



HOLLYWOOD APRIL 2003

Confidential's Reign Of Terror

Inside the magazine that catalyzed the celebrity tabloid culture.

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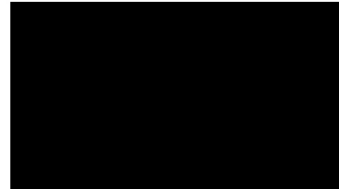
By the mid-50s, Robert Harrison's *Confidential* magazine was the scourge of Hollywood, naming names and dishing dirt, with its army of tipsters, private eyes, and libel lawyers. A 1957 court case—the “Trial of a Hundred Stars”—dismantled Harrison's gossip machine, but not before he'd redefined celebrity journalism.

The beginning of the end of the most terrifying force ever to hit Hollywood arrived on the night of November 5, 1954, on a dimly lit street in Los Angeles. Retired baseball great Joe DiMaggio was dining with pals at the Villa Capri restaurant and stewing over the demise of his marriage to Marilyn Monroe, who had been granted an interlocutory decree for divorce just a week earlier. He was especially furious about rumors that Monroe had been seeing another man. Following the suggestion of one of his friends—Frank Sinatra—DiMaggio had hired a former cop named Barney Ruditsky to tail her. While DiMaggio was eating and grousing, one of Ruditsky's men, a private eye named Philip Wayne Irwin, spotted Monroe's car parked on Kilkea Drive in front of an apartment complex. He immediately phoned Ruditsky, who met him there for a stakeout. After about an hour, Ruditsky left to phone Sinatra, knowing that Sinatra, at that moment, was at the Villa Capri with DiMaggio.

By the time Ruditsky returned to the stakeout, DiMaggio and his associates were already circling the block in the ex-Yankee's Cadillac. Sinatra later said that he had tried to talk DiMaggio out of taking action but that DiMaggio insisted he was going to catch Monroe in flagrante. Sinatra reluctantly agreed to drive him, park the car a block away, and wait while DiMaggio and two companions launched their mission. Though Irwin and Ruditsky both tried to calm DiMaggio, he snapped, “I'm not fooling around here any longer.” So Ruditsky led the expedition to the back door of the apartment where Monroe was supposed to be visiting. The gang then kicked down the door—only it wasn't Monroe they found in the bed. She was upstairs in the apartment of a friend, a bit actress named Sheila Stewart. Instead, the men had invaded the apartment of a terrified middle-aged woman named Florence Kotz, who screamed as DiMaggio and his accomplices bolted.

The L.A.P.D. investigated the incident as a foiled burglary

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and, without suspects, the case faded. But someone sold the “wrong-door raid” story to *Confidential* magazine, where it appeared in the September 1955 issue. A year and a half later, when California state senator Fred Kraft went looking for a pretense to attack *Confidential*, he pounced on the story, citing the incident as an example of “strong-arm” tactics by private eyes in the service of the magazine.