

## The Spy Who Found Honor

By Craig M. Collins

James Bond fans know that no one but Sean Connery has ever brought dignity to the role. George Lazenby, one of the others who have portrayed Her Majesty's best secret agent, managed an uninspired but sincere portrayal—which is unquestionably better than anything done by Roger Moore. Moore's presumptuous attempts at the role can be dismissed as broad farce. Pee Wee Herman could capture the essence of the role better than Moore. James Bond is a hired killer, a highly efficient and very deadly machine completely amoral except for his absolutely unshakable loyalty to the Crown. His body is like rich, brown leather stretched taut over braided steel-cable muscles. Even if Roger Moore's entire body were run through a juicer, it wouldn't squeeze out enough machismo to fill one of Sean Connery's shoes.

Connery's eyes, like a panther's, are incessantly alert, but his face reveals something about the man within the machine. He's devoted his entire lifetime to developing himself as an agent of death, not for pleasure or money or love or hate, but solely in the name of patriotism. His duty to his country is the *sine qua non* of James Bond. Since emotions are a handicap in his profession, he has exorcised himself of them completely, thus incapacitating him for normal life. If it were somehow important to national security, James Bond could calmly saw through a live kitten with a dull kitchen knife. He has permanently encased in ice that part of his soul which, in other people, allows them to enjoy feelings such as compassion and sympathy. Printed somewhere on his heart are the words, "Keep frozen when not in use."

Although, or perhaps because, he is unable to ride the emotional roller coaster of life, his face perpetually reveals traces of his only remaining emotion: the sadness of realizing, only after it is irrecoverable, what he has lost. Bond is never happy—the closest he could ever come to laughing is an occasional smirk in appreciation of the irony of a particular situation—and for positive emo-

tions he must be content with the self-respect and satisfaction of having done the right thing. All of Bond's personal sacrifices, however, are made understandable, even heroic, because of his all-consuming devotion to the most noble of causes—the triumph of good over evil.



*The Equalizer*: No longer in service to the state, ex-spy Robert McCall (portrayed by Edward Woodward) now helps equalize the odds for the underdog.

But imagine the extent to which the tragedy of this character would be amplified if, late in life, he not only realized what he has lost but also began to question the sole justification for his entire existence: his patriotism. Perhaps he had not been fighting on the side of good against evil but instead had spent his lifetime committing the most abominable acts imaginable against others, all on behalf of what he now sees is a self-serving, morally ambiguous political entity. His innumerable crimes might not, after all, have been justified by honorable ends. Perhaps his consummate loyalty had been misdirected. This tragic figure has found embodiment in Robert McCall, the central character of the CBS series *The Equalizer*.

McCall, portrayed by Edward Wood-

ward (the star of the acclaimed 1980 Australian movie *Breaker Morant*), once worked for a spy ring known only as the "agency," which undoubtedly is intended to be the CIA. In his conversations with an ex-comrade who still works for the agency, McCall hints that he left the agency because, much to his horror, he finally realized that he had committed his many unpardonable sins, all in the name of espionage, for an agency that favored pragmatism over principle and put honor and decency far lower on the list of priorities than face-saving and political expedience. He now suffers the inescapable guilt of an executioner who one day discovers that the judges have been sentencing prisoners not for moral offenses but simply for being inconvenient to the judges' personal interests, and that for most of his life he has sent hundreds of innocent people screaming to their deaths.

It is out of a desperate but pathetically futile attempt to cleanse himself that the now-retired McCall spends all of his days selflessly assisting the world's underdogs, or at least those who answer his newspaper advertisement offering his assistance in equalizing the odds against them. This "good guy to the rescue" stuff sometimes has the flavor of a mouthful of granulated sugar, but in McCall's case the pathos of his situation is compelling.

James Bond and Robert McCall could have been friends except that neither is capable of feeling anything like friendship. Given the type of company they usually keep, their survival depends upon their ability to regard everyone with a coldly analytical degree of suspicion. The warmest interpersonal relationship that either man would ever allow himself is probably something similar to a cordial *détente*. Both are exceedingly self-confident, and McCall, like Bond, speaks with a British accent. In the figurative sense, they share a common enemy—evil.

One difference between the men, however, is that Bond richly rewards his physical body for faithful service by regularly enjoying fine dining, beautiful women, and other luxurious accommodations. McCall, on the other hand, has transcended these material pleasures. He lives a relatively simple life in a comfort-

ably spacious New York apartment, drives a car that any other moderately successful mature person would drive (a Jaguar sedan), and entertains himself by playing his grand piano alone in his living room. Yet, despite his sadness, he somehow exudes an inner peace infinitely more enviable than any of Bond's material luxuries.

While almost all other television shows glamorize the high-voltage excitement of youth, it's a pleasure to see one that appreciates the serenity of post-middle-age maturity and the heroic dignity of aging with grace. When McCall observes one particularly depraved bad guy indulging his sensual gluttony without restraint—reveling in the charms of a team of prostitutes—he smiles with the satisfaction of a man who has long since been released from the troublesome urges of youth and says to himself, "You're getting old, McCall... thank God."

