

James M. Fox

CODE THREE



**A thriller set in the seamy side
of a great city where crime
and politics work hand in hand.**

PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION

General Editor: Brian Aldiss

1999

SIRIUS

OLAF STAPLEDON

William Olaf Stapledon was born in 1886 and educated at Abbotsholme School, Balliol College, Oxford, and Liverpool University. After spending eighteen months with a shipping office in Liverpool and Port Said, he lectured extramurally for Liverpool University in English literature and industrial history. He served in France with the Friends' Ambulance Unit from 1915 to 1919. He subsequently lectured, again extramurally, for Liverpool University, in psychology and philosophy. He died in 1950. His books include *Last and First Men* (1930), *A Modern Theory of Ethics*, *Odd John* (1935), *Star Maker* (1937), and *A Man Divided* (1950).



PENGUIN BOOKS

1671

JACK WOULD BE A GENTLEMAN

GILLIAN FREEMAN



CODE THREE

Detective Sergeant Jerry Long is assigned to investigate the murder of a petty hoodlum, then, suddenly he is officially called off. But dogged by a sense of justice Jerry continues to work - secretly and unofficially. "Code Three" is not only a novel of suspense and detection; it is also a picture of the seamy side of a great city where crime and politics work hand-in-hand.



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JAMES M. FOX

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very own. This ought to be an easy one for guys like you – we discovered a curly black hair at the scene.”

“It undoubtedly came off the point of your head,” the twin who was driving observed with a grin. “What else you got?”

“A very unlovely body,” Jerry said.

“Need any casts?”

“Just pics – the usual.”

“You’re a pal. Murder, huh?”

“One of the most shocking and revolting crimes I’ve seen this week,” Jerry told him. “You can quote me.”

“And you expect to have the killer behind bars for the morning edition,” finished the lab man. “Here comes the smear brigade, right now.”

Another pair of headlights topped the rise and raced towards the intersection. The car made the turn and drew up behind the lab truck. Doors slammed and two men came out from behind the headlights. The first was middle-aged and waddling fat, and swung a battered Speed Graphic by its strap, as if it were a ladies’ pocket-book. The second was hatless, slender, young, and sported a crewcut. The fat man peered jovially at them.

“Hiya, boys,” he said cheerfully. “Anything good?”

“We have a body in a forty-dollar suit,” Chuck Conley said. “That’s as far as we got.”

“Any angle?”

“You can make one up,” Conley assured him.

“Where is it at?”

“We’re going over now,” the crime lab man said. “We’ll lead you by the hand.”

“You’re so good to us,” simpered the photographer. “Don’t you guys ever get mad?”

“Tangle with one of our uniform boys and you’ll see,” Conley told him. “They’re the ones who are taking the heat. Why don’t you ghouls lay off us for a while and pick on the sheriff’s office?”

"They're incorruptible - aren't they?" the reporter asked him with a leer.

Chuck snorted. "Stir that outfit with a stick and the whole county would have to be evacuated," he grumbled. "No kidding, Miltie, what's the beef? Who are the clowns behind those editorials?"

"Hell, I don't know," the fat photographer said. "They're after the mayor, I guess. There's lots of people want this town prised open. It's been locked up tighter than an old maid's secret for eight years. What the hell do you guys care? You can't make a living under a reform administration anyway."

"Pearls of wisdom from the cherubic lips of a newspaper man," Chuck sighed. "Comes the millenium."

They moved over to the body in a group. The lab man and the fat photographer shot their pictures while the others watched.

"Know who he is?" the fat man asked Jerry, pocketing his plates.

"Not yet."

"Well, thanks, boys. We'll be seeing you."

The press car pulled away. Chuck walked over to where Jerry stood and tapped the bowl of his pipe against the heel of one hand, gently dislodging the burned tobacco.

"He has it pegged about right," Jerry mused. "They're trying to undermine the administration. We'll be catching hell right along - until after the election."

"I can stand it till then," Chuck said comfortably.

"I'd hate to see this town disintegrate."

"What makes you think it would?"

