



The Assassins

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A FIRST NOVEL by Jim Garrison, the controversial former New Orleans district attorney who investigated the assassination of President Kennedy, "The Star-Spangled Contract," explains in explicit fashion how a President, no matter how carefully protected, can be assassinated. It is a chilling book benefiting from Garrison's professional knowledge of the sophisticated arsenal now available to would-be assassins. He is not writing about bearded women carrying Saturday night specials who take a pot shot from a crowd, but about plotting in high places by cold-blooded men "invariably motivated by principle."

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WHAT SURPRISES most about the book is its gripping narrative. Garrison has written a knowledgeable, suspenseful thriller that keeps you continuously interested. His mastery of narrative technique, especially his intricate plotting and sophisticated dialogue, invite comparison with books like "The Day of the Jackal" and "The Eagle Has Landed."

We are introduced to a nether world of assassination squads directed by leaders whose identities they don't know.

They are hired for specific projects well aware that the less they know the

longer they are likely to live. These pools of hit men are stationed in different parts of the country, are paid handsomely for long periods of idleness and even more handsomely when they "do their number." Garrison calls this part of our "intricate tracery of fear," with every operation providing its patsy complete with activities that will seal his "guilt." (The implied question here is: Was Lee Harvey Oswald a patsy set up for the assassination of President Kennedy?)

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THE POLITICAL SCHEMERS in the Garrison novel are senior Washington officials and presidential advisers with direct access to the Oval Office. The central figure in the novel is Colin McFerrin, an ex-CIA agent who changes his mind about the planned assassination and himself becomes a target after trying to warn the President. It would be unfair to say more about this complex story.

More significant than the story itself are Garrison's commentaries on America's grim national mood, its shock-saturated state of mind that takes outrageous behavior in its stride, the spread of dangerous intrigues by radical paranoids, the "crazy circus of government working against government, agency against agency." (McGraw-Hill; \$8.95).