

## THE SENTINEL INTERVIEW

## ARNOLD LAVEN

## TALES OF THE DARK SIDE

Arnold Laven is not typically associated with film noir. The veteran director/producer/writer is probably best remembered for his thoughtful war drama *The Rack* (1956), starring a young Paul Newman, and a pair of hit television series, *The Rifleman* and *The Big Country*, produced in conjunction with his longtime partners Arthur Gardner and the late Jules V. Levy. Laven also directed several superior crime films, including *Without Warning!* (1952), Hollywood's first contemporary-serial-killer movie, and the underrated *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* (1957). During a wide-ranging conversation with **Alan K. Rode**, Laven comes across as a charming man who, in the words of Sydney Greenstreet's Kasper Gutman, "likes to talk to a man who likes to talk."

*Sentinel: Tell me about your early life and how you got into the motion picture business.*

Arnold Laven: My family moved to California in the late 1930s, during the Depression. My father couldn't get work where we were living in Illinois, so we packed everything we had in an old 1932 Ford and drove to Los Angeles. Los Angeles was the cheapest major city to live in at that time. The five of us rented a three-bedroom house in the Carthay Circle area for \$80 a month.

I was quite a film fan. I guess I saw every reasonable film there was, wrote down the title and rated it from one to four stars. I also educated myself by reading the best literature, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, what have you. I also read all of the plays from New York. My interest was very much in this direction. At the time, I was driving a truck for about \$18 a week.

My father's business partner had a son who was an executive at Warner Bros. My father called Bobby Lord, a producer at Warner Bros. who did *One Way Passage* (1932) and several other relatively important films. Lord evidently passed the word to the man who hired people for the studio. The studio called and asked me if I wanted a job in the mail room as a messenger. I told them that I wanted to be a reader—I was an avid reader and made a couple of synopses of books—but they only had the mail room job. I

think it paid 25 cents an hour—this was in 1939 or 1940. My father insisted that I should get inside the studio, so I took it. At Warner Bros. I was in and out of the mail room. I got temporary jobs in publicity sometimes, but nothing of any consequence.

*Sentinel: Did you ever sneak onto the Warner Bros. sound stages to watch movies in production?*

AL: Of course. I would go in, stand by the door, and watch. I took great care not to attract any attention to myself. I was on the sound stage when they shot *Casablanca* (1942). No one, particularly me, thought anything about it at the time, but I actually watched that final shot in the movie with Bogart telling Claude Rains, "Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." It's hard to believe, but it's perfectly true.

At that time, the war in Europe was full-blown and all men of a certain age had a draft number. The 1st Motion Picture Unit was formed [about a year and half before Pearl Harbor]. General Hap Arnold was the head of the Army Air Corps, and under him, the Signal Corps made all the training films for both the Army and the Air Corps. After Pearl Harbor, when I joined the Motion Picture Unit, I would kibitz at the end of the day with the head of the script supervisors department. He was the trainer and qualifier of all of the script supervisors



Courtesy Arnold Laven

at Warner Bros. He broke me in on the military training films and I learned by observation. There were some fine directors working on these films as well as assistant directors and editors who moved up after working on the less-complicated films. For example, John Sturges was a film editor there who went on to be a very distinguished feature film director. I wasn't really thinking of being a director at this point, but I loved film and was actually studying various directors under a microscope and subconsciously preparing myself for what would come later.

*Sentinel: What does a script supervisor do?*

AL: It's a hell of a job. On the hierarchy totem pole from one to ten, the director is number one and the director of photography is number two, and the script supervisor is probably number nine. But he has a very significant job. He keeps track of all of the shots in the script, in shorthand and with sketches. In those days it was extremely time consuming for an editor to run the film in order to keep track of the different camera placements for a given scene: close-up, dolly, what have you. The script supervisor's notes enabled the editor to understand what coverage he had instead of going and running the film. So the script supervisor's primary job wasn't highly technical, but it was

important. A secondary responsibility was continuity. If someone in the scene was smoking a cigarette in a close-up at a certain point, when you go to the master shot, you tell the actor "Right here, you have to be smoking when he says this." Or when someone takes a hat off, you need to tell the director that so you can make the cut from one shot to another without a hat suddenly appearing back on again. Essentially, you are responsible for making notes to yourself in the script so that all the shots in a given scene will match.

*Sentinel: After World War II you continued working as a script supervisor and did a number of pictures for Eagle-Lion. Was this a contractual relationship or did you work picture-to-picture?*

AL: I can't quite remember how I got the job at Eagle-Lion, but I became their regular script supervisor. I think that I went from picture-to-picture rather than a contract.

*Sentinel: Where was Eagle-Lion located?*

AL: It was a small independent studio on Santa Monica Boulevard. It was under the auspices of Arthur Krim and United Artists. Brynie Foy, who was in charge of the B unit at Warner Bros., took over as the production chief. Eagle-Lion ran the gamut from very

low-budget films to mid-level pictures, including *He Walked by Night* (1948) and *Canon City* (1948).

