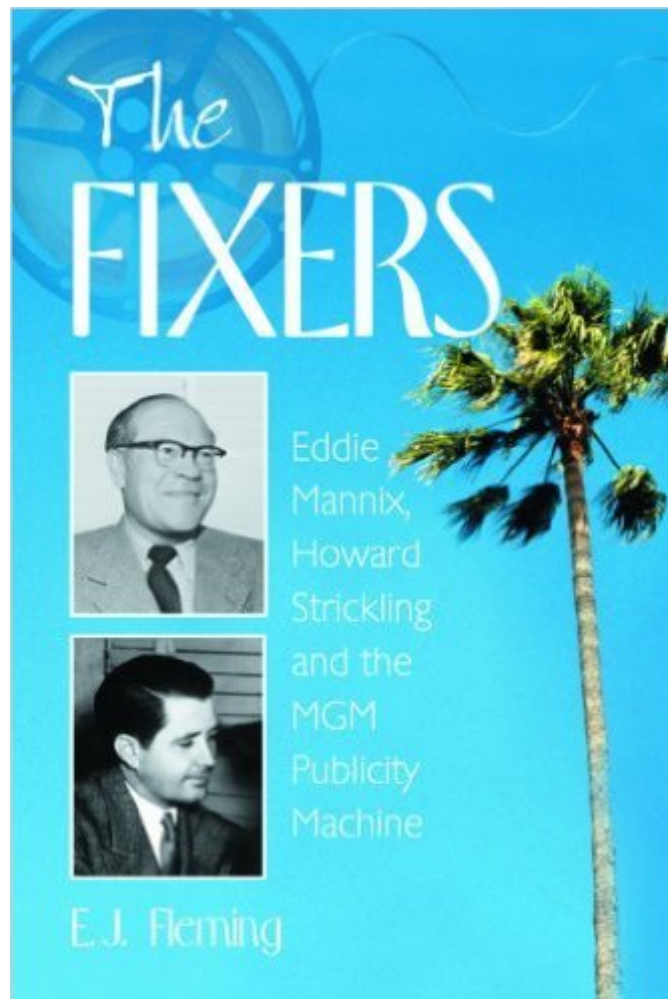


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The Fixers: Eddie Mannix, Howard Strickling And The MGM Publicity Machine



Synopsis

Eddie Mannix and Howard Strickling are virtually unknown outside of Hollywood and little-remembered even there, but as General Manager and Head of Publicity for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, they lorded over all the stars in Hollywood's golden age from the 1920s through the 1940s--including legends like Garbo, Dietrich, Gable and Garland. When MGM stars found themselves in trouble, it was Eddie and Howard who took care of them--solved their problems, hid their crimes, and kept their secrets. They were "the Fixers." At a time when image meant everything and the stars were worth millions to the studios that owned them, Mannix and Strickling were the most important men at MGM. Through a complex web of contacts in every arena, from reporters and doctors to corrupt police and district attorneys, they covered up some of the most notorious crimes and scandals in Hollywood history, keeping stars out of jail and, more importantly, their names out of the papers. They handled problems as diverse as the murder of Paul Bern (husband of MGM's biggest star, Jean Harlow), the studio-directed drug addictions of Judy Garland, the murder of Ted Healy (creator of The Three Stooges) at the hands of Wallace Beery, and arranging for an unmarried Loretta Young to adopt her own child--a child fathered by a married Clark Gable. Through exhaustive research and interviews with contemporaries, this is the never-before-told story of Eddie Mannix and Howard Strickling. The dual biography describes how a mob-related New Jersey laborer and the quiet son of a grocer became the most powerful men at the biggest studio in the world.

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Customer Reviews

I'm a big fan of classic Hollywood, and in the many star biographies I've read, the names of Eddie Mannix and Howard Strickling crop up often. When I found an entire book, just about the two of them, I pounced. Fleming has some fascinating stories to tell, and at first glance, most of the anecdotes appear to be, for the most part, well documented. When he relies on his own theories, he clearly states that this is the case; even when he just theorizing, he seems to have a good basis in fact, or what facts can still be uncovered after all these years, and after all the covering-up Mannix and Strickling did. His theories about, for example, the deaths of Paul Bern and George Reeves seem sound, on the face of them. I was shocked to read of Wallace Beery's alleged involvement in the beating death of Ted Healy, founder of the Three Stooges, but even that seems to be reasonably well proven. He does a good amount of research about the early lives of Strickling and Mannix, a topic that has never been explored at any length before. He also provides a detailed history of the origins of the motion picture industry and the births of the major studios, much of which will be familiar to scholars of Hollywood history. I started to seriously doubt his accuracy for the first time around page 166, when he describes Jean Harlow's death as being caused by "uremic poisoning caused by an infection from wisdom teeth surgery the month before.

Initially I enjoyed reading the book although I did find the author's style of writing a little annoying. However I quickly became concerned about the level of research the author had conducted for each scandal that was discussed. In some cases it seemed to be fine and quite well thought out, for example his take on Clark Gable's involvement in a couple of road accidents and then at other times he seemed to rely solely on another persons' book for his research. The worst example I came across which really irritated me was his take on the death of Thelma Todd, the extent of his research seems to have been that he read Hot Toddy and has taken it as Gospel. I have read Hot Toddy and it had no list of references to help prove that Thelma Todd was murdered in fact it read like a completely fictionalised biography. From this point on I noticed just how often the author made reference to other people's books for his research and I began to think that this book was little more than a cobbling together of all the racy and interesting gossip from lots of other books. To be honest

this wouldn't have bothered me as I quite enjoy reading a real hatchet job of a book about film stars, reading all the gossip and comparing books about the same person. However I don't think that this was what the author set out to do and I feel cheated that he didn't look more closely at each story and assess them properly which is what I thought he was going to do, comparing different takes on a scandal or piece of gossip and then giving his own opinion and research. Considering the book is about Strickling and Mannix they do not really come across as the main focus of the book. I don't feel that I know much more about them than I did from reading other Hollywood books.

"The Fixers" is a wildly inaccurate book that inflicts great damage to the integrity of responsible cinema history on two fronts. 1. The book is replete with factual errors on picture titles, studios, performers, names, you pick a category. A complete listing of the mistakes by author E.J. Fleming should require McFarland to publish a separate errata sheet but that listing would probably be longer than the book itself! 2. The content is a veritable slop bucket of unsubstantiated gossip, rumor and absurd speculation. Most of this nonsense lacks any type of documentation or fact although Fleming relies on discredited sources like Charles Higham and Kenneth Anger to foist his view of Hollywood as a stewpot of perverseness. The obsession over the sexual orientation of actors such as Barbara Stanwyck and Cary Grant is over-emphasized to the point of absurdity. While there is always interest in that prurient aspect of Old Hollywood that constitutes gossip or scandal (particularly by publishers!), such accounts need to be balanced and well-grounded in fact, not simply assumed in an author's imagination as this book was evidently written. The Fixers is in no way a researched nor balanced biography of Howard Strickling or Eddie Mannix. Both men are presented in broad brush strokes as omnipotent CIA-like studio manipulators without a single redeeming feature. One of the few solid parts of the book is the initial narrative concerning the mysterious demise of 'Superman' actor George Reeves although the author's rendition appears to be heavily borrowed from the writing of Sam Kashner's and Nancy Schoenberger's "Hollywood Kryptonite". Even though E.J.

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