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JOSEPH WAMBAUGH

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THE CHOIRBOYS

THE CULTIVER DOVE

THE GLITTER DOME

Joseph Wambaugh



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THE GLITTER DOME

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The New Centurions
The Blue Knight • The Choirboys
The Black Marble • The Onion Field
and now . . .
The Glitter Dome

Within the smoke-filled disco-bar, cheap thrills carry a heavy price. Payday groupies rub against cops drowning in triple shots. And skull-cracking homicide detectives like Welborn and Mackey kick around cases from softcore porn to hardcore murder. How could a truly successful studio boss—a *star-maker!*—with a billion-dollar grin stop two .38 slugs with his face?

Joseph Wambaugh
The Glitter Dome

"A MARVEL!"
—*Publishers Weekly*

A perverse thank you to those in The Business, who, during a two-year Passage To Hollywood, imbued the author with sufficient venom to produce this book.

and

A humble thank you to Jay Allen, Harold Becker, Jeanne Bernkopf, Jack Herron, John Sturgeon, who helped the author complete the Passage, relatively intact.

IN HOLLYWOOD!

Where is the place that they all like to go?

It's Hollywood.

Jack 'n' Jill. Bruce and Bill, Farrah and Bo

Go Hollywood.

Down on the boulevard Saturday night,

You've never seen such a colorful sight,

But make sure that you roll up your windows real tight

In Hollywood.

Where are there so many hustling stars?

In Hollywood.

Stuck in the sidewalk or parking your cars—

That's Hollywood.

Most every moment you'll hear sirens scream;

Follow the cop cars—you'll soon reach the scene

And you're bound to end up on the big or small screen

In Hollywood.

In the tradition of countless marines

Go Hollywood.

Tuck your equipment in super-tight jeans,

Go Hollywood.

Saunter the boulevard, you're out for hire,

Milk all you can out of old men's desire,

'Cause in just a few years you'll find *you* are the buyer—

That's Hollywood!

—SONG BY IAN WHITCOMB

THE
GLITTER DOME

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOSEPH WAMBAUGH is the author of *The New Centurions*, *The Blue Knight*, *The Onion Field*, *The Choirboys*, and *The Black Marble*—all of them outstanding bestsellers. He is a veteran of fourteen years with the Los Angeles Police Department and currently lives near Los Angeles with his wife and children.

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The Glitter Dome

It was six inches long. He stroked it lightly, but he could not conjure an appropriate response: eroticism, revulsion, fascination, *terror*. He had read it described in a hundred melodramatic and pathetic suicide notes. Technology had even infiltrated death messages: So far this year four farewells were transmitted on taped cassettes, the ultimate proof of declining literacy.

It was dark and cool in the tiny kitchen. The formica table-top was greasy and wet from the spillage of Tullamore Dew. He stroked the thing again. It had hung on his body for too long. More of a cock than the other one. He used it once a month as required by the Los Angeles Police Department. He had *tried* to use the other one this very night. The fifth of Tullamore Dew was nearly empty. He should be anesthetized. He'd nearly died and all he could think of was his cock. But the memory of the misfire *hurt*.

Even the Pacific Ocean had the sweats that night. The offshore breeze was hot and wet. He ought to have turned and left The Glitter Dome the moment he entered. It was just nine o'clock, yet there they were, perched at the long bar like Mother Carey's chickens.

Chinatown gave him a headache, especially on those two nights a month when The Glitter Dome was jammed with chickens, yet that was why he was here. Police payday.

He had retreated utterly to the bosom of the cop "family." To The Glitter Dome. To kaleidoscopic colors: greens, yellows, reds, all of which he hated. To chaotic winking lights and leering neon messages. To winking groupies (seldom at him) and leering young cops plucking the chickens from their tentative perches at that long, long bar.

The hysteria was palpable. The Glitter Dome was teeming, smoky, loud. A dozen couples bumped and banged together on a parqueted dance floor hardly larger than a king-size bed. And it may as well have been a bed: Three of the groping, licking, grinding pairs of cops and chickens had managed everything but penetration.

He had known he should leave. He thought about leaving. But his legs were hurting from a game of handball at the police academy. *His* stupid idea, to provide some badly needed diversion for his partner, Martin Welborn, who, after his marital separation, had become morose, distant, burned out, *eerie*. They'd been partners for three years and he was suddenly scared for Marty Welborn.