"His honourable nibs is supposed to be the best city manager in the country. The only people interested in getting him out would be the gambling, dope and prostitution syndicates. They're crowded around the city limits now like a bunch of claim jumpers."

"Maybe so," Chuck admitted. "But it strains their mentality to mark a race sheet – they're not writing editorials."

"They've got connections. Look at Manny Gimon. He's turned the county into a Punch-and-Judy show – and some of his wires run right up to the state capitol."

"Manny sticks to bookmaking."

"Yeah, because he has to. The Mafia controls dope and prostitution clear across the country. Jack Ringo is their man – and Manny isn't about to move in on that traffic. This town is loaded with dough. It's the only big piece of gingerbread left on the plate."

"Let's worry about it," Chuck said, grinning. "The public wants an honest administration like I want a broken leg!"

The radio car came cruising back down the street and coasted up beside them.

"We found one couple – a few blocks over," the driver reported, chuckling. "Had to pry them apart with a crowbar. They didn't come by here, they said."

"Thanks for trying," Jerry told him. "Guess you fellows can check out."

"Okay, Sarge. Any time."

The radio car departed with a roar. Jerry Long looked at his watch again. It was a few minutes after two. The twins from the crime lab came over.

"If you guys want to take off, we'll baby-sit until the coroner gets here," one of them offered. "We got all morning."

Across the street, the radio in the call car crackled. "Sixteen W One – come in," floated through the window.

"I'll get it," Chuck Conley said, and walked over to the car.

"We'll follow the coroner on in and get the rest of our pictures," the lab man continued. "You want the

works on his clothes, fingernails and the rest of it, don't you?"

"Yeah, we'll need all of that. Thanks, boys."

"Don't mention it."

Jerry turned on his heels and crossed the street. Chuck had replaced the mike.

"Kickback?"

"Uh-huh. The tattoo checks out to a guy named Eddie Duval. A bookie."

"That right? I'll bet the county found him first and dumped him over the line!"

Chuck grinned around his pipe-stem. "The place is pretty near the boundary, isn't it?"

"About four blocks. Well, let's stop by for coffee, and phone in and have his package pulled."

"Okay with me."

Jerry drove east out of the oil-well pocket and turned towards town on the first main boulevard. When he came to a drive-in restaurant, he tooled into the parking lot and coasted to a stop. A waitress in an abbreviated ice-skating outfit eyed him speculatively, then pranced by with a loaded tray. The edge of her skirt was trimmed with chalk-white rabbit fur and flounced with the swing of her hips.

"What's the matter with that?" Chuck Conley wanted to know.

"She's wearing a wedding ring."

"The hell she is! I didn't notice."

"I believe you," Jerry said. He climbed from the car and walked over to the phone booth at the edge of the lot. He dialled and got City Hall. The operator sounded sleepy and annoyed.

"Twenty-six hundred," he told her.

She dutifully repeated the number, her tone laconic now. There was a click, and two soft buzzes, and another

click, and then at last a cheerful male voice. "Records - Bunch!"

"It's Jerry Long, Max. How are you?"

"Pregnant, as usual. You having any?"

"I've been had. Listen, you yanked a name out of the oddities for us a while ago - Eddie Duval. Is there a package on him?"

"Sure thing, kid - hold your left one!"

There was a dull clank as the receiver was laid down, and a fading whistle. Jerry thumbed through the central telephone directory while he waited. There was an Edward M. Duval with an address of 1025 Gainley Park Avenue.

Jerry closed the book, cracked the door of the phone booth open, fished out a cigarette and touched a match to it. Through the wire-webbed glass of the door, he could see Chuck Conley's head framed in the car window, chin on folded forearms, the cherished meerschaum drooping from his face. The buxom brunette waitress stood in front of him. From that distance, it looked as if the bowl of the pipe was snuggled in between her jutting breasts.

"Jerry?" Bunch was back on the wire.

"Yeah, I'm here." Jerry flipped his notebook open and poised his pencil over a blank page.

"Edward Monroe Duval, male Caucasian, thirty-five in fifty-two. Record goes back to forty-eight. Three book-making arrests is all. Last one in April - six months suspended and a hundred and fifty bucks. What else you want?"