Sentinel: *Wasn't some of the filming of Canon City done on location in Colorado?*

AL: It was all done at the state prison out there. Certain things I can remember quite well and *Canon City* is a picture that I distinctly recall. The weather! We left Los Angeles and arrived at Canon City and had to shoot immediately. The night we got there, they wanted to make one shot that evening and it was practically zero degrees! The story was that 12 men broke out of the prison, and one of them holed up at a house with a family held hostage. One of the hostages, a young daughter, had an appendicitis attack and the lead convict made the self-sacrifice. The actor was Scott Brady and his character's name was Sherbondy and I can't tell you why I remember *that!*

Sentinel: *The director of Canon City was Crane Wilbur, who dated back to Pearl White silent movies and stage work around the turn of the 20th century. He really excelled at writing and directing prison movies. What was he like?*

AL: He was an actor and a writer, but not a director. That was my impression. My impression was that he was not a warm personality. He wrote *Canon City*, and it was a pretty damn good script. He was certainly not the worst, but he was a poor choice as a director. I remember saying to myself, "I could do a better job than that."

Sentinel: *Any memories of the cast? It included Scott Brady and Jeff Corey. The latter was later blacklisted and became a renowned acting teacher.*

AL: I became semi-friendly with Scott Brady. Later on I became quite friendly with Jeff Corey. There were a number of actors in the cast whom I met and worked with over the years. I also remember Whit Bissell as a very fine actor. I even got to play a bit part in the film with dialogue! There was a scene with a bunch of reporters talking to the prison warden. They needed to fill the shot, so Crane Wilbur asked me to step in and say hello or goodbye, I forget the exact line. We can forget about that.

Sentinel: *Another Eagle-Lion film you worked on was The Spiritualist, also known as The Amazing Mr. X (1948).*

AL: My main recollection of *The Spiritualist* is that Turhan Bey could not remember his lines! He had a mental block or something. It wasn't due to drinking or anything like that. He felt

very bad about it. Turhan Bey was a very likeable man. I would frequently run lines with actors—it was a secondary feature of my job as script supervisor, since they didn't have cue cards at that time. Some actors had instantaneous recall. Mickey Rooney never read the script; he didn't have to. I remember reading a scene with him one time and then asking him, "Do you want to go over the lines?" He said, "No, I know them." And he did, cold! Dana Andrews on *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) was the same way.

Sentinel: *Another Eagle-Lion film noir assignment was Hollow Triumph (1948).*

AL: I have a silver ashtray right there on the table that is engraved from Paul Henreid that he gave as a gift to members of the cast and crew on that film, including me. I got to know Henreid better later on, when he directed some episodes of *The Rifleman* and *The Big Valley*. What I remember about *Hollow Triumph* is how Henreid and the director Steven Sekely wanted to have a fast tempo. It was potentially a fairly good picture, it communicated well and there was a good sense of how to use the camera, but the problem—this is my sense of it—was that the increased pace didn't vary from, say, a sad scene to a happy scene. So the tempo defeats itself. What was intended as a plus ended up being a minus.

Sentinel: *I thought the ending of Hollow Triumph was extremely dark and well-crafted. I particularly admired John Alton's camerawork.*

AL: It was a good script, but let me tell you about John Alton. Obviously we were trying to save money while making these types of pictures at Eagle-Lion. In those days, the average cameraman was the average cameraman; the majority of these guys would over-light to protect themselves. So Alton came in and the first thing he said was, "Eliminate all the overhead lights!" which was all the equipment up on the scaffolds. He literally cut the amount of time that another cameraman would take to light the exact same scene by 35 to 60 percent! Alton was the fastest cameraman I ever knew, and his stuff was always interesting. What a difference Alton made! You know they said at the time, "Wait and see what happens to Alton when he goes to a major studio." In other words, he won't make it in the big leagues. So he ended up going to MGM . . .

Sentinel: . . . and won the Academy Award for *An American in Paris* (1951).



**Top: Turhan Bey observes Lynn Bari in *The Spiritualist*, aka *The Amazing Mr. X*. Bottom: LAPD swarms the sewers in search of a homicidal maniac in *He Walked by Night*. Both films were photographed by the legendary—and fast—John Alton**

AL: That's right! When Alton came to work for Eagle-Lion, nobody had ever heard of him. When he left for MGM everyone knew who he was. He became the cameraman of choice at Metro. He was a colorful character, too. He wrote a book [*Painting with Light*]. I enjoyed talking to him. I remember thinking at the time, "Is this guy digging his own grave or what?"

Sentinel: *He did it his way and was irreverent to boot?*

AL: Yes, very much so. Alton was European and talked with a slight accent. A delightful man.

Sentinel: *Alton's ability to get the job done so much faster with fewer lights and fewer people probably didn't endear him to the rank-and-file union members—the grips and electricians—on the set.*

AL: It made it him very unpopular among the crew, particularly the electricians because he cut the electrical staff virtually in half. You felt the undercurrent of tension. But Alton's

crew, the gaffer and the best boy, among others, were extremely loyal to him. The point is that Alton made it so much easier for the director to be creative. I also recall how Alton helped Werker enormously from a budgetary and schedule perspective by getting *He Walked by Night* done so quickly.

