

This high roller takes his 10% off the top

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NEW YORK — Scott Meredith is a high roller. He'll plunk down \$250 on one roll at Las Vegas. He'll reject \$750,00 for a Norman Mailer novel not yet written. He held out for — and got — \$1 million.

Last winter he got a phone call from Judith Campbell Exner's lawyer asking whether he'd hawk her tale of her relationship with John Kennedy and the Mafia. Meredith agreed.



Scott Meredith

He's the man who got his hands on the so-called Nixon love letters this spring. And Spiro Agnew managed to find him last year when he needed money. Meredith handled Agnew's novel, "The Canfield Decision."

As a 10 per center, Meredith handles 7,000 literary properties a year and makes upwards of \$300,000 after taxes.

He is also one of the most unorthodox agents. He introduced the auction system, charges to read manuscripts and advertises.

Meredith has little formal schooling. He's an author himself, a man who never goes to lunch, and a teetotaler.

The Nixon love-letters, 32 in all, were written over three months, beginning about four weeks before Nixon resigned.

"I am convinced they were authentic," says Meredith. "I am also convinced I could never prove they were."

One letter dealt with Nixon's drinking. Nixon wrote to the woman in question that he had better watch that tendency, that he had just finished half a bottle in one night, Meredith recalls. Meredith says he saw 22 of the letters and transcripts of the 10 others, but he received a telegram from Nixon saying the letters were a hoax and asking him not to publish them.

It wasn't Meredith's first dealing with Nixon. Rose Mary Woods had called after her boss' resignation to ask how much money Nixon could make from his memoirs.

"I said I could get \$2 million or \$1.50, depending upon what kind of a book he wrote," says Meredith.

Later, he dealt with Nixon directly by phone. Nixon was more interested in writing the \$1.50 version — the exoneration of Richard Nixon, says Meredith.

"I doubt that I could place a call to Nixon now," he says. Their final conversation was a long-distance shouting match.

After Meredith, Nixon reached an agreement with Irving "Swifty" Iazar, another agent. The memoirs are still being written.

Meredith first ruffled feathers when he introduced the literary auction 20 years ago. Agents' ethics had mandated that they offer a book to one publisher at a time, as gentlemen would.

Meredith sent out 10 copies of a first novel to 10 publishers and gave a deadline for a firm bid. It was a gamble, but they bid.

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Meredith also irritates colleagues by charging to read manuscripts. His prices are nominal, \$50 to \$150. For that you get a detailed critique.