



Detective Drama **GEMS...**

Mid-1940s to the Mid-1990s

Issue #12 October 2023

Radio and TV Episodes Analyzed ... *for Writers and Editors*

Gem #37 — "[The Serpent's Tooth](#)" — March 19, 1991

From LAW & ORDER (NBC-TV, 1990 to 2010...and resumed in '22)

February 21st, after 11 p.m. Two New York City cops stand watch. One is okay with the bitter temps; the other curses this cold assignment on Embassy Row. They are there because of bomb threats. Suddenly a *home* alarm goes off, immediately before a young man dashes out, screaming that his parents have been shot.

The two officers think it might be a diversion; but they have to respond to his plea. And because he called 911, more police arrive. That includes Max and Mike, two of the six regulars during this opening season of an unbelievably durable series.

SLAIN: Evelyn Jarmon, dead after "two shots from right here" (the officer signals close range) in the heart and stomach. At Minute 1:38, a victim close-up of the sort not shown in living rooms a decade earlier. Blood spatters the wall, just above the stair steps. And "there's more." Her husband — "Karl Jarmon, three at close range."

"Let me guess," says Max Greevey: "No signs of burglary." Then why did the alarm go off? "Kid tripped it when he came in," someone replies. Which doesn't square with what we saw: Alarm started just before he ran *out*. Killer's entry wasn't forced. Still, the doors could have been locked. Servants, close friends — any of them might have keys. Quick check of the adjacent neighbors; they saw or heard nothing.

Additional orientation for Max and Mike: "No shells, but...check out the study." Dazzling collection of firearms! "This one has been fired." Very recently. We're up

to Minute 2:20. Mike Logan muses: "You never figure you're gonna get it from your own gun." Seems so, but the mordant Logan's leap turns out to be too quick.

Nick and Greg are the Jarmon Brothers. Greg is the younger. They were coming back from a Rangers game. Greg walked into the carnage. Nick is seen by us only after a crowd has gathered. What was he doing for that minute or two before the alarm and police caused a crowd to form? Unlike Greg, Nick says he did not go inside.

Both brothers are hysterical. Their mom *wasn't supposed to be home*, Nick says in agony. Where was she supposed to be? "A benefit at the Met."

At Headquarters, the sons are interviewed separately. Could be 2 a.m., could be late the next morning or in the afternoon. Cops seek clarity on the sequence...

Nick and Greg called a cab. Left the house for Madison Square Garden around 7 p.m. They stayed through the Rangers game, got some food at Chelsea Central. Talked to no one in particular. Made it back to their home street around 11:30.

When repeating these responses, the detectives make minor changes, to flush out incompetent rehearsals. Or, worse, to expose suspiciously perfect ones. No contradictions emerge. At the same time, the brothers remain each another's alibi.

When Max suggests paraffin tests — "standard procedure...to see if there's any gunpowder residue on your hands" — Nick bristles. Gregg says powder COULD be on his. "This afternoon on the Island I went skeet-shooting." Naturally he brought one of the family rifles. A gun-club staffer will later confirm presence and time.

Crime Lab technician scours that rifle. And? "The powder in the barrel has similar characteristics to the trace residue found on the victims." This and other fine points make Mike Logan ask: "Are we lookin' at the murder weapon or what?" The Lab guy is a precise hedger: "An attorney's opinion? Inconclusive. My opinion? Yes."

Medical Examiner places the murders between 7 and 9. Okay then, how long were Greg and Nick at the hockey game? Specifically, "were they there for the face-off?" and "did they stay for the whole game?" It helps that Karl Jarmon bought a season pass. Max and Mike check that space with two Garden operatives. The first is no help at all; the second is cordial but not big on faces: "There might've been other kids [in that section] for the third period. People move around a lot."

In hundreds of places, novels and movies are reviewed ... with too much opinion, and not enough quotes. Here, it's **Episodes** — exhibits within a popular and credible series — featuring **characters** that became familiar and quotable. Analyzing the best of these productions will help editors and writers **communicate complexity engagingly**.

What Max Greevey ([GEORGE DZUNDZA](#)) learns about Nick Jarmon triggers scorn. "College student, Young Turk on Wall Street — couldn't cast the part much better." "Come on, Max," retorts Mike Logan ([CHRIS NOTH](#)), "I know you don't like trust-fund babies, but we got no EVIDENCE on these guys."

When it comes to situations, the reliably callow Logan is okay with snap judgments that are often fused with smirks. As for individuals and what makes them tick, he holds back. Waits for a wider picture to take shape.

In this case, he's moved by Greg's shattered state at losing "Mom." Even though Logan, as a youngster, had been MUCH closer to his father and "hated" his own mother. Or perhaps that's why, unlike Greevey, he connects with Greg's grief.

Greevey is 16 years older than his patrol-car colleague. Unlike Logan, he sublimates personalities. A situation or sequence requires connecting the dots as they *come* in but doing so without getting *locked* in. Greevey is also able to juggle the opposites, telling his boss: "They're either innocent — or well-rehearsed."

The boss is Captain Donald Cragen ([DANN FLOREK](#)). He does not pretend to be curious, methodical, or psychological. "Put 'em through the ringer," he tells Max and Mike re Nick and Greg Jarmon. Cragen knows the odds are on his side...

That case in La-La Land? Nine months, the Beverly Hills cops [being] jerked around, it came right back to the kids. We all know, nine times outta 10, in the house, husbands kill wives, wives kill husbands, and kids kill parents.

La La Land is Hollywood, and the case alluded to is that of the Menendez Brothers.

LAW & ORDER often piled up Plausibility points because real life, via the media, served up stark events and cases to build on without going nuts on "creativity."

And the Legal Dept. insisted, from the start, on a disclaimer: "The story is fictional. No actual person or event is depicted." Got it — and with not a word wasted.

Cautious Housekeeper, plus Clarification of the Tag-Line

In many cases of fatal interactions among the upper classes, the servants end up being a non-credentialed version of Expert Witness...

GREEVEY: Have you worked for the family LONG, Mrs. Langdon?

MARGARET LANGDON: Twenty-two years. Even since Nicholas was born.

LOGAN: Mrs. Jarmon too busy to bring up her own kids?

LANGDON: Oh you're WAY off target, Detective. She was devoted to them, maybe too much so. She picked them up every day after school.

Everyone else sent their nannies.

GREEVEY: How 'bout Mr. Jarmon?

LANGDON: [Slight sigh] He wasn't at home as much as he wanted. He and his partner were always at the plant.

LOGAN: "Partner." Nick told us his father owned the company.

LANGDON: He owned most of it. He made Mr. Petrovich a Partner a couple of years ago.

GREEVEY: How 'bout when he was home?

LANGDON: [Pausing, then firmly] He did the best he could — as a father.

During this short exchange, Mrs. Langdon kept busy. With her eyes focused on the task and finishing a reply, she belatedly realizes Max and Mike are heading off to confer, or simply get a better feel for the now-quiet crime scene.

"Radio and TV Episodes Analyzed...for Writers and Editors"

Between TV and radio drama on one side, and 100% text products on the other, how big is the gap? It shrinks when we realize: **Every TV episode or movie began as a SCRIPT**. And 20th-century Marketing greats Al Ries and Jack Trout advised that, if you want your written products to be easily understood, try writing each one as RADIO text. Great advice! You can at least ***read the draft aloud***, as part of revise & rewrite. Stand up and pretend to be delivering it to two dozen people in a small room. In crafting and drafting, it's risky to depend totally on solitude, mental leaps, and feedback from a PC screen.

Back at the office, the Captain wants a motive. Why would either son or both kill the parents, especially a mother whose loss shattered both of them the night of the atrocity? "I don't think things were that great between the Old Man and the kids," Greevey muses. "All I keep hearin' is what the Housekeeper WASN'T saying."