Sentinel: *Was the finale of He Walked by Night actually filmed in the Los Angeles sewer system?*

AL: Yes, I remember going down to the sewers and discovering that you could almost put a house in there! I had no idea how large they were. Of course Alton knew how to use whatever light was available.

Sentinel: *You worked with two of the greatest cinematographers of all time: Alton and Gregg Toland (in The Best Years of Our Lives). Which one would you choose if you were directing a movie?*

AL: That's tough. Gregg Toland was the greatest cameraman who ever lived, the best cameraman in America.

If you asked any cameraman who influenced them the most, they would say Toland. I could tell you Gregg Toland stories for more than an hour. He was so creative, he adapted perfectly to what the story was and what the director wanted. You look at the revolutionary nature of *Citizen Kane* (1941) and then *The Best Years of Our Lives*, where you don't even notice the camera. Toland wasn't slow, but he wasn't particularly fast. Alton was fast as lightning. James Wong Howe was great as well. If I were directing a film noir or a low-budget film, I'd pick Alton.

Sentinel: *Another question about He Walked by Night: I've read that Alfred Werker was the nominal director and Anthony Mann stepped in and directed portions. What is your recollection?*

AL: I worked with Tony Mann. I remember we shot at night once and I had dinner with Tony. As far as working on *He Walked by Night*, Al Werker made the film and was a first-rate director; I believe he directed *The House of Rothschild* (1934) with George Arliss. I remember one occasion he bawled the shit out of me. That's the one thing I hate: being yelled at for any reason. As I recall, I wasn't out of line, I just happened to bother him at an inopportune time. Any rate, *He Walked by Night* was a first-class picture.

Sentinel: *He Walked by Night has been credited with establishing the "police procedural" type of film and inspiring Jack Webb to create Dragnet, first on radio and then on television.*

AL: Webb played a police lab technician. Eagle-Lion had an actual detective [Los Angeles police sergeant Marty Wynn] on the set as the technical advisor and I observed Webb having extensive conversations with him and it stuck in my mind at the time because I wondered what they had in common. I knew that Jack Webb had done the radio shows up in San Francisco [*The Jack Webb Show* and *Pat Novak for Hire*] but it meant little to me then. After *Dragnet* became such a success, I recalled Webb and that detective having those in-depth chats and realized the import of it.

Sentinel: *Richard Basehart was memorable as the killer in He Walked by Night and then played Robespierre in Reign of Terror (1949). What do you remember about him?*

AL: Before he came to Eagle-Lion, Basehart had a solo role in a New York play called *The Hasty Heart* that garnered a lot of attention. He made his debut in *Repeat Performance* (1947), which was being made when I



Director Arnold Laven checks a camera set-up circa mid-1950s

Courtesy Arnold Laven

came to Eagle-Lion. He was a fine actor and an extremely likeable man.

Sentinel: *Reign of Terror is a classic example of a medium- or lower-budget picture that is still a visual feast because of the huge talent involved at every level of the production.*

AL: In addition to Tony Mann and John Alton, you had William Cameron Menzies as the producer. Menzies did the production design on *Gone with the Wind* (1939). They did all sorts of creative things, like making the impression of huge crowds using only 20 people. Walter Wanger was the executive producer. Unfortunately, *Reign of Terror* contributed to closing the studio down. The picture cost about \$800,000 to \$900,000. That, plus prints and advertising, put a real crimp in studio financing. [Editor's note: Research indicates *Reign of Terror* cost \$771,623 to produce. It either broke even or possibly made a little money. The Walter Wanger-produced *Tulsa* (1949) at Eagle-Lion was a financial disaster that cost more than \$1 million and failed to recover its negative cost.]

Sentinel: *What was your impression of Anthony Mann as a director?*

AL: I didn't realize that Tony was that good. I thought he was a good director in the context of Eagle-Lion, but at the time I didn't foresee his future suc-

cess. He was a serious director who was different from many others. He really cared about his work. He was an interesting man and extremely rewarding to work with. I didn't know him well, but we had a good professional relationship.

Sentinel: *In your opinion, was Mann more skilled at the technical aspects of film directing or at working with actors?*

AL: He was gifted at both and possessed a great deal of confidence, which is very important. Again, at that time I thought he was a very effective B director who had a lot going for him. He found his niche later on with those terrific Westerns with Jimmy Stewart.

Sentinel: *You were also the script supervisor on a renowned film noir released by United Artists, D.O.A. (1950).*

AL: I can still remember standing on the streets in San Francisco improvising a shot with the director, Rudy Maté, that had Eddie O'Brien running through crowds of people, most of whom had no idea what was going on! Rudy Maté was an enormously warm and likeable man. I found he was not a full-blown director even though he was a terrific cameraman. Ernie Laszlo was the cameraman on *D.O.A.* It was a wonderful picture to work on.

