

STYLE

People /

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Return to the
The Man Who Wrote
About Assassinating...

By Jean M. White

A few days after "The Day of the Jackal" appeared in print, the author, Frederick Forsyth, had dinner with one of the technical consultants for the book: a professional assassin.

"He was really terribly kind," recalls Forsyth. "He said he enjoyed the book, found it realistic, and the suspense engrossing."

So apparently are many of the readers of Forsyth's best-selling suspense thriller, which meticulously plots a professional assassin's attempt against the life of French President Charles de Gaulle, down to the moment that the unmistakable De Gaulle visage appears in the crosshairs of a gun's telescopic sight.

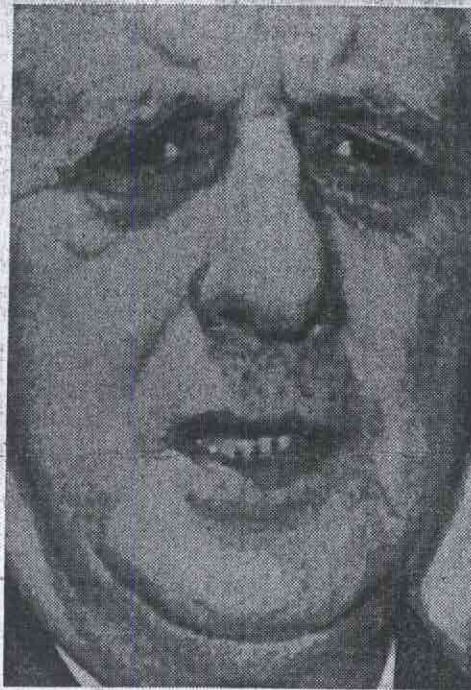
For "The Day of the Jackal" — which so successfully blurs fact and fiction that French newspapers sent out reporters to check on some of the book's episodes — Forsyth drew from his experiences as a Reuters correspondent in Paris. He then covered the abortive Petit-Clamart attempt on De Gaulle's life, the near-miss that came closest, in 1962.

The background of "The Day of the Jackal" rings with the authenticity of fact from Forsyth's memories of the people and places of that time. It is an authenticity that leads the reader to forget that Gen. de Gaulle really died of natural causes years later.

Forsyth, the reporter turned novelist, left nothing to chance. In addition to a professional assassin, he also consulted a passport forger and an underground armorer.

"The forger wasn't as happy about the book as the professional assassin," Forsyth says. "He rang me up afterwards and said I had ruined his profession, taken bread from his wife and two children, since I gave away the secrets of his trade."

The forger was recommended to Forsyth by a mercenary whom he met in Biafra. In his job, the mercenary needed several false identities and paid up to 200



... De Gaulle

pounds for a name and face.

The Jackal — the code name for the professional killer hired by the French OAS (Secret Army Organization) to kill De Gaulle, whom they viewed as a betrayer over Algeria — is an amalgam of three persons that Forsyth knows.

One is the professional assassin, "a man who told me he feels no more emotion in killing a person than in stubbing out a cigarette," Forsyth says.

Then there is an English man I know, lean, charming, but with a hidden ruthless streak. And there also is a undercover agent, who is a superb chess player and meticulous plotter of moves."

For some, the Jackal has become a kind of perverse hero, the cold professional whom they secretly want to succeed in his killer's task. It is a bit like rooting

for the fallen angel in "Paradise Lost."

"I found this reaction to be uniquely American," the author observes. "There is this American trait of admiring efficiency, and the Jackal is efficient in his job."

The armorer, who specializes in guns for the international underworld, was Forsyth's consultant on the weaponry for the assassin's task. A gun such as that used by the Jackal does exist. The armorer showed a rough form to Forsyth.

"As a kid in the country, I had used a .22 to kill rabbits and pigeons. I didn't know too much about guns but now I do. For the assassin's job, it had to be collapsible, light, easily concealed to be carried across borders.

The prototype was a
See ASSASSIN, B4, Col. 2



By Arthur Ellis—The Washington Post

Frederick Forsyth, author of "The Day of the Jackal."

Too Real Not to Be Believed

ASSASSIN, From B1

Browning .229, bolt-action. The barrel had to cut back to about 10 inches and yet have enough accuracy to hit a man's head at about 150 yards. It's the rifling in the barrel, the corkscrew action, that gives accuracy to a rifle and cutting back the barrel reduces this accuracy.

"The underground armorer told me the rifle could do it. Then there was the explosive bullet — not a dum-dum. A hole is bored in the slug; a droplet of mercury dropped in; it is resealed. It explodes with devastating effect when it hits a target."

Forsyth tells his precisely plotted tale in a spare documentary style. His hero is one-dimensional, a characterization that reflects a one-dimensional, emotionless life.

Forsyth refuses to play the game of spotting the intermingled fact and fiction in his book: Jean-Marie Bastien-Thiry was in fact executed for his part in the Petit-Clairmont plot; 11 of the 14 men who meet to protect de Gaulle are now living in Place du 18 Juin (but a year) to pin medals on veterans in Place du 18 Juin (but a year) later; the OAS did mount raids on banks to raise money.

Were the bank raids to hire a professional assassin to kill de Gaulle?

"You'll have to read the book to find that out," says Forsyth, with a touch of the Jackal's secretiveness.

Forsyth wrote his book in 35 days and nights, but it was "already worked out in his mind like a chess game. For it, he interviewed many of those who had lived in Paris during the turamoll after Algeria.

"I'd invited them to dinner. Over the third bottle of wine, I would ask: 'Now what was it really like.' Everyone likes to reminisce, and they told me what it was really like."

If the Jackal does not collect his half-million-dollar fee, the 33-year-old Forsythe has collected nearly that much so far for his assassination plot.

Bantam has bought the paperback rights for \$365,000. The book has been sold for a movie to be directed by Fred Zinnemann, who directed "High Noon."

For Forsyth, the careful research has begun on a new book, to be as meticulously plotted as a Jackal assassination.

"I can't say anything more than it will be set in Western Europe in the last five years and will be 80 per cent fact," he says.