

BOOK BREAK

# Hollywood tracks down Lathrup author



VICTORIA DIAZ

You could say that, up until just a few weeks ago, Lathrup Village author, Thomas Sullivan ("The Phases of Harry Moon," "Born Burning"), was a hunted man.

A newly established, Hollywood-based film group called Vista Entertainment was seeking him out, in a true grit sort of way.

He was between agents at the time, and Vista couldn't get much help at his former publisher, E.P. Dutton, a route often followed in these matters. Due to a major shake-up there, most of the staff who had known and kept up with Sullivan in past years had gone on to other places of employment.

The telephone was a dead end as well. Vista had called just about every Thomas Sullivan in every Michigan directory, but with no luck. (Later, they would learn he was there all along, but, for reasons of privacy, under a fictitious name.)

Not to be discouraged easily, however, they kept collective noses to the

ground, pursuing every lead. Unfortunately, over a period of about two years, every lead concluded in a very dead end. Maybe it was time, someone eventually suggested, to hire a private detective.

And then one day, a Vista rep. strolled into a small book-store somewhere in Manhattan, and struck up a conversation with the owner. Somehow, the conversation got around to Sullivan. As luck would have it, the owner of the bookstore happened to know Sullivan's former agent. The former agent knew Sullivan's whereabouts. One thing led to another, and you can guess the rest. What did Vista Entertainment want with one Thomas "Sully" Sullivan, novelist, short story writer, journalist, ex-teacher, former athlete, proud father, and self-proclaimed "child of the universe"?

They wanted to purchase film rights to his 1989 novel, "Born Burning," a unique tale of terror set in Michigan, with a small boy as its hero, and one of the darkest characters you could ever hope to meet as its villain.

With three years to find backing for the film, Vista looks forward to seeing "Born Burning" made into a major

motion picture.

Sullivan thinks that might be very nice (and yes, he's even gone so far as to imagine maybe Jack Nicholson in the role of the villain), but right now, he's just getting his real kicks from the fact that Vista went to all the trouble, and finally "got their man." (Sullivan, by the way, was never avoiding discovery, but simply didn't know of the search until he came home on that fateful day to see the little red light blinking on his answering machine.)

The whole experience, he noted one recent afternoon over a quick lunch, has certainly injected some fun into a life that had contained some pretty heavy stuff in recent years, including a painful divorce, and a complicated custody suit for his son, Sean. With two new books pretty much completed, he now has his eye on a full-fledged re-emergence in his literary career, much of which was put on hold during the extended legal battles.

"I could spend the option money (from Vista) in one afternoon at Baskin-Robbins," he said, stressing candidly that Vista hasn't made him a millionaire overnight. "But if it gets made, the film would allow me to commit

death by chocolate every afternoon for eternity.

"(If) it all turns into a pleasant but fading memory for me, I'll count myself out nothing. Tying up satellites with calls from the left and right coasts has been tremendously entertaining. The dream machine offers previews worth the price of admission."

Amid the telephone conversations studded with names like Spielberg, Paramount, and Disney, Vista heads Eileen Kimball (wife of noted cinematographer, Jeff Kimball), Tobey Belaky, and others have touched on the subject of Sullivan possibly writing the screenplay adaptation of his novel. Having relatively little experience in screenwriting, he said he doesn't expect to ultimately be the person named to the job. He'd like to try it, though, and, in fact, has already put together a "treatment" (as they say in Hollywood)! Just like in the movies, anything could happen.

Victoria Diaz of Livonia, a longtime member of Detroit Women Writers, has of lifelong interest in reading "everything from great novels to cereal boxes." You can leave a message for her on a Touch-Tone phone by dialing 953-2047.

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