The writers were Russell Rouse and Clarence Greene.

Here's a story. Besides my wife, there is only one other girl that I was ever in love with. That was a girl that I held hands with in first grade. Her name was Joan Feingold. I moved from New York to Florida and never saw or heard from her again. Just a memory I still have. I used to tickle her arm. Now what does this have to do with *D.O.A.*? I found out years later that this same girl married Clarence Greene! And, so sadly, she died young and I never got a chance to meet her again.

Sentinel: *Do you have any recollections of Edmond O'Brien?*

AL: He was just an all-around wonderful guy. When he first came out to Hollywood, Eddie had a background as a Shakespearean actor. I directed him in *The Rack*; he had a great speech as the defense counsel for Paul Newman. He was married to Olga San Juan—I don't know why they divorced later on—and we had dinner with them on occasion. I remember my wife and I went to a party he threw, it was very fancy, I had on a tuxedo. I knocked on his front door and he opened up wearing his bathrobe and pajamas! I had the wrong day! We had a big laugh over that.

Sentinel: *Did the Popkin brothers*

(producers of D.O.A, Impact [1949], The Well [1951], The Thief [1952]) spend any time on the set?

AL: We were aware of them, but they were not a constant presence. They hired Joseph Nadel as a production manager to run things. Nadel's son became one of my dearest friends and the editor of my first directorial film, *Without Warning!*, and *The Rifleman* series. I would occasionally see the Popkins on the set but they never interfered, at least at the level I was exposed to.

Sentinel: Another film noir that you worked on as a script supervisor was *He Ran All the Way* (1951), which was John Garfield's last picture.

AL: I loved the director, John Berry. But here's another story. There was an agent—I can't remember his name—who always had an ingenue or aspiring actress on his arm and would make the rounds of the studios. I was working on a film titled *New Orleans* (1947) and he brought in this lady who wasn't particularly attractive, but she had a small part in the film and a voice that was strongly Brooklynese. I remember showing her the script and sitting and talking with her. She was kind of interesting, but I was thinking, you know, "What are you doing here in Hollywood?" She told me she was up for a part in a film directed by George Cukor with Ronald Colman. To even think that she was auditioning for Cukor or working with Colman was ridiculous! The next thing I know, the picture comes out with this girl in it, *A Double Life* (1947). Of course I am speaking about Shelley Winters.

Sentinel: Shelley Winters acquired a reputation for being difficult to work with at times, particularly with directors and producers. Was that the case in *He Ran All the Way*?

AL: She wasn't easy. It seemed to make the column in *Variety* or the *Hollywood Reporter* every day, what was happening on the set of *He Ran All the Way*.

Sentinel: Was all of that publicity due to Shelley, or Garfield, or both?

AL: The chemistry between Garfield and Shelley was antipathetic; they argued constantly. Sometimes yelling and screaming. They were all people with a high level of emotion and I'm including John Berry too. As I recall, though, 90 percent of the conflict was between Shelley and Garfield. One night I was working late and sitting on the sound stage, about a half-hour after everyone else had gone home. John Garfield's dressing room started to rock and shake. The door finally opens and out walks Shelley, with a



John Garfield had a volatile relationship with costar Shelley Winters on his final film, *He Ran All the Way*, on which Laven served as script supervisor

smile. So of course I am looking the opposite way, no eye contact. It was kind of an epochal moment in the history of that movie! Of course, Garfield was such a warm and charming guy.

Sentinel: Garfield had that unique star quality and was well thought of by his peers and colleagues.

AL: Very much so. I wanted to get a script job on *I Love Lucy* and mentioned it to Garfield. Do you know, he called a top guy at Desilu—not Lucy, but their production head under Desi—and got me an appointment, which was extremely nice. I really felt that John Garfield was a warm, authentic, likeable guy.

Sentinel: The credits of *He Ran All the Way* (John Berry, John Garfield, Dalton Trumbo, Hugo Butler, Guy Endore) pretty much read like a muster list for the Blacklist. Was there any awareness of the Blacklist on the set? Did certain people feel that they were under government scrutiny or on borrowed time because of the Communist witch hunt that was convulsing Hollywood?

AL: It was a left-wing, Democratic group from top to bottom. They were all tremendous people, particularly Hugo Butler. I remember Gale Sondergaard and Herbert Biberman (he later made *Salt of the Earth* [1954], a very leftist movie) as wonderful people. I was, well, not quite as far left. I remember one time someone asked me to sign a card for some cause. I asked, "What is that for?" They said, "Oh, it's for the such-and-such crusade." So I said, "Well, I just don't join things like that." I found out later that signing this card would have gotten me into a lot of trouble.

Sentinel: My understanding is that a lot of people who ended up getting blacklisted merely had friends and col-

leagues who were politically active left-wingers or Communists, or they simply signed the wrong petition.