The gap between his subordinates irritates Captain Cragen. To him, they sound like Siskel and Ebert (a pair of self-satisfying film reviewers who didn't need a website or a Twitter account to be "influencers"). "Go talk to...whatsisname, the Partner."

That's Alex Petrovich, played by [JONATHAN HADARY](#), age 42 1/2 when this episode was first broadcast. The visit opens with some creative camera work looking inside and around an industrial-grade print shop. If you like "gear" and are mechanically inclined, it's a visual highlight of this episode — and not a gory one at all.

A much wider perspective comes from this fact: "The Serpent's Tooth" was filmed

at the start of a decade when the Russian (formerly Soviet) economy would crash by 25% as several "provinces" regained their independence. National break-up plus economic depression led to population shifts and political vacuums.

At first the vacuum was filled by the Oligarchs, and eventually by Vladimir Putin. Many Russians who were smart, though not rich, fled to the U.S.A. And they were able to join Russians who had escaped when it was still the Soviet Union.

When we get to Page 7, Alex Petrovich will joke about "Little Kyiv" and "Brighton Beach." On the night of the Jarmon killings, he was there, dining with friends. "Russians," he explains, "we need reminders of home [laughs] — of the FOOD anyway."

Immigrant "Shops, Restaurants, Clubs, Offices, Banks, Schools..."

Calling on socioeconomic accounts to explain detective drama is weird, but two fit very nicely here. The first is a blend from [Wikipedia](#) extracted on May 15th, 2023...

In the mid-1970s, **Brighton Beach** became a popular place to settle for [Soviet immigrants](#), mostly Ashkenazi Jews from Russia and [Ukraine](#). So many Soviet Jews immigrated to Brighton Beach that the area became known as "Little Odessa" (after the Ukrainian city on the Black Sea). The 1991 [collapse of the Soviet Union](#) ... led thousands [more] former Soviet citizens to immigrate to the United States. Many more immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who primarily spoke Russian, chose Brighton Beach as a place to settle... A large number of Russian immigrant firms, shops, restaurants, clubs, offices, banks, schools, and children's play centers opened in the area.

The second, from March 1999 and *The New York Times*, is by Edward Lewine. His [highly impressionistic account](#) contended that "Brighton Beach is on the cusp of a slow decline as a Russian-speaking neighborhood..."

The children of the immigrants are chasing the American dream to Manhattan, to other parts of Brooklyn and to the suburbs. "Old people live in Brighton Beach," said Lyudmila Reyngach, the owner of Oceanview Optical on Brighton Beach Avenue. "The young people are moving out" [while] people from Mexico, Pakistan and the Middle East have been moving in. "It's going to be different," said Marina Shapiro, the executive director of the Brighton Beach Business Improvement District. "It will be a multinational neighborhood, not just a Russian one."

Did Mr. Lewine cover dark-side elements? "Even the Russian mafia has been forsaking Brighton Beach" was his lone reference. It was backed up by one source:

Raymond Kerr, supervising agent in the FBI's Eastern European Organized-Crime Unit. Kerr told Lewine: "In the '70s, Russian organized crime concentrated mostly in New York. Now it's in cities all over the country."

For our purposes, to appreciate this 1991 episode, the places where a key character worked and spent leisure time...yes, it matters. Russian Culture was at its crest.

The interview by Max and Mike will tell us little about Alex Petrovich's history, other than that he left Russia when it was still formally Communist. But this first encounter does generate one extremely specific fact and one useful hint...

ALEX PETROVICH: Karl and me ran this business together. We were like, like ahh YOU: "Good cop, bad cop."

LOGAN: Which was which?

PETROVICH: Karl knew how to get a nickel out of a penny. Drove the buyers crazy. Customers, too. Was up to me to make everybody happy again.

LOGAN: What about the employees? He drive them crazy, too?

PETROVICH: [Dryly] Karl wasn't no HAND-holder.

LOGAN: Well a man can make ENEMIES that way — maybe the kind that'll kill ya.

PETROVICH: Okay. Karl was a bastard. So find me a boss who isn't... He liked to kick a little ass, and yell a lot — except when his JAW was broke.

LOGAN: [Too eagerly] Oh yeah? When'd THAT happen?

PETROVICH: About a year and a half ago.

LOGAN: How?

PETROVICH: I dunno. He showed up at work with his jaw *wired*. Said he slipped in the bath, or something. I'll tell you: Karl never had a grudge. Everybody here [got] bonuses at Christmas. And the customer was always satisfied.

LOGAN: You handle his public relations, too?

PETROVICH: **I* never had a problem* with Karl. He hired me when I was a little *kaliyaka* right off the plane. I hardly spoke English. He gave me a place to sleep — and a place to WORK [spoken proudly].

GREEVEY: Did this love-fest extend to his kids?

PETROVICH: Karl and his boys, he was very proud of them. He had a terrific family.



GREEVEY: Was he the sole owner of the business?

PETROVICH: [Defensively] Why?

LOGAN: It's a normal question. Must be worth, what, 10, 15 million? What's gonna HAPPEN to it?

PETROVICH: I have a small piece.

LOGAN: How small?

PETROVICH: Ten percent.

LOGAN: And the rest?

PETROVICH: I know what you're thinking [and] that's CRAZY. Greg and Nick, they're good SONS.

GREEVEY: The sons — THEY inherit it.

PETROVICH: Yeah! They get the business.

A Seemingly Stray Remark Puts the Focus Back on the Sons

Petrovich's voice mixes energetic stressors and NYC slang. The main flare-up is when Greevey inquired about father/son dynamics. Otherwise, this articulate Russian is steering between a businesslike pace and wanting to be helpful.

LOGAN: Oh by the way, uh — if you don't mind, what were you doin' Saturday night?

PETROVICH: I had dinner. Little Kyiv, Brighton Beach. Bleeney, herring, Russian food... Rostov's the owner; he knows me.

Max and Mike go see "Rostov" and his wife at their restaurant. Only Mrs. Rostov speaks English, and the captions show her sanitizing, hilariously, her husband's responses. But both confirm that yes, Petrovich and his lady friend dined with them in "Little Kyiv" on Saturday night when the Jarmon killings happened.

So Alex Petrovich's alibi holds, and he fades from our view. What does not fade are these words: "Except when his JAW was broke." Max Greevey will also make something out of the seemingly positive statement that Karl Jarmon "hired me...

right off the plane [and] gave me a place to sleep — and a place to WORK." Greevey tunes in to what figures say, and don't say, including word emphases.

As for Captain Cragen? The boss is weary of subtleties. The deficit remains MOTIVES. From his subordinates, Cragen expects clarity on the Why and What For.

- From Petrovich they confirmed that the boys will inherit most of their dad's business. For Max Greevey, that's one more motivational "dot."
- But the dot sounds dotty to Mike Logan. Because? The brothers already had everything they need: Spending money, future options, their college has been covered, and probably Trust Funds to boot.
- From Petrovich the cops have a What — broken jaw — but not a Who or a Why. Was it from breaking up a fight? Or a violent altercation with a supplier or trucker? If so, Petrovich would know; or maybe he wouldn't. Or he might know but not be able to say, because HE caused the injury. (We don't hear either detective speculate on the latter.)

From Cragen comes a self-created lead, and very helpful: *Press the family's doctor*. What that doc recalls is just enough, and right here is where a viewer can feel the script lurch. The jaw? "He told me Nick broke it. I don't know the circumstances."

Back to the brothers. The first question to Nick elicits one of his one...

NICK JARMON: Do you love your parents every day of the week?

GREEVEY: Breaking his jaw? That your way of showing affection?

JARMON: Went out with some buddies. I came home drunk. My father didn't want to let me in 'til I sobered up.

LOGAN: You broke his jaw over that?

JARMON: It was a stupid mistake! I TOLD ya, I was DRUNK. Haven't you ever hurt anybody YOU loved?