*The Equalizer* is clearly not intended for channel-flipping twelve-year-olds with eight-second attention spans, although even they may be able to appreciate the subtle beauty of the show, perhaps without quite knowing why. Regardless of what may happen when the fall season begins, it is remarkable that a new television show in the detective/spy genre, which together with all other shows must struggle in the life-threatening ratings competition, has not (excessively) resorted to the cheap but effective tricks of the trade: bikini-clad bimbos, machine gun-bullet hailstorms, and tire-squealing car chases. Can that be right? No car chases? Somebody must have been snoozing at the network.

The show has not done well in the ratings so far but will rerun in the summer. Its long-term fate is uncertain. But at a time when the English language seems to be adulterated further each day by some new and convenient euphemism—at some point, peep-show proprietors began restricting their products to "mature audiences only," because, to paraphrase comedian Jay Leno, otherwise God forbid some *immature* person might stand in a booth, pants around his ankles, watching some melon-breasted floozies hose each other with whipped cream—it's nice to know there still exists good entertainment that truly is for "mature" audiences, in the proper sense of the word. And better yet, it's on network television every week, so you aren't required to drop a quarter in a slot every two minutes to watch it.

Craig Collins is a writer in Chicago.

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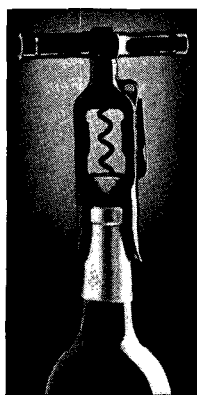
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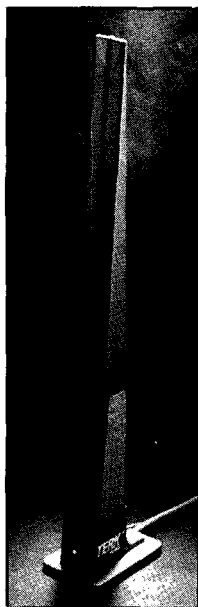


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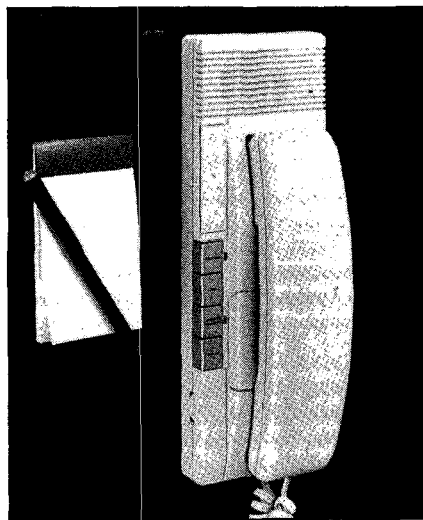
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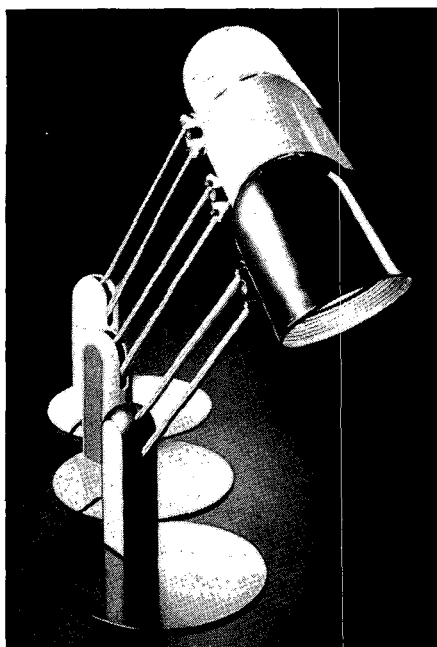
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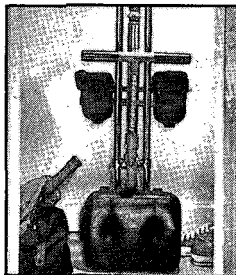
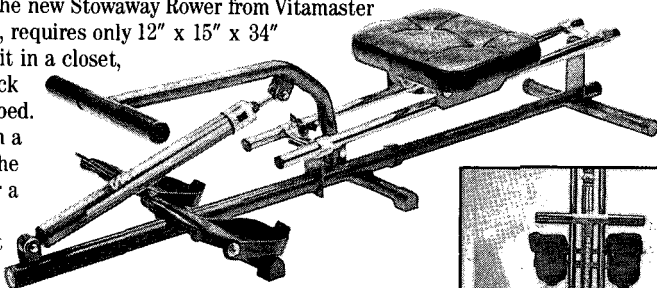
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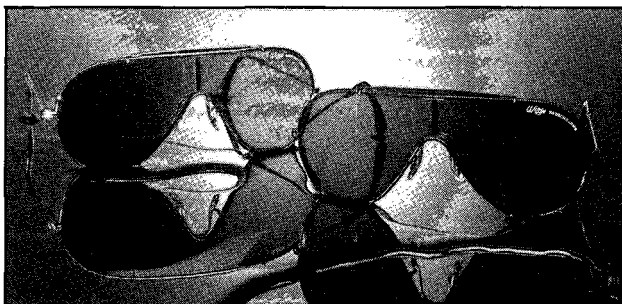
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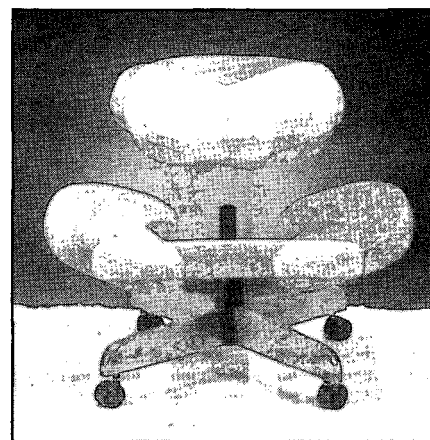
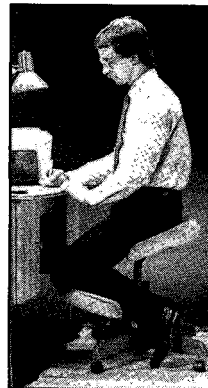
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## Crashing for Dollars?