AL: Yes, to a large extent they were politically oriented, but certainly not Communists. When I first started directing in 1952, there definitely was a Blacklist and it went on into the early 1960s. I remember being a script supervisor for Edward Dmytryk on *Mutiny* (1952) produced by the King brothers. Dmytryk was a difficult man, particularly at that time. [Dmytryk had been one of the imprisoned Hollywood 10, who was "reinstated" in the business after testifying against former Communist colleagues.]

Sentinel: Did you know that Hugo Butler and Dalton Trumbo had written the script for *He Ran All the Way* and were being fronted by Guy Endore?

AL: Yes. I knew that particularly after going to the preview! While we were shooting *He Ran All the Way* there was no sense of potential tension or anything like that on the set. Afterward, all of those names involved in the picture came to mind very clearly because the Blacklist had really descended by that time.

Sentinel: Your partnership with Jules V. Levy and Arthur Gardner solidified when you directed your first feature, *Without Warning!*, in 1952.

AL: Yes, our association dated back to the Motion Picture Unit during the war.

Sentinel: There were a lot of legendary movie stars who served or were associated with that unit, including Clark Gable, William Holden, and Ronald Reagan.

AL: Sure, but you know, no one really cared too much about that. We were all in uniform, all doing a job and just

too busy to be starstruck. I suppose if Marilyn Monroe walked down the street, a couple of people would look. That's an exaggeration, but you get my point. I remember an exception, though. One day Clark Gable walked down the street in his uniform. I don't care who you were—producer, director, writer—we all stared. Gable in uniform! Amazing!

Sentinel: He really had star power.

AL: Absolutely. Like no one else. At any rate, Jules Levy and I had known each other since the days of the Warner Bros. mail room. We car-pooled together and became very close friends. Jules worked with Arthur Gardner on shows. I remember working in the mail room and Jules telling me about PRC. Making a movie for \$18,000! Jules was always talking about getting a script, raising money, and making a movie. Arthur worked as a production manager for the King brothers and had been an actor in films.

Sentinel: Arthur Gardner told me that he played a scene in *All Quiet on the Western Front* opposite Lew Ayres back in 1929.

AL: That's right. He eventually found that he could make more money behind the camera, struck up a relationship with the King brothers, and got hired. Arthur and Jules were always talking about making a movie. Eventually they contacted a fellow named Don Weis, another close friend of mine, about a project they were putting together. Do you know of him?

Sentinel: Yes. His career paralleled yours and seemed to follow the same path. He was the script supervisor on many noirs, including *M* (1951), *Outrage* (1950), *The Prowler* (1951), and *Force of Evil* (1948), and then moved into the director's chair. Don Weis ended up directing a lot of quality television.

AL: That's exactly right. Anyway, Don said, "I've been up to bat too many times, I'll pass." So Don was out and they came to me about it. I had nothing to lose at that point. I hadn't come close to being asked to direct anything. So Arthur, Jules, and I got together. We stole material from two movies to make *Without Warning!*

Sentinel: Was *The Sniper* (1952) one of them?

AL: *The Sniper* was not one of them. Dmytryk made *The Sniper*, and actually when he saw *Without Warning!* he thought we'd stolen from him!\* We actually copied *He Walked by Night* and another film that I think Joan Bennett was in. At any rate, we decided it



Belgian poster art for *Without Warning* and two images from the film, including leading man Adam Williams (top)

would be about a serial killer and that we would go out on location and get a lot of value that you can't get by shooting on a sound stage.

Sentinel: *You pioneered a new Hollywood genre: the serial-killer movie.*

AL: Willie Raynor, who was a publicist for the King brothers, contributed a first-draft screenplay. It was pretty good. I am good at rewriting. I had gotten a job as the script clerk on *Teresa* (1951) (which was a wonderful experience, working on location in New York and Italy with Fred Zinnemann). I took the script for *Without Warning!* and worked on it while I was on location. When I came back, the script was complete.

Sentinel: *How long did Without Warning! take to shoot?*

AL: Fifteen shooting days and three days of second-unit work: chases, running through the produce market, and so forth.

Sentinel: *How did you come to hire Adam Williams, who had the lead role as the psychotic killer?*

AL: Arthur Lubin directed *Queen for a Day* (1951) at Eagle-Lion. Adam

\* Plagiarism is unlikely by either party: *Without Warning!* and *The Sniper* were released on the same day, May 9, 1952. It's unlikely either director saw the other's film before release. Inspiration may have come from an actual serial killer, Evan Charles Thomas, on the loose in Los Angeles during preproduction and filming of both movies.

Williams had a part about a guy who left home, joined a circus, and volunteered to jump off a tower into a water pool. I had a talking relationship with Adam that eventually turned into a close friendship. I thought he projected a Brando-esque type of persona. Naturally he wasn't the actor that Marlon was, although he thought so and it really hurt his career later on.

Sentinel: *His actual name was Adam Berg. I understand he was quite a pilot in addition to being an actor.*

AL: Adam was kind of a bullshit artist, so you really didn't know how much to believe, but he was apparently decorated as a combat pilot during the war and continued working as a flight instructor out at Van Nuys Airport when the acting dried up. He could be more than difficult. If a producer or casting director called him in about a job and started the conversation with "Well, what have you done?" Adam would lean forward and respond, "Well, what have you done?"