LOGAN: Never put 'em in the Emergency Room.

Greg confirms Nick's account. Later we'll hear Greevey being contemptuous of this session, and asserting (again) that the brothers are covering for one another.

Logan had sought to shift the focus: "Greg. Help yourself out a little, all right? Give us some TRUTH here." At this attempt to divide, the elder brother blew up: "*You guys seriously think we'd kill our own mother?!?* You don't get anything." Nick means that the cops will not "get anything" — additional details — from HIM.

But they do, from the second session with the Jarmons' Housekeeper...

MARGARET LANGDON: Mr. Jarmon...had a short fuse. Mrs. Jarmon kept reminding them they were only children.

GREEVEY: Nick get the worst of it?

LANGDON: Well you must understand: He WAS the first child...

LOGAN: We have to know: Did he beat his kid or not?

After a four-second pause, and with wavering voice: "Almost every day."

LANGDON: He'd use whatever was at hand. A belt, a tennis racket. One time, he used a wooden coat hanger.

GREEVEY: Nobody ever stopped him?

LANGDON: Mrs. Jarmon was terrified of him. It went on for YEARS. Finally, when Nick was 16, he hit him back. Mr. Jarmon never raised a hand to him after that.

GREEVEY: Except when Nick broke his jaw.

LANGDON: No. That was because of Gregory.

GREEVEY: Greg punched his father?

LANGDON: No. Mr. Jarmon was beating Gregory with a cane. Nick had to put a stop to it. And so he hit him.

End of a brief musical backdrop, and the informal testimony of a very sad housekeeper, played convincingly by [FRANCES STERNHAGEN](#) — still, by the way, with us in her nineties, and with eight videos and 46 photos [on the IMDB site](#).

Text is no substitute for seeing or listening. But it's a tool for grasping how an outstanding episode was built, and why it "works." These write-ups stick with the first half. You can still "enjoy" the rest — while seeing exactly how it was set up.

And, while we're taking this Intermission, two more points not related to the episode's events. (1) The episode's title is identical to the name of a book from nine years prior — "a novel by Singaporean writer [Catherine Lim](#), first published in 1982 by Times Edition Pte Ltd." (Thank you, Wikipedia.)

And (2) "serpent's tooth," as a metaphor, goes back to Shakespeare's *King Lear*:
"Sharper than a serpent's tooth / It is to have a thankless child!"

"What's the Story These Days with Dead People's Mail?"

Max and Mike's second visit to the crime scene takes up nearly two minutes of the episode. They arrive to find the carpets being scoured. The cleaner has no name. His IMDB credit is "Carpetman" (played by [ANTHONY ALESSANDRO](#)).

It bothers Max to see a crime scene being altered so fast. Carpetman tells the detectives that Greg hired him. "I think they're putting the place up for sale." This necessitates an immediate walk-around. Who knows what useful artifacts, any time now, will be trashed or put in a box? And why try to sell the house so quickly? "Bad memories," says Logan. "Or bad consciences," counters Greevey.

Greevey wants to arrest one or both boys. Logan can't believe they'd kill a mother the Housekeeper confirms was so loyal to both. The back and forth between the two cops is very good. Tension between the good guys...almost always helps a script.

At the 22nd minute they enter Karl Jarmon's home office. GREEVEY: "What's the story these days with dead people's mail?" LOGAN [after pausing]: "If it's useful, it's admissible — or maybe it's not." They are looking for...something that will justify finding it. Tidbits: The lease payment for Mr. Jarmon's Rolls-Royce is \$2,300 a month; the bill from an upscale clothier is \$1,200, "for three pairs of shoes."

Then comes a mild tantalizer: "Personal Progress Report" from the Dean of Communication Arts" at the college Greg Jarmon attends. "Since when do college deans write parents about their kids' grades?" Luckily, it's a local college...

The Dean is played by [JOHN CHRISTY EWING](#). He says Karl Jarmon was "a significant contributor," because he attended as a young man. "That rates a plaque and a tax-deduction, not surveillance reports," replies the sagaciously sardonic Logan.

Why those customized progress reports to the dad? Repeating the question unlocks the vault: "He was out of control," the Dean says after exhaling. "He dragged Greg in here last November, ranting at the top of his lungs — about his grades." Karl Jarmon "even slapped him, in front of me."

How did Greg take it? "He took it," replied the Dean. "He was too terrified not to." Now we hear the motivator: The Dean thought the evaluations might get Jarmon Sr. to "ease off" the "poor kid." Believable enough. And it's coming from a person who is unlikely to have a financial or psychological reason to slant information.

Though sad at a human level, Karl Jarmon's violence *still* doesn't make Greevey feel bad for the boys. But recollections, from TWO witnesses now, do confirm a years-long rift between them and their father that might've led to retaliatory violence.

We're nearing the close of Minute 24. [MICHAEL MORIARTY](#) materializes as Assistant D.A. Ben Stone. He'll have to lead any prosecution. Stone sums up the case against the brothers. "He's convinced," Cragen says, sounding relieved. And so, to Greevey and Logan: "Go get 'em." They find Nick and Gregg playing squash. Greevey tells them: "You're under arrest for the murder of Evelyn and Karl Jarmon."

Logan remains the holdout. He tried to sow doubts in his partner. Also tried to slow Moriarity down. Now? Why not *review the tape* of Greg Jarmon's 911 call?

"Is there something personal here?," Ben Stone asks. "Yeah," Logan shoots back: "I *personally* don't like to see to innocent kids getting 20 [years] to life." It's also tactically wise: How Greg sounded on that call might help *the defense* raise doubts among the jurors. Doubts like Logan's, although he had them from the start.

So we get to hear Greg Jarmon's 911 call. Afterwards, Logan quietly says: "You ask me? NOBODY's that good an actor." Greevey's sigh signals deflation. "Great," says Stone in exasperation. "So, according to you two, we NOW [pause] have no suspects." *Really* great, since the arrest and charges have already taken place.

Time for Adam Schiff ([STEVEN HILL](#)), Ben Stone's superior, to earn his pay as D.A. He sets forth a high-level tactic, aimed at the Jarmon Brothers' defense team. And it's the first time the gap between Mike and Max is transcended...

Schiff reasons like Ben Stone's courtroom foes. They will need "another suspect" to spotlight. Someone who can incline the Jury to "acquit on reasonable doubt." "Don't get outflanked," insists Schiff with quiet authority. "Clear Petrovich, so they can't use him against you." Fascinating pivot by the District Attorney: Although it begins as an insurance policy, it almost creates a new episode...

Except for Logan, neither the cops nor the lawyers believe the Jarmon Boys. But Logan showed them how much the Defense will have to work with. So, as Minute 28 begins, he and Greevey have to CLEAR the dead man's business partner. Watching them try to do that will be easier for you after Page 5's Brighton Beach backdrop...

Honorable Mentions plus Three Viewing Options

Watch on [YouTube](#) using **v=xz6ZaBTIV18** in the SEARCH box

<https://tv.apple.com/ca/episode/the-serpents-tooth/umc.cmc.1gakoshgsndckz1bngnlvzt3k>

[Buy Season One](#) of LAW & ORDER (as released in 2013)

Viewers didn't see the names of this superb script's WRITERS until the start of the 7th minute; that's the furthest into any episode I can recall. But describing their careers *here* won't erase that slight, and it was hard to find a good spot earlier. Bottom line: Having already spent 3,900 words on just half the episode, I'll end this way: "The Serpent's Tooth" was written by [I.C. RAPAPORT](#) and [JOSHUA M. STERN](#).

Gem #38 — "The Seaside Sabbatical" — July 7, 1951

From [The New Adventures of Philip Marlowe](#) (CBS Radio, 1948-51)

This episode is a fog-bound non-comedy of errors. It features *double* the mistaken identification, and a misuse of "sabbatical." Although a subtle innovation along with those foggy atmospherics helped make it a Gem, the episode has two real flaws.

