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Guyana: A CBS Option

By Don Shirley

CBS has taken a one-year option to develop a television movie from "Guyana Massacre," one of the two instant paperbacks on the Jonestown slaughter. Agreement was reached late Thursday with agents representing the Washington Post Writers Group, which developed the book for Berkley Books.

Frank Konigsberg (producer of "Pearl") will produce the Guyana movie, with Ernest Tidyman ("Shaft," "The French Connection") writing the screenplay, based on material in the book by Charles Krause, Laurence Stern, Richard Harwood and other members of The Post staff.

Screen rights to the other Jonestown paperback, "Suicide Cult," are headed in the direction of a theatrical film producer rather than a television network, according to Linda Cunningham of Bantam Books, which published "Suicide Cult."

The CBS option on "Guyana Massacre" calls for either a two-hour or a three-hour movie. The project has been assigned to the specials division of CBS rather than the movies-for-TV division. Yesterday specials vice president Bernie Sofronski said his division "can be more selective because we don't have to fill a slot with a number of movies a year. And we can go for a comment as opposed to the action/adventure movies." He said he would like to see the Guyana movie air "as soon as possible," but "no one intends to rush it."