Sentinel: *Most people remember Adam Williams as one of the killers in North by Northwest (1959) and Lee Marvin's aide de camp in The Big Heat (1953).*

AL: I used him in *The Rack* and *The Glory Guys* (1965). We were close personal friends, but I found him difficult. There was a situation on location in Mexico, and he turned on me. I had always tried to support his career. Our relationship suffered, and by the time he died in 2006, we hadn't seen each other in at least 15 years.

Sentinel: *I enjoyed the period L.A. locations in Without Warning! like the freeways under construction and the scenes of Chavez Ravine before Dodger Stadium was built.*

AL: We got approval from the Department of Transportation to use the freeways. At this point, none of the new roadways were connected; we went to where there was an entrance to the freeway that was blocked off, with no entrance signs. These areas were separated by small connecting roads used by the construction crews. So the DOT told me, "Just go in between them." I got to go everywhere and shoot film. For a good six to eight months, the freeways belonged to me! I would go to the blocked-off entrances and take those connecting roads when I wanted to use the freeway. Believe it or not, no one ever stopped me.

Sentinel: *Did Without Warning! give you confidence that you could be an effective film director?*

AL: I rehearsed about 80 percent of the show with the actors. This was a minimum type of deal with Adam Williams, Meg Randall, and the other actors. Then I also had developed sketches—my own way of storyboarding—that indicated exactly how every shot was going to be made, because we had 15 days. When we started I was very confident, but I didn't sleep too well at night. My hair began falling out in clumps, I had bald spots. I went to a dermatologist, who told me it was stress related. He said to relax, and then charged me \$50! So even

though I felt comfortable as a director, it was stressful as hell! We had deferred our salaries and were working for nothing. For the three us—Arthur, Jules, and myself—our collective salaries were around \$30,000. I believe the total budget was \$90,000, including paying Herschel Burke Gilbert and the musicians to do the score. \$60,000 was put up by a gentleman named Auerbach and the rest was deferred. The picture got extremely good reactions in the trade papers.

Sentinel: *Did you have a preview?*

AL: We previewed it at one of the big theaters on Hollywood Boulevard. In those days, people would line up to see the previewed movies. When the titles came on and the audience didn't see any recognizable names on the credits, 10 to 15 percent of them got up and walked out. So we had about a half-full house. Then, when the picture was over: applause, people standing up, cheering.

Sentinel: *That must have been exceedingly gratifying.*

AL: It was the highest moment of my professional life. I haven't had a whole lot of success. Some reasonable measure, yes, but nothing compared to that moment. The picture ended up getting sold to Sol Lesser, who distributed it. We got our deferment, Mr. Auerbach got his money back, and then we all split profits of an additional \$60,000.

Sentinel: *Your next picture was Vice Squad (1953). What was it like as a young director working with a pair of authentic movie stars like Edward G. Robinson and Paulette Goddard?*

AL: Goddard was a doll! She only had to work for a week. We had already hired another actress and ended up having to give her a smaller part. The lady we hired was good but didn't have Goddard's pizzazz. I remember I was working in the office and Jules came in and I could tell something was brewing. He said, "Don't get mad, but we just hired Paulette Goddard and you're going to have to move so-and-so to a different role."

Sentinel: *Did you get mad?*

AL: A bit, but I got over it quickly. Now, Eddie Robinson was another story. First we were going to hire Paul Douglas, but he was unavailable. His name meant something at the box office. Robinson was the second choice.

*Vice Squad* told the story of a

day in the life of a captain of detectives. The trick was how to manipulate this into a story on-screen. I was front man, working with Larry Roman on the script. Larry had never done a film before, but we hit it off and he was good. We went down and met with a captain of detectives at the Los Angeles Police Department. We expected to hear something from a public-relations standpoint. Instead we got about a half-dozen insights on how the detective bureau actually operated. For instance he told us that a policeman is only as good as his information. Therefore, a lot of the arrests of prostitutes have nothing to do with prostitution; it's to squeeze them for information. Remember an early scene where the police captain leaves his office, a pickpocket is in the outer office, and Robinson is making a deal to let him go in exchange for information?