But, because this is a positive publication, it's better to start with the innovation...

As a mid-20th-century radio sleuth, Philip Marlowe was rarely more than a step behind the vital clue or move. In THIS outlier of a story, the normally clear-eyed and fast-acting protagonist is disoriented by the "danger" of wrong assumptions.

As "The Seaside Sabbatical" rolls out, piece by perplexing piece, even the keenest listener will be led astray — right along with the main character. We are along for the ride, and at times it feels like going in circles. Why is that a positive? Because life can be like that sometimes, even if you're not a detective. And, until the real situation clarifies itself, this tough guy will be too confused to be compelling.

Because Marlowe hasn't had "media immediacy" since a [mid-1980s HBO series](#), and it's his first time in this publication, it seems wise to review the man's history.

Marlowe was introduced to the world by crime novelist [RAYMOND CHANDLER](#) (1888-1959) in his 1939 book [The Big Sleep](#). And the detective's opening *radio* appearance took place on June 11, 1945, in The LUX RADIO THEATER version of *Murder, My Sweet*. [DICK POWELL](#) (1904-63) played Marlowe and [CLAIRE TREVOR](#) (1910-2000) served as *both* of the critical female characters.

On June 17, 1948, NBC Radio launched "Adventures" as a Summer Replacement series. [VAN HEFLIN](#) (1908-71) carried the lead role through Labor Day. Mr. Chandler had nothing to do with this production and was reportedly glad for his distance.

As Summer gave way to Fall, CBS Radio had better luck, in addition to winning some positive musings from Chandler. Returning on September 26, 1948, this time with

Gerald Mohr as Marlowe, "The New Adventures" ran with plenty of energy for two years, and came back as reruns during the Summer of '51.

Most descriptions of Marlowe stress one adjective: Hard-Boiled. But that doesn't mean this detective was a bad egg, or a cracked one, ethically speaking.

Nothing I can write about him here isn't already on several websites. But I do have something not in those accounts. Though not original with me, it's somewhat more practical: An unusual tribute to the independent character of the character.

Avoiding "the Resentment of the Underappreciated Talent"

Philip Marlowe was the complete lone wolf. No secretary, no partner, no acolytes, no media friends, and not even a loyal nephew. Which makes it surprising to find this free-lancer being offered as a role model *for white-collar professionals*.

Who would make so bold a leap? Business writer, and later author and History Professor, [AMITY SHLAES](#). Interacting with an agenda-driven political realm, I have used her February 4, 2002, *Financial Times* column as a centering force...

In that column, she contended that Marlowe would never have gone along with late-'90s dot-com flim-flam and its "pay to say it's okay" accountancy gigs.

From *The Big Sleep*, Shlaes discerned Marlowe's "**three-stage process of client-management.**" FIRST, "establish your fee. Make it standard. That is vital because it helps you to keep your independence." Not playing favorites is critical, "especially if you are in a self-regulated field, such as accountancy."

The wrongness, and stupidity, of putting your reputation at risk in exchange for a big fee, is the kind of gut knowledge that every professional should carry around in his or her head... When something is right by the books, but wrong by the nose, you have to trust the nose.

SECOND, "beware your own greed." It could've tubed him. "Life has not treated Marlowe the way he deserves. He has a small office, no secretary, and an unhealthy fondness for cigarettes and double scotches."

Accordingly, this man "nurses that most treacherous of resentments, the resentment of the underappreciated talent." It's an ailment that — *gasp* — also affects writers. And Shlaes conveys it with one perfect sentence: "What a life that talent could live if only it were paid what it deserved!" Having such a thought grind away is an occupational hazard that can become PRE-occupational. Or post-firing.

THIRD, "when someone wants to make you a generous payment," get a complete

answer on Why and What For. "Now you offer me 15 grand. That makes me a big shot," Marlowe admits to Vivian Regan on her (spelled correctly) chaise lounge.

But "Marlowe is man enough to put down his cigarette and ask: *What are you offering it to me for?* And to collect his hat and walk out on [this temptress in] oyster-colored pajamas." He'll do the same with Vivian's sister Carmen.

This timeless Shlaes column is entitled "An Offer Enron's Advisers Could Have Refused." Thanks to white-collar white-washers validating Enron's cooking of the books, the company was [set up for destruction in slow motion](#). Looks like Shlaes the blue-chip biz essayist got her money's worth from detective novels...

"[W]hen a too-luscious offer materializes," she counsels, we can "strive to do better, just like [certain] bottom-feeders in the world of the 1930s detective." She termed that world "a 'self-regulating' place if there ever was one."

"Self-regulating" — a key term. From economists. Of course, they've got their own problems, and in any case I don't believe they ever face audits. Or conduct them.

In the previous issue (#11) of GEMS, uploaded June 2023...

["The Platinum Highway"](#) from [TARGET: THE CORRUPTORS](#)

The NBC "Made for TV" movie that set the stage for COLUMBO and a 1975 5-O masterpiece titled ["Honor Is An Unmarked Grave"](#)

Intercepted by the Wrong Member of the Household

"The wire in my hand said it all," Marlowe tells us. **"Need your help. Urgent. Meet me at 8:30 tonight, Ship's Galley Cafe, Long Beach."** The signer: Dale Higgins. Not nearly "all." Many unknowns there, including the signer's gender.

Call it a challenge, call it money, call it a chance for a Shore dinner, call it anything ya like — but 8:15 found me pulling into a parking lot on Ocean Boulevard, not far from the Amusement Pier.

Note the water references. Doubly skilled use of language: Clever as well as practical, given that the listener needs to be oriented fast. (Remember, no visuals.)

Marlowe spots Red, a kid who parks vehicles at the Ship's Galley. He's also a wit: "What brings YOU to the *capital* of Iowa?" And Marlowe is a two-wit player. "My AIM is getting bad, Red. I thought I'd come down to the pike and try for my limit at a shooting gallery... Greatest practice in the world." Red parks the car.

The night was muggy and close. Ya wore it like an extra coat. And the Ocean breeze I'd anticipated had *retired* in favor of alternate waves of FOG that rolled in — engulfed you for a moment, and then suddenly [pause] rolled out again.

Like an extra coat. Raymond Chandler's novels were even richer with analogies.

In narrator mode, Marlowe calls the "hot little rooms" of The Ship's Galley a poor place for "anyone in need of urgent help to discuss his problems." But the blue neon lights at least made it easy to find, and the action has to start somewhere.

"Are you Philip Marlowe, by any chance?... I'm Higgins." Dodging the noise, the two men adjourn to the beach. The resulting exchange takes a minute and a half...

Talk about a flat opener! No violence, no big event, and no alluring female. Just a middle-aged man speaking slowly. "The truth is, I was a little *quick* sending that wire." The urgent situation cited in the message has been resolved.

But he'll cover time and travel. Marlowe's "customary fee" is \$25 per day plus expenses. Here, the latter come to "7 cents a mile for 23 miles and" — he laughs — "35 cents for parking my car." The man asks if cash is alright. "Always has been."

The non-client apologizes a second time. Marlowe remains upbeat: "Don't WORRY about it, Higgins; anybody can change his mind." At Minute 4:25, they part.

Fewer than 10 seconds of radio time pass. A girl is yelling to Marlowe. The just-departed "Higgins" knows this girl; she is scared to death of him, and he is tracking her movements. But he decides not to get between the girl and Marlowe...

I turned in the direction of her voice. But the fog has a cute way of diffusing sound as well as sight. And I realized I wasn't closing in on anything — that the fog was circling ME and I was circling IT.

Marlowe then stops moving... No more shouts. "Somewhere along the fog-swept beach, a girl had called my name. And nobody knew I was in Long Beach except Red at the parking lot — and Dale Higgins. Yeah, the choice was obvious." Ask Red.

