

Hollywood Babylon Study Guide

Hollywood Babylon by Kenneth Anger

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Plot Summary

Ever since the first silent film was shown in Hollywood, the entertainment world has never been the same. The movie moguls of the early 20th century were enthralled by the up and coming medium, and many also realized the possibilities that were involved - how there was bound to be fame and fortune as all the world clamored to go to the movies.

Kenneth Anger explores Hollywood in "Hollywood Babylon" by introducing the reader to the early days of film, focusing mainly on the lives of the actors and executives, their successes and failures, and of course, the scandals.

The book begins with DW Griffith's vision of Babylon and how the creation of "Illusion City" would forever change the world. Griffith was a brilliant director known for his creativity and éclat.

The stars of the Silent Era and leading into the Golden Age were fascinating and exciting both on and off screen. Hollywood managed to keep a great deal of the stars' lives private in order to protect the image of the studio and its stars, but as the industry grew, that feat became nearly impossible. As gossip became a multi-million dollar industry, privacy went by the way of the dodo bird.

Anger tells tales about many of the most famous stars of Old Hollywood. There are many that may not be recognized by film buffs of today; however, it is important to understand who they were and why their contributions to Hollywood were important. Others are legendary for their work as well as their checkered pasts and penchant for drink, drugs, sex, and mayhem.

The author addresses the temper tantrums, orgies, drunken parties, drugs, murders, suicides, and the rise and fall from fame, complete with broken lives, ruined careers and lost fortunes.

There are many notable people and stories, some of which are almost common knowledge. Included are the exploits of Charlie Chaplin and his many affairs, tales about the most popular starlets of the day, from the "It" girl, Clara Bow to Olive Thomas to Gloria Swanson. Rakish men included Fatty Arbuckle, Rudolph Valentino, Gary Cooper, Wallace Reid, to name a few.

The studios had their hands full in trying to protect its image, keep its stars out of trouble or in some cases keeping them alive, as well as trying to run a business. There was constant interference from all sides, including those who believed that the movies were too revealing, racy, or just plain immoral. The pressure exerted from the moral majority caused a great deal of trouble, causing stars to be blacklisted as Shifty Hays jumped on the bandwagon as Movie Czar and declared what would or would not be considered decent. This was particularly difficult during prohibition when the stars thought that the

law did not apply to them. Neither did the illegal use of cocaine, heroin or other drugs, which caused the downfall of many great actors.

Eventually, Hollywood moved onto a new era, one filled with the invasion of privacy for the stars in a tell-all society, even more money, and even bigger scandals.



Chapters 1-9

Chapters 1-9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter one, "The Purple Dawn" begins with the creation of the set for Belshazzar's feast. The extravagant court of Belshazzar was dominated by eight white plaster elephants as ordered by DW Griffith, the "movie director as God." The purpose was to have the elephants tower over "Illusion City." The scene required an unheard of 4000 extras paid the astronomical sum of two dollars per day. It was Griffith's Babylon. The birth of the colossal court took place in 1915 and was the impetus of what is known as the Purple Epoch. The set stood through the rise and fall of many, even after the Los Angeles Fire Department condemned it as a fire hazard. This is also the period when actors became more than hired help; they became stars. Should the stars get bored, there was always "joy powder" or cocaine. The use of the drug began to inspire a manic movie style made famous by the likes of the Keystone Cops.

As stars blossom so did gossip. Preachers began to equate Hollywood with sin. The Golden Age had begun.

Chapter Two, "The Clutching Hand" begins with the first scandal to reach Hollywood. Olive Thomas, Ziegfeld Follies queen and star of Selznick Pictures was found dead in Paris, nude, clutching a bottle of toxic bichloride of mercury granules. Olive Thomas had risen to stardom quickly and was viewed as the all American dream girl. After the star's suicide at age 20, it was revealed that Olive was not at all that she seemed to be. Once in Paris Olive sought out the roughest crowds and was devastated when she failed to score a large amount of heroin for her husband, Jack Pickford, who was heavily addicted. Although many thought Olive Thomas' death was untimely and tragic, newspapers considered the fallen actress to be "good copy" for the next year.

Chapter Three, "Fat Man Out," is the story of the rise and fall of Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. Arbuckle was working as a plumber's assistant when he met Mack Sennett in 1913. It wasn't long before Arbuckle was cast into movie roles that would make the best light out of his affable character and roly poly comedic style. Arbuckle went from working with the Keystone Cops to starring in his own feature films with illustrious co-stars like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Arbuckle quickly became one of the major meal tickets for Sennett and Paramount.

Unfortunately for "The Prince of Whales," Arbuckle had a penchant for partying and often breaking various laws along the way. The first major incident involving indecency cost \$100,000 in hush money to hold off a district attorney and mayor in Boston. Four years later, Arbuckle's force field gave out.