Sentinel: *Yes, I do. What was Robinson like to work with?*

AL: This is the point of the story that I am getting to. Robinson was very reluctant at first to participate; the time and budget were far below what he was used to. I think we had 20-plus days to shoot. But he was on the "graylist" at that time and he needed the work. William Allenburg, the head of William Morris, tells us that Robinson wants to meet with Art, Jules, and me. So we go to his house after dinner to discuss the script. Robinson says, "Well, this one scene you have get rid of." This is the sequence between him and the pickpocket that I just described. Robinson declares, "If I was a captain of detectives, I would squish him like a bug under my foot. I am not going to wheel and deal and bargain. No way." We explain to Robinson that this is the hub of the whole script, that the police captain has to be different things to different people. Robinson finally says, "Either eliminate the scene or forget it." Art, Jules, and I look at each other and I am sure that Arthur and Jules—who have a personal relationship with Robinson through Robinson's son—will say something like, "Well, surely we can work something out." Instead they both look at me and I shake my head no. It's about 1:30 or 2:30 in the morning by this time. So we shake hands with Robinson and say we're sorry and then good night. The point is that Arthur and Jules never hesitated for one second in backing me up. So we go out and sit in a coffee shop talking about what's next. We have no other choice for the lead role. We have no money. Sol Lesser was paying for our office. Lesser ends up meeting with Allenburg and word comes back that Robinson has agreed to do the picture, including that scene he'd objected to. But he has requested that there would be no mention of that



omitted scene. Just shoot the movie per the script.

Sentinel: *In other words, don't rub it in.*

AL: Exactly. Now we get to the actual shooting of that scene. It's at Los Angeles Police headquarters and the police have given us X amount of time, 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. or something like that, to use the office and corridor. This is where Robinson will walk from his office down the corridor, open the door, and talk to the guy playing the pickpocket. The interior will be on the sound stage, but the point is that these are the only two doors available to shoot this sequence.

So I say "Let's rehearse," and incidentally we now have about 10 minutes before we're going to be kicked out and this is the last shot of the day. Robinson is good on his lines and doesn't need a lot of rehearsal. We rehearse, set up the dolly tracks, and get ready to go. Robinson comes out, he's very brisk and he has to walk down the corridor, pause to look at a paper that an underling shows him, and enter the other door. And we miss

the scene. He doesn't stop where he's supposed to and goes past the right door. So I say, "OK let's do it again." I ask his personal assistant, "Harlan, maybe you get him to stop and sign the paper where the door is?" Now I am looking at my watch and sweating. Robinson senses something isn't right and comes up to me and asks what's going on, what's the problem. I say, "Eddie, we're committed to doing it this way because the police will only let us use this door, et cetera." He says, "Why didn't you tell me that?" I tell him I wanted him to have his freedom of expression. I didn't want it to be mechanical. He says, "OK, let's shoot it." He comes out the door, stops

exactly where he is supposed to, and exits. A perfect take. It was the end of that scene and it was never mentioned again.

Getting along with Robinson worked out very well. I was tipped to some things that he liked. Other things I had to pick up. One time there was a guy telling him dirty jokes just before we were going to roll. I go up to the guy and say, "Don't bother Mr. Robinson, we're ready to shoot." And Robinson says, "No, I like it, it relaxes me." So of course I say, "Great, go right ahead."

Now we come to the scene with Paulette Goddard and they both favor the left side of their faces. So I design it so that they walk around the desk in a way that supports their best sides and also supports their relationship in the film. It played very well. I patted myself on the back for that one. Usually at the end of every day Robinson would give me one of his cigars—I smoked then—and I looked forward to it because it meant that it had been a good day. This time Robinson walks right by me. No cigar. I say, "Eddie, what's the problem? I thought the scene went pretty good!" He says, "Pretty good? You shot her face and my ass!" How he got that impression I'll never know, but I never forgot that. "Her face and my ass." I guess he meant that there was a brief second when his back was to the camera.

Sol Lesser looked at the finished film and told us, "You win some, you lose some," but *Vice Squad* was a reasonably successful picture.

Sentinel: *I watched Down Three Dark Streets (1954) on television recently. It was the first movie that featured the Hollywood sign in a principal sequence.*

AL: The interesting thing about *Down Three Dark Streets* was that the producer, Eddie Small, did not give us the final cut. The original premise was that the three stories would intertwine. We would be halfway through one story and then we would go to another. Small decided that we had to redesign the cutting to make the stories to run *consecutively* so viewers wouldn't get confused. I said that the whole essence (which also gives it that extra little pizzazz for a low-budget movie) is that the audience follows one story, then loses it, then catches up with it later. The structure keeps their attention.

Sentinel: *Eddie Small was going to make the movie over in his own image.*

AL: It was going to be in the image of Eddie Small, which was very basic and very simple. That wasn't the movie I directed. The movie that I thought it would become . . . Well, I'll never know.

Courtesy Alan K. Rode



**Dan Duryea and Charles McGraw square off in a courtroom scene from the Laven-directed feature *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue***

**Sentinel:** *Small edited the film and you, the director, had no say at all?*

**AL:** I was out of it. As a matter of fact, I was so upset that I took an opportunity to go to Chicago and visit some relatives. I walked away from the cutting of the film.

**Sentinel:** *How was Broderick Crawford to work with on that film? He usually projected the force of a bull elephant on-screen.*

**AL:** He was clearly an alcoholic, but other than that he was OK. Knowing that about him, I had a sense of how I might relate to him when the alcohol was more controlled than he was. I got though the picture OK and I thought Crawford was extremely good in the picture. As far as I was concerned, we were lucky to get him. He drank and we accommodated it, but I don't think it had a negative impact on the picture or anyone else.