Footsteps Detected. Probably the Girl's. Or Maybe Not...

Yep, the mystery female had asked Red which direction Marlowe was headed. He told her. (Why not?) "Now tell me who she IS," Marlowe replies. His intensity makes Red nervous. He also wonders why Marlowe doesn't know. Red doesn't either. He feels as if he failed his older friend. Marlowe laughs it off.

But this un-hired detective isn't ready to drive back to Los Angeles...

Instead, spend a little time at the Quick-Quack shooting gallery, where "everything that was young and pretty along the Pike was hanging on to a Sailor's arm."

He spots "a frightened fawn of a thing who caught my eye as if we were the only two on the Pike." He follows her, she picks up her pace, then breaks into a run and darts into an alley. He corners her. She is terrified. Fearful of being followed.

She had watched Marlowe "meet him." Wants to know what they discussed. Then she says: "I'll kill you, you know; if you're with him, I'll kill you. I've got to before someone kills me." "Him"? She pulls back when he reaches out to reassure.

Go get your car, she says, "and don't let Val see you now." "Val?" No answer. The script is playing this micro-mystery to the max. We're only into the 7th minute.

The girl says she'll meet him, in his car, at 7th and Anaheim. Is that within walking distance? Seems so, because SHE doesn't have a vehicle. But her parting words — uttered while running away — spill some of the beans: "*I'm Dale Higgins.*"

Brief horn crescendo, and it's like a starting pistol, except that the intent here is to *pause* the action. "It was a study in contrasts all the way," says Mohr as narrator...

A dinnin' kaleidoscope of rainbow pier against the lonely sound of a foghorn. The gray feel of fog and the dank gray black of the warehouse district at 7th and Anaheim. An urgent wire signed "Dale Higgins" — *heh* [mild but doubting grunt] — and a guy who *called himself Higgins*. Husband? Lover? What? Well, here we go again, Marlowe.

"I parked the car and waited." His sense of time dimmed, "but it was long enough for me to stretch my legs out along the car seat, lean my head back against the door, and feel the [pause] *damp* touch of *fog* sweep against my face from an open window." Approaching footsteps are heard — could be the girl's. Or not.

Suddenly Marlowe is whacked. Whacked? Actually, it sounds awfully weak. Like an amplified finger-snap. With Marlowe out cold, this episode is one-third over...

And no part of it resembles a "sabbatical." In fact, the word will fit **ONLY** in the context of a helpful Catholic Priest who emerges 11 minutes later.

So...what has the listener got? Certainly something that matters to the sponsors: Enough curiosity to sit through the commercial. In my version of the mp3 file, it's a half-minute plug for U.S. Savings Bonds as the second year of the Korean War begins. Then what? A hard to swallow process will relocate the confusion.

Page 12 mentioned two sizeable problems with this particular Gem...

- Nearly all of what is represented could be believed, if the false signals and actual events had been given 48 minutes rather than 24. (Wait till you see what still has to be resolved during the final 7.) Too much event-compression risks short-circuiting the audience's comprehension.
- Second is this next scene shift. Having taken a blow, Marlowe is out SO cold he awakens in a big house. He perceives "the ceiling, the walls, and one corner of an expensively furnished room..." But how do you move a fellow around in his vehicle, drive both to this place, and then get him inside? So much physical movement...*without* the victim coming to?

In any case, it's clear why this story desperately needed fog! Then again, 70 years ago, who had ways to analyze dramatic performances on the radio? The committed listener could not pause the action, let alone replay a key scene. Hmmm...

Was that bad? Maybe not. Radio dramas delivered a social dividend: Complex sequences were conveyed briskly without causing mental chaos. Which meant that media consumers developed focus. What reinforces attention-span today?

Lesson for Methodical Writers: From event to event, and scene to scene, whether it's fiction or real-world analysis, you'll need to carry your audience with an adroit mixture of urgency and/or clarity on one side, along with a new question or danger opening up on the other. And *not* do it with gimmicks or impossibilities.

Since this is hard to do, why not study places where they did it? For my money, great episodes are a livelier locus for such "research" than literary manuals.

"Marie" is Definitely a Higgins, but "Val" is Val Nichols

The room is too dark for Marlowe to see a clock. But a "kind, motherly face" is at his bedside. She is "Mrs. Higgins." Even when dazed, Marlowe's wit is not dulled. He inquires: "Is everybody in Long Beach named Higgins?"

Then comes another startler: "We're AWFULLY sorry, Mr. Marlowe. I know when Dale realizes what she's done, she'll be sorry too." Dale?!? She "beaned me?" Apparently, he's with the mother of an out-of-control teen who is "often violent."

He absorbs this news without scoffing; after all, the girl *did* threaten to kill him. "We'll pay whatever damages there are, of course." So unthreaded is Marlowe from the night's events that he's half-believing what they say about his attacker.

The doubts resurge upon realizing that the kindly Mrs. Higgins has locked him in. Then a doorknob on the OTHER side of the room turns. We're only at Minute 11:20. "My little frightened fawn was back," he tells us, "and my head hurt."

Dale Higgins wants to know: "Did they hurt you?" Set aside "them"; he'd like to know if SHE did the hurting. He asks how much she weighs. Answer: 105 pounds. Trademark drollness is back: "You know a romance with you would be rough?"

"[W]ere it not for a surprise bout of illness, Gerald Mohr would have become 'Dr. Gerald Mohr' — he was a Columbia University medical student who found himself felled by an attack of appendicitis. Mohr was recuperating when one of his fellow patients, who was in the radio business, liked Gerald's pleasing baritone voice and suggested he would be ideal for radio [where ultimately] he logged... nearly 4,000 on-the-air performances... Mohr also displayed versatility as a comic performer [and had roles in the films] *Lady of Burlesque*, *Gilda*, *Two Guys from Texas*, *Hunt the Man Down*, *Sirocco*, *Detective Story*, *The Sniper*, *The Ring*, and *Money from Home*."

That's from a concise bio by blogger **Ivan G. Shreve Jr.**, posted on June 11th, 2012, and available early in 2023 — but gone six months later.



Back in her mom's house, and feeling anything but safe, Marlowe's agile "fawn" resumes her ocean-side report: *Val and Marie are going to kill me*. This is the first time anything sinister is referenced, but at least the names are about to be defined. Who in blazes is "Val"? "You met Val last night! At the Ship's Galley. You TALKED to him. And Marie was just here." Marlowe's bafflement is palpable, and we listeners can easily identify with it. But it strikes the rattled girl as a trap. She breaks down: "Don't try to confuse me, you're all I have... If you won't help me, then..."

IN SUM: "Marie" is definitely a Higgins, but "Val" is Val Nichols, "a friend of Marie's." And the "motherly" Marie is actually the STEP-mother of Dale.

Marlowe is getting the picture — stumblingly — as he tries to keep us listeners from sprawling onto the pavement. Seems that Dale ran away, or was relocated somewhere, after her father died. How long of an absence? Not reported.

When she returned, very recently — on a ship called *The Orange Coast* — Val had taken over the household. The Road to Clarity then jack-knifes again. Val Nichols opens the door and makes inquiries in an even more eel-like manner. "You could use a little rest yourself, my dear." No, Dale protests, "Mr. Marlowe likes me."

Marlowe has moved on the who, but he STILL doesn't know what from why. Dale insists on staying but Marlowe weakly reinforces Nichols. "You're not bothering [me] at all, Honey, but maybe it WOULD be better if ya come back a little later."

Nichols wants to escort her out. "Never mind, Val," Dale says, still jittery but not quite angry. "I came in alone, you know — I can find my way out." Exit Dale. "She's sweet," Marlowe observes to this Val character. "She's sick," he counters blandly. "A very sick young lady, Marlowe..." According to Nichols, the girl imagined everything, *including* running away from home and returning on a ship.