"Last address, hang-outs and relatives."

"Ten twenty-five Gainley Park, Apartment 208. No relatives listed. Hangs out along Seventh - between Grant and Alvarado. Books in bars."

"Has he ever made a crime report?"

"You can hold your right one, this time." Bunch laid down the receiver again.

Jerry waited. He opened the booth door all the way and flipped out his cigarette butt. Over by the drive-in, the brunette hung a coffee tray on the window of the call car - on the opposite side from where Chuck Conley was sitting - and flounced away with her nose in the air. Jerry grinned.

"Hey, kid - you there?"

"Yeah, Max, go right ahead."

"He was picked up last May in a vacant lot - unconscious. Wouldn't talk. Reported by investigating officers as a miscellaneous injury. That's about it."

"Well, thanks."

"Anytime, kid. See ya!"

Jerry put the receiver back on its prongs and went back to the car. He eased the door open that had the tray clamped to it and climbed inside. He passed one of the cups to his partner and sipped at the other.

"I saw you making the pitch," he told Chuck. "What was it - a foul ball?"

The busty waitress crossed in front of them on her way to the service counter, her rabbit fur bouncing. She gave Chuck a sidelong glance of distaste. He took the pipe from his mouth, clicked his teeth at her, and put the pipe back between his lips. The girl tossed her head, but she smiled.

"I wish she hadn't done that," Chuck said, sighing. "Now, I don't know which one she means - the brush-off or the come-on."

"That's elemental, my dear Conley - the come-on, of course."

"If you know so much about women, how come you never got married?"

"There's an answer in that question," Jerry told him. "Even a detective should be able to hit on it."

"Yeah, yeah! Well, what did you find out?"

"It's nice of you to be interested. Eddie lives – or lived – on Gainley Park – and it isn't the first time he fell into a meat grinder."

"Welsher, huh?"

"Looks like it."

They drank their coffee and Jerry switched the lights on and off. The waitress came to his window, smiled at him and began unclamping the tray. Chuck watched her silently, puffing on his pipe. When she finished, he asked: "You work every night, baby?"

"Except Tuesday."

"You know, your husband is a very lucky guy."

She sniffed. "He doesn't act like it – not very often anyway."

"He should be taught a lesson then."

Her smile was cynical. "Good night, now. Come back soon," she trilled.

Jerry Long touched the starter, backed clear of the packing space and drove off the lot. He turned west, towards Gainley Park Avenue, threading his way through the light traffic, the speedometer flickering at fifty. They were well on their way before Chuck took his pipe from his mouth and knocked the ashes out into the slip stream of air beyond the side-wing.

"Goddammit, pal you could be right at that," he said.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 7,
3 A.M.

GAINLEY PARK AVENUE, in the ten hundred block, was solid with flats, duplexes and apartment houses. Ten twenty-five was a squat, multi-storied apartment house of ruffled red brick, and sported a fancy façade of weather-stained marble. A pair of stubby, sturdy rubber plants, in great concrete pots, flanked the entrance.

Cars lined the kerbs on both sides of the street, bumper to bumper. Jerry drove on by, turned the corner and parked the call car in a fireplug zone.

"What time you got?" Chuck Conley asked, as they climbed out.

Jerry held up his wrist so that the corner street light hit the dial of his watch. A yellow taxi grumbled past them, double-parked in front of the apartment house down the block, then pulled away with a whine of gears. A girl in a trim white linen dress emerged from between two of the parked cars and started up the walk. The light from the apartment house door struck a glint of red from her hair. The faint click-click of spike heels reached the men.

"Not bad," Chuck said. "Not half bad."

The girl had taken no more than a dozen steps when a dark coupé, its headlights off, coasted up into the space vacated by the taxi. The girl turned, looked, then ran towards the building. There were two brisk explosions and she stumbled on the sidewalk, falling heavily.

"Goddam!" Chuck said. His voice had cracked with the falsetto of surprise. He started forward at a run.

Jerry yanked out his gun and climbed over a pair of bumpers to reach the street. The engine of the coupé roared and the car shot towards him. He threw himself