Virginia Rappe, an ingénue from Chicago, came on the scene and made a not-so-impressive arrival at Paramount where she slept on more than her share of casting couches. Rappe began to have some success in films and caught the eye of Arbuckle.



On Labor Day weekend in 1921, Arbuckle held a "revel" at the exclusive Hotel St. Francis in San Francisco. Arbuckle's friends and colleagues made the 450 mile drive up the coast and intended to spend the entire weekend engaged in drunken debauchery.

By Monday the party was still going on and Arbuckle finally had his chance to be alone with the tipsy Rappe. Things went badly and after bouts of screaming and noises related to a struggle, guests got into the room to see that Rappe had been severely hurt. The damage from the rape was so severe that Rappe could not recover from the injuries. Eventually the girl died but not until she confessed to a nurse that Arbuckle had raped her.

Arbuckle's career was over, even though he was acquitted of the murder charges. Despite attempts at making a comeback, the public wanted nothing to do with the comedian they had once adored. Arbuckle died penniless at age forty-six.

Chapter four, "Panic at Paramount," depicts the scandal surrounding the death of William Desmond Taylor, the Chief Director at Players-Lasky, a subsidiary of Paramount. Taylor's manservant found him dead in his study and immediately ran out into the street in hysterics. The word spread fast and before long, all the big shots at Players-Lasky and Paramount knew the bad news. No one thought to call the police. After all, Taylor was dead. Robbery was not the motive as nothing was missing, including Taylor's signature diamond ring. Before the police could arrive, the execs and staff had "cosmeticized" the scene, effectively removing any incriminating evidence or scandal-causing materials.

Scandal came out anyway as Taylor was having affairs with a number of prominent people including Mary Minter Mills, a virginal actress, as well as Mary's mother, Charlotte Shelby. Although it was suspected that Mrs. Shelby had shot Taylor, it was never proven.

Also surrounding Taylor's death was the drug culture that had been infused into Hollywood and the movie industry. The studios decided that the time had come to clean up the town's act.

In chapter five, "Hays Fever," the movie industry hires a political bigwig to the position of Movie Czar, the one who would clean up Hollywood. The choice was somewhat odd, considering that the man who was hired was considered by many to be a "prim-faced, bat eared, mealy mouthed political chiseler." The man, Will H. Hays, had served as a member of President Harding's cabinet as well as the chairman of the Republican National Committee and was known to have taken large bribes in return for his nomination of Harding to office. Perhaps Hays was hired due to a previous stint as the Postmaster General whose policy it was to "clean up" the mail by opposing the sending of smut through its channels.

The nickname "Shifty" should have given movie execs a clue of what they were in for with Hays.



The biggest contribution Hays made to the introduction of a cleaner Hollywood was the "Doom Book." The Doom Book consisted of a list of 117 names of Hollywood stars who were to be blacklisted by the studios due to their less than appropriate behavior. These names were gathered by battalions of private detectives who would stop at nothing to get dirty on the stars.

Chapter six, "Good Time Wally," tells of the downfall of one of the stars listed in the Doom Book. Wallace Reid, dubbed "The King of Paramount," showed up on Czar Hays' list of celebrities who were known to use drugs and were therefore unacceptable role models for the American film industry.

At first, the accusations about Reid's morphine addiction were simple rumors. When Reid was sent away to a sanitarium, Reid's wife stated publicly that her husband was an addict. Paramount had previously stated that Reid's hospitalization was due to exhaustion.

Wallace Reid ended up becoming complete unhinged from the shock of withdrawal from the powerful drug as well as being locked up. Reid died at the sanitarium at age 30. Mrs. Reid continued to point fingers at the other stars for leading Wally down the path of destruction. Mrs. Reid eventually went on a cross country tour giving lectures on the evils of drugs.

In chapter seven, "Champagne Baths," Hays promises the public that there will be no more debauchery on the Hollywood scene. It is not clear if Hays actually believed his own press but the Hollywood elite, while more discreet than in previous years, kept right on with what they wanted to do.

Chapter eight, "Heroin Heroines," details the presence of the main drug dealer in Hollywood, an actor simply known as "The Count." It was The Count who helped Wally Reid with his pharmaceutical needs. The Count was also there for heroines such as Barbara La Marr, who died at age 26; Alma Rubens, who met a nasty fate in the police; and Juanita Hansen, whose entanglement with Smack led to her arrest and the ruination of a very promising career.

In chapter nine, "The New Gods," Hollywood's best and brightest continued to scoff in the face of Hays' and his morals clauses. There was a definite defiance that was attributed to the Jazz Age, and no one - not even Shifty Hays - could put a stop to it.