So if it hadn't been for his friendship with Marty Welborn, and the handball, and the sore legs, he would not have almost *died* this night. He was ready to leave when one of the chickens (this one more of a vulture) was plucked from her stool by a cop he knew, a street monster named Buckmore Phipps who patrolled Hollywood Boulevard with the subtlety of a Russian gunship.

"Whaddaya know, whaddaya say?" Buckmore Phipps grinned, baring thirty-two donkey teeth, amazingly still intact, given the way *this* street monster did business on the boulevard. "If it ain't Aloysius Mackey. Welcome to the Bay of Pigs."

Then Buckmore Phipps was off to the dance floor with his boozy vulture, probably a record clerk. Al Mackey had gotten so he could tell the record clerks from the communications operators even before they opened their mouths. The policewomen were most easily identifiable: They evinced all the cynicism of their male counterparts.

So there was an empty barstool, and his legs hurt, and

he had a sudden yen for three fingers of Tullamore Dew. He pointed to the bottle of Irish whiskey and nodded to Wing, the proprietor. With his overlong neck, and hollow eyes, and small head with sparse tufts of slicked-down hair sprung loose on each side like antennae, Wing looked for all the world like a praying mantis hopping around behind the long bar, his bony arms extending from his emerald mandarin jacket. Wing was a third-generation American who affected a Chinese accent and obsequious demeanor for daytime tourists. Nothing was as it seemed in The Glitter Dome.

"Double?" Wing winked, pouring a triple.

Before the night was over he would shortchange the detective to more than make up for it. Nothing was free in The Glitter Dome either. The perfect microcosm for Al Mackey. Thank God Marty Welborn didn't come here. He'd probably go home and swallow his Smith & Wesson. The Glitter Dome was a death wish of a saloon.

Al Mackey tossed it down at once and Wing skipped over with another. Three triples of Tullamore Dew and the warlord of The Glitter Dome could give the uncomplaining detective change for a ten and drop his *twenty* into the mysterious box made of monkeypod which sat beside an abacus to accommodate the "tips" which never passed through the cash register. Wing called the "tips" a tribute to his honored ancestors who, among the huddled masses, came to these golden shores and prospered. There was an American flag on the front and Chinese characters painted on the back of the box. The message on the back, roughly translated, read: "Uncle Sam's taxes suck. It's every Chink for himself."

Another thing that Al Mackey hated about The Glitter Dome was the cascade of fruity drinks they poured over that bamboo long bar: Scorpions, Zombies, Fog Cutters. They all delivered a throat full of phlegm and a world-class hangover. And they were expensive.

"What division you work?"

She was rather young, something between a chicken and a vulture. But why did they all have phony lacquered

nails? The one that Buckmore Phipps had plucked loose from the bamboo had actually left claw marks in the varnished bar top.

"Hollywood Detectives." He said it to the Tullamore Dew, figuring it would be all over the second one of those virile, healthy young authority symbols from Central Patrol came swashbuckling in, full of juice and energy and hope, with the balance of a City of L.A. paycheck causing the *other* bulge in his jeans. We may not be the best cops in the world, honey, but we're the best paid!

And in they came. Look-alikes. Polyester body shirts, tight pants, hairstyles trimmed just short enough to keep the sergeants happy, the inevitable sideburns and moustaches. Why do all cops love sideburns except Al Mackey and Marty Welborn? God, it was so predictable, but not as predictable as the barroom greeting:

"Roll call!" bellowed one young cop, spotting a clutch of pals and friendly groupies. "Marcus!"

"Here!" a voice shouted from the smoky darkness. The goddamn place was starting to smell like incense. Al Mackey's head throbbed. A perverted Chinese church.

"Cedric!" the young cop bellowed, and a voice answered, "Present!"

"Sweet stuff!" the cop yelled, and three chickens from the corner pocket tittered and screamed, "Here! Over here!"

The chicken-vulture next to him surprised him by not letting it drop.

"I work communications."

"I woulda guessed."

"How?"

"Nice voice," he said. Big ass, he thought.

"My name's Grace," she said. "Some a the fellas call me Amazing Grace."

"Al Mackey," he said, giving her clammy hand a squeeze. Stress. Tension. So familiar, all of it. *Déjà vu*.

He became even more depressed when the door burst open again. (They *never* entered without a flourish.) Three more twenty-two-year-old father surrogates, fresh from a nightwatch radio car, came swaggering through the

plastic-beaded curtains, doing a momentary freeze-frame for the queue of fatherless Glitter Dome chickens.