"She DID send me the wire, though," he asks without a question mark. OH YES, confirms Nichols. She pulled that stunt during "one of her spells." And how did he know the contents of what the girl relayed to Marlowe? "The switchboard has its instructions" and they reported the wired plea "to Mrs. Higgins" and him.

"So we thought it best if *I* met you and..." "Called me off," he finishes Nichols' thought. Right. A keen listener might note that Val Nichols never takes responsibility for lying to Marlowe, the night before, about his being named Higgins.

But the con job seems to hold. Marlowe asks: "She doesn't know she *hit* me, does she?" No idea, says Val. Marlowe finally chooses sleep. He won't see Dale Higgins again in this house, despite general agreement about a morning chat being okay.

After some pleasantries with Val and Marie, Marlowe drives away from their residence, early in the afternoon after a bewildering night. It's Minute 17:40.

In the seven remaining minutes, two more characters will be introduced. Having gotten this far, using text, you can *hear* how "Seaside" resolves its chaos...

<https://www.oldtimeradiodownloads.com/crime/adventures-of-philip-marlowe-the/the-seaside-sabbatical-1951-07-07>

Philip Marlowe could *never* have solved this one on his own. Even so, when it comes to the critical events — whether years past or menacingly immediate — the seven final minutes, not covered here, really needed to be 17, if not 27.

The fog and mist ... and Marlowe's original belief that the message's sender is the one showing up only to shut down the inquiry ... and needing a new character to revive his edge while *worsening* the confusion... Such a progression suspends the un-reality of the good detective being a reliable Superman. *Different* — and...

"Seaside Sabbatical" can induce the reasonably perceptive individual to inquire beyond all-purpose explanations. Especially ones from calm types filling the blanks strangely. In real life, various sequences seem too weird to be...what they seem.

Gem #39 — "[The Friendly Gesture](#)" — April 16, 1961

From THE ASPHALT JUNGLE (ABC-TV, April-September '61)

"The Asphalt Jungle" has paved media history four times: As a book, as a landmark movie, as this short-lived TV series, and in the form of a Generation-X rock group.

Rock isn't the type of "performance art" covered here; we don't have space to discuss the book; and the movie is saluted in the picture caption top of Page 29. To keep this issue under 11,500 words, I'll jump right into the episode...

"Gesture" as a script becomes four conflicts personified pervasively. Viewers absorb enough back & forth to appreciate — as in: Fully comprehend — all of the four. The first three run through the entire episode...

(1) Because of personal sentiment and a flukish bust, a senior cop begins twisting official procedure to help a long-time friend. Carrying \$37,000 in cash, the friend was "flushed" from a hiding spot next to the apartment. He insists he never made it inside. And the cash? Meant to prove liquidity for a boring business deal.

(2) The cop is acting on loyalty and sentiment. Yet we see him confront his own doubts, and professional training, again and again. In fact, you could say that the *worst* conflict is taking part *inside* this one individual. In turn, he is confronted by his boss, who has a related but different struggle: Fending off the Acting D.A.

(3) Reporter Ira Fallin writes about Relationship #1 in a manner that enflames all three of the individuals cited in #2. Which generates rare agreement among just about everyone at Police Headquarters: This front-page PR mess is intolerable.

(4) Fallin is therefore the fourth Tension generator. Obnoxious in person and incendiary in print (during this and a few other ASPHALT episodes), it's Fallin versus those who know and trust the detective despite his erratic conduct.

Here's the scene that comes right after the bust, but before the front-page story hits. It's pre-media, meaning an awkward situation is still an internal matter...

COMMISSIONER MATT GOWER: Who's Lou Gordon?

CAPTAIN GUS HONOCHEK: I've known him nearly 20 years — since before the War.

GOWER: And — ?

HONOCHEK: "And" nothing; he's a friend, that's all.

GOWER: How close? [Pause] Uh, do you see a lot of him?

HONOCHEK [in a mild tone, not sounding defensive]: I'm over at his house once or twice a month. We have dinner, play Hearts; he's got a nice kid [and] his wife Helen's a lovely girl.

GOWER: He's got a RECORD.

HONOCHEK: [End of mildness] *One rap*.

GOWER: One or 10, what's the difference? His name is on the Yellow SHEET [throwing down the page].

HONOCHEK: It was 15 years ago, Matt, when he got outta Service! Some rent-control dodge he got nailed for; I helped him with his probation.

GOWER: Just like you're helping' him *now*.

HONOCHEK: [Standing up abruptly] Matt, he's straightened out *all the WAY*. He was a frightened KID then. He figured he'd lost five years in the War [pause]. He's in the importing business now — fancy foreign stuff. He's doing VERY well.

GOWER: Gus, keep your nose outta this.

HONOCHEK: Matt, he said he wasn't mixed up in this. I *believe* him.

GOWER: [Pregnant pause] Do ya?

HONOCHEK: He's a *friend* of mine.

GOWER: Gus, we all have our friends, but in a situation like this we're not *supposed* to have 'em.

Now come two footnotes that aren't. If they were, you might miss them...

- ❖ GEMS write-ups give extra space to characters, including ones who aren't regulars: Extensive text showing humans making or defending tough choices. Mere opinion and summary (that's all most "reviews" are) can't bring those individuals to life. And the exchanges between Gower and Honocek, and then a prosecutor, are carried out brilliantly.
- ❖ Part of that requires: Articulating the back and forth loudly, without stepping on each other's lines. This is **a split-second pacing skill** taken for granted by everyone, except those who had to learn it. When goofs occur? Retakes plus editors. Either way, the viewer does *not* have to listen to individuals talk over each other. And that's a blessing that no mobile phone or digital gizmo will ever bring to everyday analog life.

The action shifts when the Assistant District Attorney enters Gower's office. "Well, we made it," he says, sounding euphoric. He and a few others stayed at the scene of the bust searching for what the case needed. "This'll send Dunn up COLD."

And why did they raid? Commissioner Gower got a tip from an ultra-jittery source. Their meeting was actually the episode's opening scene, ahead of the theme music. But, despite reversing the events in this write-up, I'll keep using the present tense. It's a more bracing way to recount video scenes in a written analysis.

Exactly What Was Gus Honocek's Friend "Mixed Up" In?

The tipster is **Al Stehl**, played by the ultra-versatile DABBS GREER (see top of Page 28). He wanted Gower to meet up with him at a club. It's one that features sultry dancers. In fact, this episode began with close-ups. Smooth, not frantic.

Maybe this isn't QUITE a "strip" club. But, in those days, prime-time TV knew how to imply realities without being *too* realistic. In any case, the *tipster* is the one who is lacking in coordination. "The stuff may be at his place now," Stehl tells Gower in a tone of distracted hyperness. The word is "he's gonna shove it fast."

"Shove" what? A massive stash of stolen travelers' checks. And the person hosting the meeting is Eric Dunn, a known fence. "Fencing" isn't sword-play. Here it means receiving and then selling off stolen property, in ways and chunks meant to escape tracing by the authorities. And Matt Gower has long wanted to nail Eric Dunn.

So he instructs Gus Honocek to lead three colleagues to Dunn's apartment. They get the desk clerk to turn off the AC, which should trick Dunn into phoning down a complaint. Dunn is also friendly with the clerk. He makes the call. The clerk says he's sending a technician right up. That'll get one or two officers in the door before any of the suspects can pull out their own firearm and do something crazy.

Eric Dunn ([HENRY BECKMAN](#)) makes up for his unimpressive height with an aura of almost military command. *Where's your warrant?* Yep, they have one for him; it was obtained by interrupting a Judge's dinner. Next, Dunn demands to know the charge. "Vagrancy." What?!? *This is HIS apartment.*

But Dunn has these three guests. Though Gower's informant called them "torpedoes," the rest of the episode suggests they are less violent than professional hit men. In any case, they're bit players in this script. As for "vagrancy," it's somehow included in the offense of "consorting with known criminals."

