

## A Miss

By Ron Capshaw

### *Hit List*

Richard Belzer & David Wayne

Skyhorse Publishing. 368 pp. \$26.95

As the historiography of the Kennedy assassination approaches its 50th year, the pendulum seems to be swinging back to the Oswald-did-it-alone thesis of the much-maligned Warren Commission. The Dallas Police Department (DPD) in recent years unearthed records that showed Oswald's fingerprints on the trigger of the Mannlicher-Carcano. The DPD also revealed that the tramps arrested on the day of the shooting were in fact tramps and not fleeing assassins or point men for the plot.

For those who argue that anything coming out of the DPD, that collection of Southern crackers in collusion with the military-industrial complex, is suspect, there are those who present evidence with no political axe to grind. [Computer analysis](#) of supposed bullet trajectories from the grassy knoll show that for a head shot to have come from there the shooter would have had to be elevated 40 feet from the ground—a matter that witnesses that day might have noticed. A [non-partisan sniper](#) recently tried to duplicate a shot from the grassy knoll and concluded that it would have passed through the president's head and ripped Jackie's face off.

But Oswald as the lone assassin seems to run aground when the matter of the mysteriously dying witnesses comes up. Even those that believe in the Warren thesis contradict themselves about the witnesses. A stalwart liberal friend of mine once said in the same breath that he believed Oswald did it alone and that the deaths of the witnesses was very much mob behavior.

And we have Jack Ruby to thank for this, or "Sparky" as he was known to his friends. Ruby's televised murder of Oswald set tongues wagging, or as Christopher Hitchens said, once Oswald's mouth had been shut, "everyone else's was free to open."

Richard Belzer's is certainly open. Belzer is one of these actors who take their film or TV roles to heart. We've seen this all before: Jessica Lange, or Sissy Spacek, believe that by playing farmers, they acquire the expertise to testify before Congress on the plight of the agrarian community. Belzer plays a homicide detective on TV, but somewhere from script to his own writings, the concept of empirical and forensic evidence seems to have eluded him.

*Hit List*, with its CIA using dart guns to induce cancer and/or heart attacks, goes beyond even Oliver Stone, who after all, only showed a witness dying by having lethal pills shoved down his throat. Jack Ruby is injected with cancer while in prison; Guy Bannister suffers a heart attack by dart. Even J. Edgar Hoover is not immune from a death-dealing poison administered by White House operatives. Lee Bowers, the railroad man in a 14-foot-high tower, not noticing the 26-foot-higher platform of the grassy knoll sniper, is drugged before being run off the road and killed by driver on a dirt road in Midlothian, Texas. (Geraldo Rivera posed the best rebuttal to the need for Bowers's supposed murder when he rhetorically asked, why kill Bowers when it seemed he already told all he knew?).

The authors could have been on surer footing with the death of Eladio De Valle and Johnny Rosselli. Both were killed in violent ways; De Valle, with ties to the anti-Castro community in Miami, was shot in the heart and had his head split open with an axe; Rosselli was found in a 55 gallon oil drum stabbed, shot, and legs sawn off.

But that is not enough. Belzer argues that both Ferrie's death in New Orleans and De Valle's in Miami was coordinated by the assassins to occur at the same time (walkie-talkies?).

On Ruby, they cannot argue for any pre-planned assassination of Oswald. In a death-bed interview with his defense attorney, while those "injected cancer cells" were supposedly raging, Ruby stated he never knew Oswald and intercepted him quite by accident, as he was out telegraphing money to one of his strippers at the Western Union office near police headquarters. That Ruby did not know exactly what he was going to do beforehand is evidenced by him leaving his beloved dog, who he bizarrely called his "wife," in the car.

That he did it, not on orders from the mob or Allen Dulles or Hunt oil, but to keep Jackie from the stress of a trial, was borne out in a comment he made to Assistant DA Bill Alexander after being arrested: "That son of a bitch killed my president!"

Like Oliver Stone, Belzer quotes Ruby's jailhouse testimony to Earl Warren about the conspiracy of Nazi-types taking over the country and how he believes he cannot talk freely in Dallas. Like Stone though, Belzer cherry picks Ruby's testimony, leaving out key comments that contradict the Belzer/Stone thesis.

Ruby also said, "No one else requested me to do anything. I never spoke to anyone about attempting to do anything. No subversive organization gave me any idea.

No underworld person made any effort to contact me. It all happened that Sunday morning.”

Belzer lays much stock in the Ruby quote that “a whole new form of government is going to take over our country” without providing the preceding quote that made suspect anything Ruby said about conspiracies, i.e., the “Jewish people are being exterminated at this moment.”

Like many conspiracy-mongers, Belzer gives the CIA a wet-work capability they simply did not have. After all, this group couldn’t knock off Castro, and their attempts—poison scuba suits, exploding cigars—were the last word in musical comedy (apparently those cancer-causing blow darts weren’t considered). William F. Buckley, in a bit of gallows humor, concluded that the CIA couldn’t have killed Kennedy because the president was murdered. If actually tasked with the assignment, the CIA would have characteristically missed JFK and killed everyone else.

Belzer details many other journalists and witnesses who were allegedly knocked off. But consider who wasn’t killed. Why not LBJ? After all, he should have earned the wrath of the anti-Castro/CIA group since, right after assuming office, called off the Kennedy brothers’ “goddamn Murder Incorporated in the Caribbean” (JFK was a better bet for the Castro plots, as before November 22, he had stepped up the assassination plots against the dictator). If the CIA/mafia had such a reach as to kill J. Edgar Hoover then why not slip some cancer-causing cells into one of Johnson’s sirloin steaks?

At the same time, eyewitnesses like Jean Hill, who had the seemingly dangerous testimony of having seen a man firing from the grassy knoll, lived till 2000. Victoria Adams, who claimed she didn’t see Oswald running down the Depository stairs beside her after the shots were fired (and hence, he could not have been on the sixth floor), is still alive and well. Marina Oswald, the person closest to Oswald, is still up and running. Perhaps they had quicker reflexes to dodge those darts.

Historians and even some conspiracy theorists may consider Belzer a trespassing amateur. But the reality is that the former stand-up comedian, and the CIA he conjures up are made for each other. Both inadvertently provide us all with prat-falling comedy.