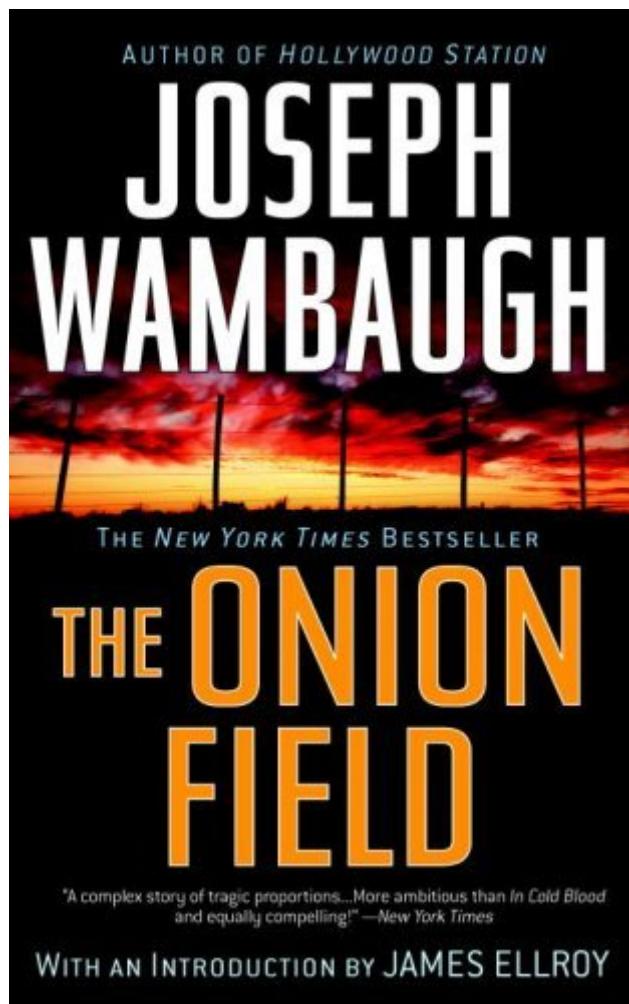


The book was found

The Onion Field



Synopsis

This is the frighteningly true story of two young cops and two young robbers whose separate destinies fatally cross one march night in a bizarre execution in a deserted Los Angeles field. From the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Onion Field" is at once an excellent novel and a fine pedagogical tool for high-school and college-level courses. The most relevant course themes for assigning this book would be: social problems, criminology, criminal justice, sociology of deviance, and sociology of law. L.A. plainclothesmen Karl Hattinger and Ian Campbell routinely investigate a pair of suspicious types, Greg Powell and Jimmy Smith. Unexpectedly, Powell pulls a gun on the cops, then forces them into a deserted onion field, where he kills Campbell in cold blood. Hattinger manages to escape, and through his eyewitness account, Powell and Smith are arrested. But that is not that. Thanks to their knowledge and manipulation of the quicksilver legal system, Powell and Smith manage to evade prosecution for years. Meanwhile, Hattinger goes through hell on earth, tortured with guilt over the

fact that he lived while Campbell died so ignominiously. Wambaugh brilliantly succeeds in capturing the Zeitgeist of the less tumultuous era of the early 1960s before the increase of cop killings in later years. A pertinent question that may be asked by students of social problems and deviance is: What social conditions have contributed to the increasing lethal vulnerability of agents of social control (i.e., police officers)?

It was frustrating to see how the guilty played the system. It really makes one understand how the public became frustrated with a lot of the fallout from the changes that were made from the 1960s through the 1980s that were backlashes to the decades of police misconduct, misuse of authority, and denial of constitutionally protected civil rights to suspects and persons of interest. It is especially sad that Karl Hettinger was outlived by both killers. I can't help but believe that all the stress he went through beginning with the victimization at the hands of Powell and Smith that night in the onion field and acerbated by the subsequent trials and treatment by the justice system and the LAPD. It was unconscionable for the LAPD to make Karl a whipping boy for what happened. At least he and Helen were able to rebuild their lives as a family. Ian Campbell never got to see his daughters grow up. He never got to hear Valerie play the pipes. Jimmy Smith never made a serious attempt to do anything useful with his life. He remained a career criminal and a sniveling coward who was too obtuse to see the three fingers pointing back every time he pointed the finger at the rest of the world as the source of his troubles in his stupidly wasted life. Greg Powell got his wish to live behind bars, which is best for the rest of the population. He never did anything to justify the luck of his existence even within the walls of prison. The excuse of the institutionalized man is no valid rationale for either Powell or Smith. Others have gone from rough childhoods and even prison as adults and still managed to become productive human beings. It seems from both of their backgrounds that these two sociopaths were made and not genetic anomalies. It also shows the warts of the justice system that doesn't have a Hollywood ending. It is not wrapped up with a nice prescribed verdict and everyone goes back to normal like movies or television. Cases can drag interminably eating up attorneys and prosecutors, details get lost or forgotten as witnesses disappear or die, crazy motions redirect the focus of trials from the crimes and perpetrators, and the real victims and the crimes against them are lost in the shuffle and human wreckage is strewn in the wake. As a nation we are still trying to adjust the delicate balance to the scales of justice because we are still far short of the ideal as recent events have revealed. In the final chapters, Wambaugh speaks of Ian Campbell and Karl Hettinger and their suffering being forgotten. Thanks to this book, they will not be forgotten and hopefully the courts, attorneys, and administrators in police departments will continue to learn from

it.

I thought this book would be the true account of the 1960s kidnapping of two police officers by two petty criminals, and the legal travesty that followed. Instead, I was disappointed to find this book was written as a novel—complete with a weird "gardener interlude" between chapters—with conversations or internal thoughts included that the author would have no way to substantiate. Realizing he added fictionalized content made it impossible to accept anything the author wrote, because it was hard to discern what conversations or events actually occurred and what the author concocted for dramatic effect. And there were no footnotes or bibliography to aid the reader in determining what was fact or show where the author obtained his information from. In the right hands, this could have been an insightful read into the real-life events that led to police manuals being rewritten, and in describing the role *Miranda v. Arizona* and *People v. Dorado* played in the court case that occurred BEFORE the *Miranda* and *Dorado* rulings made history. But here, it appears the author simply gathered up whatever information was already readily available, as there is no indication the author did any research or actually interviewed anyone connected to this case himself, thereby providing an unreliable account by blurring the lines of the true crime genre with embellishments that trivialized the events that actually took place.

This took place before I was born, but found it to be quite fascinating and shocking. They both deserved the death penalty for what they did. Also, I couldn't believe that they went through 12 judges. Excellent writing!

Not a new book, but an interesting read if you didn't get to it years ago. A sad story really, particularly for the surviving officer...but Wambaugh weaves it together hour and day by day.

Another masterpiece from the author. Not only sad because of what happened but of the way the attorneys manipulate the justice system.

This book by Joseph Wambaugh scared the living daylights out of me and broke my heart. It was a true story about the abduction of two young officers by a couple of lunatic bad guys. I don't know if I have the nerve or guts to read it again. Maybe someday. I still feel the anger and sadness about the trials and fear those guys felt, also the aftermath. All in all, a great book. One shouldn't miss reading it.

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