**Sentinel:** *Was *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* a major step up for you? It was filmed in 1957 at Universal-International and had a formidable cast.*

**AL:** I had made *The Rack*, and it earned me a certain stature. As a matter of fact, the problem with *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* is that Richard Egan was a marvelous guy, but the film needed Bob Mitchum. I forget why we couldn't get him. Egan was wrong for the part. It was a pretty good movie, and I had a great relationship with Egan. You know, one has a tendency when you're working with someone to think it was a good decision that they were cast in the film. I never could work with an actor if I was conscious of them having been miscast. I've worked with actors who required a little more work than others, but looking back and being honest, *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* suffered because of Egan. The original title of the film came from the book

*The Man Who Rocked the Boat.*

The producer, Albert Zugsmith, was quite a character. He was from a different world. He was a tasteless man, a newspaper publisher or something. Hedy Lamarr. Somehow he met Hedy Lamarr and imposed her into the movie.

**Sentinel:** *Hedy Lamarr is in *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*? I don't remember that at all.*

**AL:** She had a bit part. Lamarr's role had no meaning. I think a scene was written for her, she worked one day, and it had no relation to the story. I am 99 percent sure she was in the final cut, but she might have been cut out subsequently.

**Sentinel:** *How did the title get changed?*

**AL:** I told you about the producer being from another world. He had bought the song and the music for "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue," so that became the soundtrack theme and the title. I had to shoot an insert scene of Tenth Avenue.

**Sentinel:** *I talked to Julie Adams about this film. She remembered being astounded at how good Walter Matthau was and what he became. How did you cast him?*

**AL:** I used an experienced casting director who told me that there was this actor in New York who was exceptionally good. He told me, "I suggest—if you don't mind, we don't have any film on him—that he would be great for the part." He assured me, and I trusted his judgment.

**Sentinel:** *Were you pleased with Matthau in the film?*

**AL:** Yes, he was superb. We got along fine. He was warm and cordial and a great poker player. ■

# TV NOIR

## THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK HOUR

### Arnold Laven Directs Small Screen Classic "THE RETURN OF VERGE LIKENS"

*First broadcast October 3, 1964*

**T**he town in which Verge Likens was raised—a scruffy Appalachian hamlet eerily similar to the territory described in *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)—is at the total mercy of Riley McGrath, who runs the town like a compone Hitler. He thinks nothing of killing Verge's father Stoney when he makes the mistake of talking back after McGrath insists that he take, yet again, the short end of the stick in a business transaction.

The sheriff, in McGrath's pocket, tries to cover up the crime, calling it an accident, but Verge has had enough, and the tension begins to build. McGrath tries to buy off Verge; his goons rough up Verge's "simple" brother Wilfred; and after a series of altercations Verge is forced to leave town, vowing to return when he has concocted a plan to avenge his father.

In one of his earliest and most successful appearances, a young Peter Fonda, playing Verge, displays a large dollop of his dad's steely screen persona. He's assisted by the fact that the backwoods town and its citizens have been conjured up by Davis Grubb (author of *The Night of the Hunter*, in fine form here). Robert Emhardt, the personification of obese, malevolent corruption, is squarely in his element.

The brilliant twist in the denouement is a perfect combination of noir and Hitchcock, and it's played to the hilt by director Arnold Laven, whose staging for the climactic encounter between Verge and McGrath includes a bravura editing sequence that ratchets tension at a breakneck pace. McGrath has a weakness, and each change in the camera's point of view brings us a step closer to the payoff that Verge is slowly, painstakingly—one could say almost surgically—effecting. When the police finally intervene, their hands are tied; Riley McGrath hasn't a scratch on him.

Among the many minor treats in this masterful backwoods noir is the appearance of George Lindsey, best known as the rube Gooper on *The Andy Griffith Show*, playing a Southern thug with just the right amount of good-ole-boy menace.

—Edward Burma

## OBITUARIES by Alan K. Rode

**Jane Randolph**, 94, one of the last of the great horror and noir actresses of the 1940s, died in Gstaad, Switzerland, on May 4. Randolph was born in Youngstown, Ohio, and came to Hollywood in 1939. She met her first husband, Bert D'Armand, at Max Reinhardt's renowned acting school, where he was the manager. After several bit parts at Warner Bros. she landed an RKO contract and appeared in a pair of Val Lewton's dark fantasy films, *Cat People* (1942) (in which she was memorably menaced in a swimming pool) and *Curse of the Cat People* (1944).



Randolph also co-starred in several of the Falcon series. She was accused of killing her alcoholic husband in the Dalton Trumbo-scripted *Jealousy* (1945) and attempted to frame Hugh Beaumont for murder in Anthony Mann's B noir *Railroded!* (1947).

After appearing in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948) Randolph retired from acting, married a wealthy Spanish real estate magnate, and lived the majority of her life abroad in Europe. Her first husband later married actress Ann Savage, with whom he remained until his death in 1969.