Here in Dunn's apartment, the Assistant D.A. and Gus Honocek make a perfect crime-fighting duo. Their collaboration will be history within a couple of hours.

Eric Dunn, three shady discussants, and...**Lou Gordon**. He is played by the veteran conniver [MILTON SELZER](#) (1918-2006), who 12 years later will have a very similar role in the *Hawaii Five-O* episode "Percentage" (Gem #2, [Issue Zero](#)). Naturally, Honocek is stunned to see Gordon. Sergeant Danny Keller "flushed him right outside in a service closet." The episode's defining struggle is underway.



ARCH JOHNSON (1922-97) "was a regular on the 1961 series [The Asphalt Jungle](#) as police Captain Gus Honocek [as well as] on the 1960-1961 comedy series *Peter Loves Mary* [and] the 1965-1966 series [Camp Runamuck](#) as Commander Wivenhoe... He made five appearances on [Perry Mason](#)...four appearances on *Daniel Boone* and *Gunsmoke*, five on *Bewitched*, four on [The F.B.I.](#), and scores of others on many other television offerings, including *The Twilight Zone*, *Decoy*, *Johnny Ringo*, *Hennesey*, *Gunsmoke*, *Bat Masterson*, *The Roaring 20s*, *Lawman*, *Going My Way*, *Mr. Novak*, and *Empire* and its successor series, *Redigo*, both with Richard Egan... In 1973, Johnson played the part of Combs in the movie *The Sting*. Later in life, Johnson tutored literacy programs in Westover, Maryland. He also worked with an Alternatives to Violence program with the Religious Society of Friends" [Source: Wikipedia].

Honocek lets his colleagues tend to procedural tasks and takes Lou Gordon into another room. What will Gordon say about why he came to see Eric Dunn?

He happens to own a flock of warehouses [and] I've been trying to buy one for MONTHS. Business has been good, you know that — and I'm short of space. Today, he calls me and tells me he's sure we can come to a figure agreement; only he wants CASH.

He never joined the meeting, Lou tells his old friend, and had no idea anyone else would be conferring with Dunn. What about Dunn trying to unload hot financial assets? Gordon says he knows *nothing* about missing travelers' checks. Then why show up with \$37,000 in mostly 500-dollar bills? It was meant to prove solvency, comes the answer: To set the stage for buying a warehouse.

In sum: Reasonable objective, horrible timing. Then, when he saw cops carrying out the raid, Lou Gordon tried to dodge *everyone* — by hiding in the service closet.

"You're the same *meathead* you were 15 years ago," Gus tells Lou, in exasperation but not anger. "You got in trouble [back] then because of the 'friends' you made."

Not fair, Lou protests. Had he known the other three were there, he'd never have shown up. His business is going so well he needs more space. *From a guy like Dunn?* Lou's an IMPORTER, and importers deal with various types if things get tight.

Gordon is wily enough to ask Honocek to stop him from being hauled in. Though Honocek is ziz-zagging, he isn't THAT disoriented. From the start, though, he looks for ways to treat Gordon differently from the other four. Now, in this group of five, Lou Gordon is going to be charged with "vagrancy." He reacts with horror.

It's no big deal going to the station with the others, Honocek says: "Lou, you'll get bail almost automatically; so will all the rest of 'em." With all those 500-dollars bills on him, Lou Gordon isn't so dumb as to claim he can't afford bail. Still, he balks.

"You just pay him some money," Honocek repeats in a stable tone. "He puts up the bond." Bail-bondsman?!? Lou Gordon isn't some lowlife, *and he doesn't even KNOW any such operative*. "All right," Gus Honocek replies: "I'll call one for ya."

That call becomes the juicy deed that will clinch a reporter's accusatory theme.

"I've Been Clean Since Then. You Can Look it Up"

Of all the people we see in Dunn's apartment this long evening, Gus Honocek appeared to be the least agitated. Sometimes.

Actually, not until the third viewing did I appreciate how much this long-serving cop wades in and then recoils: He'll nearly condemn his old friend, but for stupidity more than venality. Then mildness and sympathy take over ... followed by incredulity ... and around the emotional circle again. Maybe it sounds familiar?

If you encountered a longtime friend in a radioactive ethical setting, with several witnesses, and a massive pile of cash on him, which "tape" would *you* play? Probably both, or all three — and almost at the same time. (People could do that back then, you know, without a smart-phone. Without even a Walkman...)

Must be after Midnight by now. They're at the station. Gordon is still pressing the HELP button in a not too blatant way: "I'm worried sick about Helen, she doesn't know where I am." Calm down, replies Honocek; he has already called Lou's wife.

Up to now, the "help" has been delivered. Gordon keeps sounding bewildered...

For the first time, the guy's innocent-bystander mode exasperates Honocek: "Those characters' records are so long they've been printed and BOUND — everything from narcotics to grand theft, including suspected murder. And...Dunn didn't tell you he was expecting those guys??" Again: Lack of info, unlucky timing, etc.

Officers kept searching Dunn's place. As noted, they turn up proof that the tip and the bust were justified. POSSESSION of stolen goods on a grand-theft scale is in the bag: After all, it's Dunn's apartment, "leased in his own *name*," inside a safe "built in his bathroom wall." (Did you ever hear about a safe in *that* location?)

In the safe: Three hundred thousand dollars worth of unsigned traveler's checks. Yes, indeed: *This'll send Dunn up COLD*. Granted, \$200,000 of that half-million dollar heist is still missing. But the Assistant D.A.'s euphoria is justified.

Assistant District Attorney Lalley (no first name) is played convincingly — plenty of nervous energy that isn't fear — by [BERNARD KATES](#). We rejoin him, Honocek and Gower in the latter's office. Yes, Grand Theft; it looks like Dunn is done for.

How to handle the others? Lalley says he's going to "work on a conspiracy label" for Dunn's visitors. Including Lou Gordon? Sure. Gordon was very near the parley, carrying big money, and acting to dodge police. Being stuffed with cash indicates a readiness to buy a whole lot of *something* outside of normal channels.

"There's no doubt he came there to buy unsigned traveler's checks," Lalley insists. But he wasn't in the room dickering. "Maybe he got wind we we're raiding [or] maybe they couldn't come to terms. So, he walked out. Can anyone *doubt* it?"

Honocek says HE might do some of that doubting. We see Commissioner Gower eyeing this exchange like a crossing guard watching two cars coming his way at a rising speed from different directions but in the same lane.

In a controlled manner, Gower and Lalley skirmish. Lalley then leaves the room, his buoyancy deflated by hearing Honocek's "doubts."

GOWER: You *gotta* stay out of it now, Gus. It's too big.

HONOCHEK: You mean [Lou's] in more *trouble* now than he was before, isn't that it? Matt, when my dad's business failed six years ago, I didn't have the dough to bail him out. Lou put up the money *just like* THAT. *No* questions asked; he never even mentioned it. My dad'd be in an old people's home if it wasn't for Lou, so how BIG can it be?

GOWER: Gus, this isn't a traffic violation, it's Grand THEFT — with the federal POLICE movin' in. And your friend's smack in the MIDDLE of it.

HONOCHEK: He told me he's clean. Now he may bull SOME people, Matt, but not me. NOT me.

GOWER: Look, STAY OUT OF IT. No ifs, ands or buts, *stay out of it*.

Lou Gordon's wife Helen is played by [MAXINE STUART](#) (1918-2013): "It's a wonderful feeling, Gus," she says in a breaking voice; "it's very important to both of us, to know that you're with us." Also downtown: A lawyer to advise the Gordons: It's [Ted Baxter](#), from (a decade later) *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Same deep voice.