By John Doherty

**Blind Trust: How Deregulation Has Jeopardized Airline Safety and What You Can Do About It, by John J. Nance, New York: William Morrow, 396 pages, \$17.95**



**A**re airline safety and airline profits conflicting goals? Or, put more cynically, are there airline executives out there who think they can make money crashing airplanes? John Nance thinks so, and he's written a book about it called *Blind Trust*.

The argument, which seems to have been largely accepted by the media, goes something like this: Safety measures cost money. To make a profit, airlines have to control costs, thus there is constant pressure on airline managements to skimp on safety. During the era of airline regulation, airlines didn't have to worry so much about costs. But since deregulation, competition has forced ticket prices so low (remember when the argument was that regulation was necessary to protect consumers from high prices?) that airlines can no longer resist the temptation to save money by taking safety risks. The conclusion of this specious argument: Deregulated air travel isn't as safe as regulated air travel.

The kicker is that by any dispassionate measure, airline travel in the United

States, both on the big airlines and on the commuters, is much safer now than it was *before* deregulation. According to statistics of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the last five years have been safer years to fly than any other five years in aviation history—the saddening accidents of 1985 notwithstanding. Nance, of course, knows this and lawyer-like—he's an attorney as well as a pilot—argues that the statistics don't matter. ("If the facts are against you, argue the law. If the law is against you, argue the facts.") I can imagine, however, that if the statistics indicated flying to be less safe after deregulation, he and other detractors of airline deregulation would find the facts most useful.

Actually, one of the reasons flying is safer now than before deregulation is...deregulation. Airlines compete fiercely to sell tickets. The way to sell tickets is to give consumers what they want, and one of the things airline passengers want more than anything is safe travel. Successful airlines strive mightily to give consumers just that.

Airlines, especially "upstart" airlines, can't survive if they are perceived as being unsafe. Nance gives an excellent recital of the events surrounding the icy Air Florida crash into the Potomac in 1982. Air Florida never recovered from the negative publicity attendant upon the crash and was eventually merged into another carrier, the Air Florida name gone forever. No, you can't run a successful airline these days and have a reputation for being unsafe, and most airline executives are smart enough to know that.

In all, Nance examines a dozen airline tragedies. He's put muscle and blood in the telling—gripping tales of errant judgment, bull-headed wrongness, and human frailty. Great reading. But here's the kicker again. All but two of the accidents occurred *before* deregulation: regulated airlines, regulated markets, regulated safety—regulated accidents. Yet he offers up the conclusion that deregulation has been bad for safety. How?

**N**ineteen eighty-five was a bad year in terms of passenger fatalities—the worst ever in worldwide terms. In the United States, it was the second-worst year ever—the worst since 1977, the last year before deregulation. And although these accidents happened too recently to be included in *Blind Trust*, they are pointed to by reviewers and the media in general as convincing proof that Nance's thesis is correct—that deregulation, despite its financial success, is bad for safety.

Even the most casual look at the facts debunks this nonsense.

- The Japan Air Lines 747 that crashed in history's worst single-plane disaster was operating in Japan in a completely regulated environment—and JAL is one-third owned by and 100 percent under the aegis of the Japanese government. (The Japanese are now privatizing JAL, in part because after the crash they concluded that a privately owned, for-profit carrier would be safer.)

- The Air India jet that crashed off Ireland was operating on a completely regulated route for a state-owned airline.
- The Delta L-1011 that crashed on approach to Dallas-Fort Worth airport encountered a windshear that the unsus-