To Al Mackey they all looked like John Travolta. Good-bye to the operator. Catch your number some other time. Maybe around two A.M. when you haven't been nested and you're ready for the middle-aged casualties even more hysterical than you are. The kind you wake up with in a Chinatown motel (the *walls* are yellow, green and red), all sour and boozy in a lumpy bed, having left those desperate claw marks in the ass of a sad, blowsy stranger.

Just then Al Mackey got the passing bittersweet idea of going home and shooting himself. Surprise, Marty! Old Kamikaze Mackey beat you to it.

He knew he was extra loaded tonight. The chicken-vulture had begun to look vulnerable and lovely. He wanted to touch her hand. Then she opened her mouth.

"I reeeeel-ly like mature detectives as opposed to cocky young bluesuits. In fact I despise *them*. My girlfriend says if they couldn't eat poontang there'd be a bounty on them."

She giggled into her Mai Tai just as he'd talked into his Tullamore Dew. They hadn't yet tried talking to each other. Perhaps they never would. What's the difference? The clanging of glasses sounded like the tolling of bells. A dark omen. He saw that she was at least as drunk as he.

"I despise that cheating Chinaman," he said to his Irish whiskey. "He's a thief."

Then Al Mackey signaled to the thief, who hopped down the long bar and warmed Al Mackey's cockles by pouring *four* fingers without shortchanging him yet.

"I'll tell you who I hate worse than any Chinaman," she said to the Mai Tai. Then she sucked the empty straw loudly enough to drown out the music of Fleetwood Mac any old day.

Al Mackey got the clue and nodded to the ever-watchful Wing, who skipped in with a premixed \$3.50 special. This time Wing cadged fifty cents from Al Mackey's change.

Amazing Grace didn't thank Al Mackey. Apparently,

the information about whom she hated worse than any Chinaman was worth three and a half scoots. "I hate that big ugly cop you talked to when you came in. You know, whatzisname with the big teeth?"

"Phipps. His name's Buckmore Phipps."

"Yeah, that piece a cancer. I hate him. Only good thing about him, he's such a lushwell his liver's probably big as his ass. Can't last much longer, way he does it. About a year. Canceled check. End of Watch. Bye bye, Bucko." Then, for the first time, she stopped talking to the Mai Tai. She turned to Al Mackey: "Do you know he has a drippy faucet?"

"A what?" Al Mackey was trying to concentrate on her dancing eyebrows. Was she a blonde? Was she *gray*? He looked down and saw that her ass was *bigger* than Buckmore Phipps' liver. The fact is, she was somewhat repulsive. He was getting aroused.

"I happen to know that in Hollywood patrol right now the clap's as common as a head cold. Your friend, Buckmore Phipps . . ."

"He's *not* my friend," Al Mackey protested boozily. "I hate him too."

Wing, never one to miss a conversation heating up, slid in with another triple of Tullamore Dew, took the correct amount from Al Mackey, and managed to steal a dollar from Amazing Grace's bar cash before drifting away.

"Your friend Buckmore . . . excuse me." She hiccupped wetly and wiped her mouth with a damp cocktail napkin, smearing orange lipstick over her chin. "He'd like to jump on my bones like a new trampoline. Tried to penetrate my knickers one night right here in The Glitter Dome! That's the kind a animal he is."

"I hate him," Al Mackey said fervently. "I really hate him."

"And I'll tell you something else." She leaned closer to say it. "I happen to know he's practically *raising* crabs. A steno works Hollywood nightwatch told me. He has them in his armpits even."

"A goddamn crab ranch," Al Mackey said, seeing two

Mai Tais in front of the hefty operator when logic told him there was one. Double vision meant it was now or never.

"Say, listen . . ." He didn't remember her name. "Listen . . . Miss."

"That's nice," she said. "I told you my name's Grace. You'd rather call me Miss. You don't hear such politeness from those young bluecoats. I think that's awful sweet, Art."

"Al."

"That's sweet, Al."

"Grace, how about I take you home?"

"I got a car."

"Okay, you take *me* home." Al Mackey touched her hand.

"Where you live, Al?" She stroked his finger. It was getting hotter by the minute. Wing sidled by, nicking two quarters with utter impunity.

"I don't live far, Grace," Al Mackey murmured. Their faces were inches apart.

"Where you live, Al?" she belched.

"The Chinatown Motel."

"Oh, Al!" she squealed. "That's funny!" Grace pushed him playfully, which caused him to pitch backwards, stool and all. Only the return of Buckmore Phipps kept him from crashing to the floor on his head.