Headquarters is Buzzing. Ira Fallon's Story Tops Page 1

Not clear whether the new day's paper is a morning or afternoon edition. And TV viewers in 1961, with affordable VCRs two decades away, would barely have been able to read the ALL-CAPS headline. The camera shows it very briefly. No matter. Someone in the Prop department still had to create a phony front page...

COP HELPS BAIL OUT PAL HE PINCHED

This sensational story from Ira Fallin ([TERRY BECKER](#)) will ruin the day for many. The most exposed are the Commissioner and the Department's chief prosecutor.

LALLEY: [Banging the table] I want him SUSPENDED — *taken off the job*.

MATT GOWER: Hold it Lalley, now just *simmer down*... What's the sum total of his OFFENSE? He called in a *bail*-bondsman.

LALLEY: "The sum total of his offense"?!? (A) He finds Gordon at Dunn's and *closets* himself with him for a while. (B) He calls in a bail-bondsman for him. (C) He also gives out statements to the press which indicate that HE believes that Gordon is being FRAMED or something. (D) It is possible he *also* called in an *attorney* for Gordon.

GOWER: Lalley — you can go on like that to the letter Q — but in my view there's no evidence of misconduct.

LALLEY: [Generating a loud and scornful scoff]

GOWER: Look, I'm solely responsible for every man in my Department, and I'll be responsible for Gus Honochek. He's been a FINE police officer for 15 years now.

LALLEY: "No evidence of misconduct," huh? He admits consorting with a man with a RECORD!

GOWER: [Finally yelling back] I KNOW what he admits and what he

doesn't admit! And...I'll be *responsible*. Lalley, you gotta *know* Gus. He's a loner, a bachelor, with a deep attachment for his friends.

LALLEY: [The rage is profound, and the acting solid] I am not interested in his PSYCHOLOGY!

GOWER: Well *I* am, it's my job, I gotta be. Policemen aren't machines, much as people *think* they are.

LALLEY: But Matt!

GOWER: Well I'm *not gonna get into that* with ya. I'm simply telling ya I will *not* suspend Gus Honocek. Now if you're not satisfied with that, go on upstairs with it [and make your case to the Mayor].

The D.A. keeps eye contact while taking six seconds to determine whether he and Gower are both spent. Four more seconds and he is gone from Gower's office.

We have adapted to the rattled but didactic Gordon ... met his loyal wife ... ridden the Honocek see-saw as he risks sawing off his own tree limb ... and been ringside for intensely substantive clashes between the Commissioner and the D.A. — and "The Friendly Gesture" isn't even halfway complete.

Page 22 referred to four roiling relationships. By way of Summary plus an Add...

- Gus Honocek and Lou Gordon;
- Honocek and Matt Gower;
- Gower and Lalley (given that Lalley is above Honocek and therefore Gower's equal, yet not able to overrule him on Honocek); and
- Ira Fallin, who tenses up nearly everyone at Police Headquarters, including the prosecutors doing their best to hide from him.

A fifth tension-generator is Gordon versus the other four suspects. This one is implied but not personified. Those four are in a position to unravel Gordon's account.

GEMS write-ups depend on evocative dialogue. Not me talking to you, or (far worse) me talking to myself. Instead, what a writer or editor can learn from primary actors communicating with one another, as they widen tensions on the way to crossing the chasm — allowing the episode to end on a note of non-despair.

Appreciate how the first half makes possible a believable, but hardly predictable, second half. Reading these "set-up" moves by a sparkling television or radio script, AHEAD of the actual viewing or listening, lets you see a structure taking shape.

If and when you view the Gem, you can approach it with specific expectations. **Characters**, **dialogue** and **scenes** have been floodlighted. And the SECOND half — where each loose end gets clipped, tied, or fried — will *still* surprise. Because...

These analyses say little about the second half. I make an exception here, in part to acknowledge a man — [WILLIAM "DABBS" GREER](#) — who appeared in over 600 TV episodes. In "Gesture," he is Al Stehl, set up for a nasty end. But this frazzled informant is the sole fatality, which makes *this* crime episode relatively tame.

It began with LEON TOKATYAN (1925-97). Web info on him is sparse. IMDB dot-com says Mr. Tokatyan "was a writer and producer, known for *Lou Grant* (1977), *Judd for the Defense* (1967) and *The Other Side of Hell* (1978)." [The Los Angeles Times obit](#) adds: "Tokatyan wrote for such earlier television shows as *Espionage*, *Kraft Suspense Theater* and *The Virginian*. He served with the Army Special Forces from 1944 to 1946, then began his career as a tour guide for NBC in New York."

Warden & Smith, [Asphalt Jungle DVDs](#), and the 1950 Film

About the other two actors who, along with Arch Johnson, carried this series...

- [JACK WARDEN](#) (1920-2006) was **Matt Gower**, Police Commissioner in the show's unnamed midwestern city. He was built to play the "heavy" in a reliably and reassuring way. During a very long career, the burly and blunt Warden ended up as lead cop in THREE television series. Fifteen years after ASPHALT JUNGLE, he was special investigator John St. John: In JIGSHAW JOHN, he put the pieces together without having a box or its cover image. And for two seasons during the late 1960s, Warden carried the lead role — Lieutenant Mike Haines — on [N.Y.P.D.](#) Unfortunately, neither series has been released by the studio or network that houses the original episodes.
- [BILL SMITH](#) (1933-2021) played **Danny Keller**. "A fluent Russian speaker, during the Korean War Smith was a Russian Intercept Interrogator and flew secret ferret missions over the Russian SFSR." A body-builder and discus-thrower, "He won the 200-pound...arm-wrestling championship of the world multiple times [and] held a 31–1 record as an amateur boxer." And let's not forget this man's *real* profession, which generated "more than 300 acting credits listed on IMDB from 1954 to 2020." As a bonus, Smith was equipped — had the natural strength — to perform many of his own stunts.

FOOTNOTE on the unsinkable Jack Warden: In his mix-sixties, Warden became a TV crime-fighter for the fourth time. He played Harry Fox on [CRAZY LIKE A FOX](#): "Rough-and-tumble private Investigator Harry Fox Sr. solves crimes with the reluctant help of his son, respected San Francisco lawyer Harrison Fox Jr." Thirty-five episodes during

1984-86, and I stumbled upon this credit only after the entire ASPHALT write-up had been typeset and page-balanced. (That's why it's here, as a tack-on.) Jack Warden must've been an impressive man, able to build loyalties across the generations.



Especially in their interactions with **Arch Johnson** (right), **Jack Warden** (left) and **Bill Smith** (lower) carried their ASPHALT JUNGLE roles well. The TV series (just [13 episodes](#)) was inspired by a **1950 film** of the same name. It told "the story of a group of men planning and executing a jewel robbery. It was nominated for four Academy Awards [and, in 2008] selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being 'culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant'." (Quoting from Wikipedia.) Somehow, though, the TV version didn't live up to its big-screen progenitor. Placement was one problem: Stuck on Sunday, which was family and variety night, from 9:30 to 10:30, and having to compete with Jack Benny, Dinah Shore and *Candid Camera*.

Another handicap might have been being plugged in to the prime-time mix at an odd point in the calendar: April, rather than in September or October.

What else was wrong? Not much that I can detect 70+ years later. In fact, using the standards of this publication, THE ASPHALT JUNGLE contains a higher percentage of Gem-quality episodes than almost any other series I've come across.

Most elements of the human drama are timeless. GEMS write-ups are therefore instructive for **writers and editors** who seek quality specifics — **characters**, **dialogue**, **plausibility** — to convey complexity and tension without chaos and without being goofy. Meanwhile, **academics** are used to being analytical. And, unlike the typical fan, they have less resistance to spanning the decades. So...

I'd love to meet at least one Professor who can use this publication in his or her Fine Arts, 20th-Century Culture, or Media History lesson plan / study guide. Contact GEMS founder & curator **Frank Gregorsky** — ExactingEditor@ProtonMail.com