Bronx as a teenager and graduated from Manhattan College in 1932. A pre-med major, he intended to become a doctor but he had married—"That's personal . . . but it turned out swell. Was married fifty-eight

Edward Conlon is a writer living in the Bronx.

years"—and the need to make money, coupled with the hardship of doing so during the Depression, dictated another vocation. He managed to earn an M.A. in Education from Columbia while doing "odd jobs" and taking civil service tests. At the end of 1936, he joined the Police Department and, because of his science background, was assigned to the crime lab after only a few months on patrol. At the time, there were two civilian chemists employed, and he became the first policeman-chemist in the history of the department.

Besides bombs, Falihee worked on a variety of cases with the crime laboratory, from narcotics to rape. One photograph shows him at a table with four other men, sifting a kind of granulated rubbish through screens into bushel baskets. "That's from a rape-murder case. There were seventeen barrels of ashes we took from an incinerator to find the bone fragments." A hit-and-run driver killed a woman and seriously injured her child in the Bronx one night, and no witnesses came forward. But Falihee matched fragments of glass from the scene with a headlight in the Automobile Lens Library he had assembled, and an arrest was made within hours. And in the February 1951 issue of *Park East* magazine, he opined in an article on "KO girls"—who enticed men into hotel rooms, spiked their drinks with knockout drops, and took their wallets—that beer was their beverage of choice because it best masked the taste of chloral hydrate. As the biochemical training of KO girls was never terribly rigorous, there was an occasional fatality: "The thing about poison," said Falihee, "is that enough of it will kill you."

“My first bomb was on July 4th, 1940, at the World’s Fair,” said Falihee. “Like many of the things that happen, this should never have happened, in my opinion and everybody else’s.”

An attaché case had been “kicked around the British and the Polish Pavilions for eight days” before it was reported, and Detectives Joseph Lynch and Frederick Soscha were sent to inspect it. “They proceeded properly,” he explained, “brought it to an open area behind the Polish Pavilion, cleared everyone out, including the cops, and opened it up with a glass knife. You never use metal tools. Anyway, they peeled the sides back and saw it, called out, ‘Get back, this is the real thing.’ And of course, it went off.”

Both officers were killed.

Falihee and his partner collected all the evidence and examined it in the laboratory. They discovered a piece of an eight-day clock, made by the Connecticut Clock Company, which had wound down to detonate just as the detectives opened it up. “After that, we obtained a portable x-ray machine, a fluoroscope, to see all these packages we’d assume we’d get, and we did get. Some exploded, some were unfounded, some were peoples’ lunches that were left in the subway. Some were simulated bombs, that looked like bombs even under the fluoroscope. Most of the time it turned out to be unfounded. I’d guess it’s the same today. Whenever it turned out to be unfounded, the newspapers called it a hoax. ‘Hoax’ seems to have been one of their favorite words. Anyway, during the war, we looked at a lot of suitcases. Fellows leaving for war, forgetting things or not coming back, who left luggage in Grand Central or Penn Station.”

The “Mad Bomber” set off at least thirty-two bombs in New York City for several years before his apprehension in 1958, when he was revealed to be one George Metesky, a former Consolidated Edison worker who resented his company’s failure to compensate him for an on-the-job injury.

“He was a good machinist,” Falihee says. “The bombs were well manufactured: clock-and-battery, small but potent, set in public places like theaters. He’d slit the seat open and conceal it

inside. I can’t tell you how many nights I spent in theaters, opening and fluoroscoping the seats, whenever there was a rip in the upholstery.

“The Bomber was from Waterbury and they sent him to Mattawan,” says Falihee, referring to the mental hospital. “A nice old gentleman!” He laughed. “Here I am on the other side, now. He only seriously injured one person, if I recall, with a slight skull fracture. He was eventually released and has since died.”

The Bomb Squad never looks beyond the technical and forensic aspects of an explosive or explosion. The identities,

motives, and whereabouts of the responsible parties are left to other detectives or agencies. Even though an arrest was made in the World’s Fair bombing, Falihee was reluctant to comment on that aspect of the case. “I never wanted to speculate, there were a lot of rumors but I wasn’t there. I don’t think they actually got the fella, though they do.” The attaché case was originally left in the British Pavilion, and it was determined that the IRA was the culprit. “They give them credit for everything, though they do enough damage. I don’t know who did it. That is not in the realm of my duties.”

