

Capitol Punishment

Eat Your Heart Out, Fletcher Knebel

By Art Buchwald

It's getting harder and harder to sell fiction to the movies these days. The other day a friend of mine went in to see the producers at Magna Cum Laude Productions.

"Hi Fletch. What have you got for us this time?"

"I think I've got a fantastic yarn. It concerns a President of the United States at sometime in the future."

"Go ahead, Fletch. Your President stories are always good."

"Well, you see there is this President, and he's up for reelection, and his party has to raise \$15 million because the opposition party has a chance of beating him. So a committee is set up to collect the money and spend it. Now this committee decides to allocate a large sum of money for dirty tricks, sabotage, bugging and that sort of stuff."

"It's pretty farfetched so far, Fletch, but go ahead."

"The White House hires a former FBI agent and a former CIA agent"

"Wait a minute, Fletch. Did you say the White House hires them?"

"Right. They're paid by the committee, but they work right in the White House. Their jobs are to get the goods on the opposition by bugging, forgery and burglary."

"In the script, Fletch, does the President know about all this?"

"We don't find out until later. That's where the suspense comes in. Anyhow, the dirty tricks team made up of Cubans"

"Hold it, Fletch. Did you say Cubans?"

"Right, the Cubans think they're working to overthrow Castro. Anyway they try to plant a bug in the opposition party's headquarters. But they're caught. Now this is where the picture gets good. The White House is afraid the whole operation will be blown, so they work out a fantastic coverup with the CIA, the FBI and the Justice Department."

"Good grief, Fletch," a producer says. "You're talking about the White House, the Justice Department, the FBI and the CIA. Do you expect the public to buy all that?"

"It gets better," Fletch says. "One of the guys, an ex-CIA man, talks and implicates the former Attorney General of the United States."

"Holy smoke," a producer says. "What have you been drinking?"

"Then," continues Fletch, "the thing really unravels. Everyone on the committee is out to save his own skin and they implicate the President's own legal counsel and half the White House staff including his two highest aides. The President goes on the air and says he is going to get to the bottom of the coverup no matter where it leads. He fires his Attorney General and appoints the Secretary of Defense to head up the investigation."

"Thanks a lot, Fletch," a producer says. "Don't call us, we'll call you."

"Wait," cries Fletch, "I'm not finished. The White House legal counsel not only confesses to the whole thing but says the President knew about it all along."

"You have two minutes, Fletch."

"The President then goes on nationwide television and says that he has just received startling new information that he is involved in the whole affair and because of this new development he is going to resign. The picture ends with the Vice President taking the oath of office and Frank Sinatra singing 'God Bless America.'"

There is dead silence in the room.

Finally one of the producers speaks. "Get the hell out of here, Fletch. And if you ever bring us a cockamamie script like this again we'll ban you from the studio for life."