"Hold on there, Aloysius." Buckmore Phipps easily caught the frail detective in midflight. "Kee-rist, Mackey, I got a water ski bigger than you. You get any skinnier you're gonna *disappear*."

When Al Mackey was safely back on his stool and Amazing Grace was sending frantic signals by sucking air through the empty straw, Buckmore Phipps said, "It's this Glitter Dome piss you're drinkin. Irish whiskey, my dick. Wing has it brewed on the shores a Lake Mojave by a gang a bootleggers. Stuff they can't ferment they use for moorings."

"My right eye just slammed shut. I'm getting bored," said Buckmore Phipps' vulture, now clinging to the huge shoulder of the cop. "We cutting out or not?"

"We sure are, Babycakes," the big cop cooed. "Daddy's gonna take his Babycakes home and we're gonna . . . Let's see, first we're gonna . . . *fight!*"

"Oh, Daddy! Daddy!" she squealed, and Al Mackey's depression worsened. Talk about father surrogates!

"Babycakes gives Daddy a bust in the mouth and a crack in the teeth and the fight's aaaaalllll over. Then it's *piece*, Babycakes." He made a peace sign with fingers as thick as shotgun shells.

"What a hunk!" The vulture ran her claws down the big cop's chest, raking the plunging nylon shirt.

"Listen, Grace," Al Mackey said, "what say you and me . . ."

But it was no use. The rum-filled operator was staring at Buckmore Phipps' mean and massive body as the other vulture bit his shoulder and said, "Will Daddy tell Babycakes cops 'n' robbers stories?"

Buckmore Phipps had been here a time or two. "Sure I will, Babycakes. Tell you about how I got shot last year. Had a slug in my bladder floating in piss for a week till they got it out. Gave me *all* new plumbin, though. Now I fire *tracers!* Burny, burny, burny!"

And so forth. Babycakes couldn't keep her hands off him as they pushed through the crowd. Al Mackey heard Buckmore Phipps' superfluous parting shot. The big cop said to his vulture: "I'm the *best* man in this saloon."

Amazing Grace sighed and watched Buckmore Phipps all the way through the beaded curtains. Crab ranch and all.

"Well, she can have him," Amazing Grace announced after they were gone. "The way he talks to ladies. Calls her every kind a douche bag from full to empty. Still, she'd go along if he said he was driving to Hawaii. Huh! Best man in this saloon. Sure."

"I'm about the seventeenth best man in this saloon," Al Mackey said earnestly. Honesty *might* win the day.

But honesty had nothing to do with it, finally. Economics decided things. He wasn't as skinny as he looked before her fifth Mai Tai. And he was actually pretty young. No more than forty-six, forty-seven, maybe. One

of those guys that probably looked old in high school. Probably no ass at all, but a nice guy. This Art Mackey was reeeeeeel-ly a nice guy. Economics. Supply and demand.

Ten minutes later they held each other upright and pushed through the madding crowd, much to the sorrow of Wing, who hated to see rummies get away with a few bucks left in their kick.

Perhaps the second saddest moment of the evening for Al Mackey was the snatch of conversation he heard at the far end of the long bar as he swayed past poor old Cal Greenberg, a thirty-five-year detective from his own division, who was desperately trying to make his point over the din of snaky hard rock to a lethargic young cop from Newton Street Station who couldn't care less.

"I wouldn't mind," poor old Cal Greenberg shouted. "If it was music, I wouldn't mind. You call this music?"

"You know that record clerk works the Badcat Detail," the young cop answered. "Maggie something? Tits from here to San Diego? That one?"

"Well, do you? Do you call it music?"

"Tits from here to Texas? Maggie I think it is?"

"Tits! That's all you want out of life? Would you rather have brains or tits?" poor old Cal Greenberg demanded.

"Shit," the young cop said drily. "If I had brains I could *buy* the tits."

"But you call this music?" poor old Cal Greenberg insisted. "This is *not* music. You ever heard of Glenn Miller? *He* made music. Glenn Miller. You ever *heard* of him?"

Wing ended poor old Cal Greenberg's imminent crying jag by pouring him a double. He let his furtive emerald sleeve slither across the pile of bills in front of the old detective. Wing managed to steal two bucks along with the price of the double to add to the box of mad money.

"Tell him, Wing," poor old Cal Greenberg pleaded. "Tell this kid. Glenn Miller was a hero!"

"Hero, my tush," Wing giggled, turning the hard rock two decibels louder. "He couldn't even *fly*."

Wing dropped the booty in the box made of monkey-