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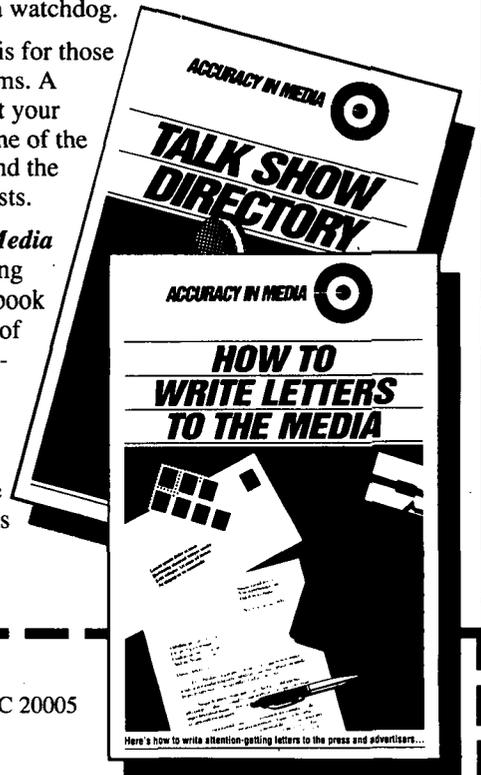
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As he watched the initial reports of the recent explosion, Falihee felt a sense of nostalgia, in its old, true meaning of "the pain of return": "I thought, gee, it's gonna be hard, with the water, all the debris. You tell everything from the scene search, you find fragments of the device. Today you probably have the same procedures, look for the same evidence.

"Anyway, they said it's some sort of explosive, all right. On Channel 2. I wanted to call up the anchorman, but I decided not to. I try to keep my fat Irish mouth out of it.

"One thing I've always hated was when someone said it was a bomb. It was the worst thing, the worst thing they could have said. Every lunatic calls in. There was a series of other calls claiming credit, and in half an hour there was a threat to the Empire State Building. We had to search the Empire State Building years ago, up and down, up and down, see if anything was out of place. You always evacuate, bring in cops and the maintenance people to see what's out of place.

"In the old days, I didn't want my picture in the papers anyway. Didn't need it. The press, I used to chase them. In fact, I used to threaten them. I haven't had my picture taken with the old magnesium flash since I played ball for Manhattan Prep, so it wasn't actually dangerous. But you're nervous enough, when you're right there with something that's alleged to be an infernal machine, without all those flashbulbs going off in your face."

These days, Falihee is untroubled by the infernal machines. Though he is on sabbatical from John Jay for the semester, he will return to teach there in the fall. His attentions are spent reading, "not newspapers, but scientific material and books where the butler did it," and among his three daughters, six grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. One grandson is a policeman in Buffalo, and a granddaughter is a pathologist at the Mayo Clinic. Though he walks with the assistance of a cane and seems to spend a fair amount of time visiting doctors, he has few complaints. His wife, Kathleen, died three years ago, but he "does not believe in mourning."

"In this world, you come without wanting to come," he said, "and you leave without wanting to leave. God treated me well. I didn't blow up." □

The Twelve Commandments

by Grover G. Norquist

Haley Barbour, the recently elected Republican National Committee chairman, would like to add a twelfth commandment to Moses' ten and Ronald Reagan's eleventh ("Thou shalt not speak ill of a fellow Republican"). Barbour's twelfth is: "Thou shalt not even think about the 1996 presidential election until after November 8, 1994."

After George Bush threw away his presidency, many conservatives immediately focused on the task of reclaiming the White House in 1996. But the real action for the next two years will be in what Barbour calls the "target-rich environment" of the 1994 elections, when twenty-two Democratic Senate seats will be up for

grabs. More immediately, this year will see a special Senate election in Texas; special House elections in Wisconsin, Mississippi, California, and Ohio; governor's races in New Jersey and Virginia; and state legislative races in New Jersey, Virginia, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

Off-year elections can redefine a party. In 1966, two years after the Goldwater debacle, Republicans gained forty-seven seats in the House and four in the Senate, eight governorships, and ten state legislative chambers. Richard Nixon's non-stop campaigning helped win him the party nomination. In 1978, Republicans picked up fifteen House seats, three Senate seats (defeating three nationally important liberals), six governorships, 279 state legislative seats, and the majority in seven chambers. Ronald Reagan learned from the Richard Nixon of 1966.

Each would-be presidential candidate has at least two years to impress the Republican Party with his ability to raise funds, campaign effectively for other candidates, and champion new issues and legislation. That's what Ronald Reagan did when he embraced the Roth-Kemp supply-side revolution after he lost the 1976 Republican nomination. The voters of California helped define the Reagan presidency when they voted in June 1978 to pass the Jarvis-Gann initiative, Proposition 13, which cut their property taxes in half and required a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to raise new taxes.

Presidential candidates follow election results. After the success of Proposition 13, a number of other states put similar initiatives on the ballot. (Idaho's referendum was actually identical to Proposition 13, with "California"

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