More than ever, the stars delighted in living lavish lifestyles complete with top of the line cars like the Pierce-Arrow, Rolls Royce, Voisin tourer, and Kissel convertible.

The weekends were reserved for people like the glamorous Gloria Swanson who was well known for her lavish expenditures on clothes and accessories, whose yearly tab for these luxuries was known to total more than \$130,000 out of her \$900,000 yearly salary. Perhaps it was all the finery along with Swanson's over the top personality that managed to net her five husbands.



Chapters 10-16

Chapters 10-16 Summary and Analysis

Chapter ten, "Charlie's Nymphs," details the scandal surrounding one of Hollywood's most ambitious men, Charles Spencer Chaplin. Unlike many of the New Gods, Chaplin was much too busy creating his own films and operating a studio to go out looking for trouble. Instead, trouble came to Chaplin.

Chaplin, a Brit, was well known for his devotion to "Film as Art." Chaplin was also known for his bevy of beauties that always seemed to be at the man's side. Chaplin was certainly a ladies man but caused quite a stir when he developed a relationship with Peggy Hopkins Joyce, who was often referred to as "the original gold digging Ziegfeld girl." Five husbands had made Peggy a millionairess in a time when such a title was rare. The intense relationship between Chaplin and Hopkins was not meant to last; however, Chaplin did get quite a bit of inspiration for future films, including "A Woman of Paris."

Chaplin's first shotgun wedding was to Mildred Harris, a nymphet who met Chaplin at age fourteen and by age sixteen was pregnant and married. Louis Mayer, a former dope dealer turned Hollywood exec, capitalized on the marriage to promote Mildred's star status. Chaplin was furious.

Tragedy struck when Mildred almost died in childbirth. The baby boy, born deformed, lived for only three days.

The Chaplin marriage fell apart. Chaplin finally confronted Mayer who had been encouraging Mildred to "up the ante" on their divorce settlement. Chaplin was also outraged at Mayer's exploitation. The incident did not end well.

Chapter eleven, "Lo: Lita," Chaplin was almost completely undone by his relationship with Lillita McMurray. Chaplin first saw Lillita when she was only seven years old. The first meeting occurred in 1915 at a popular tearoom where Lillita's mother was a waitress. Chaplin was taken by the child, and soon she was appearing in films as a child extra. The money that resulted from the roles allowed "Nana" McMurray to quit her job and become a scheming stage mother with one goal in mind - when the time was right, Lillita would marry Charles Chaplin.

As Lillita grew, she was often referred to as Lolita due to her age and questionable relationship with Chaplin. By the time Lolita was fifteen, she was filled out enough to become a leading lady, much to the delight of Nana. Lolita became Lita Grey and starred in her first major role. It was at age sixteen when Lita announced her pregnancy, soon to be followed by another shotgun wedding.

After the Chaplins' second child was born, things turned ugly. The entire McMurray clan had all but overrun Chaplin's Hollywood mansion. One night, after a long day at the



studio, Charlie went into a rage over the "drunken circus" in his house. Lita and the children, along with the rest of the family, exited.

Nana knew that Chaplin was worth \$16,000,000 and planned to get her share. Chaplin fought the proposed divorce settlement until Nana and Lita planned to release the names of the women Chaplin had been involved with along with every last bit of information about the star's life - from private conversations to activities in the marital bed - all recorded studiously by Nana. Although Chaplin had realized the money-grabbing scheme quite some time before, it was too late. Chaplin settled out of court for \$625,000.

Chaplin had a nervous breakdown after nearly three years of living hell. Lita released the information anyway, nearly ruining Chaplin completely.

Chapter twelve, "William Randolph's Hearse," details a scandalous incident involving Chaplin, Tom Ince, Marion Davies, and the iconic and revered William Randolph Hearst.

Hearst was possessive of Marion Davies and had her under constant surveillance to ensure her fidelity. This did not work, of course, and Marion had an affair with Chaplin who was at the time engaged to the pregnant Lita. During a party aboard Hearst's floating castle, the Oneida, a party was being held in favor of movie star Tom Ince. Ince had missed the boat when it left San Pedro but caught up not long after. The party was wild and over the top. At some point, Hearst caught Chaplin and Marion in the act and drew his diamond studded revolver. Although Hearst was an expert shot, there was confusion and the person who ended up being shot in the head was Tom Ince. Oddly enough, despite a rather obvious bullet hole in his forehead, it was reported that Ince had died of acute indigestion. The only person called to testify in the trial was a doctor in Hearst's employ. The DA dismissed the case.

In chapter thirteen, "Rudy's Rep," the author addresses the death of Rudolph Valentino, also known as "The Great Lover." There were always scandals - invented or real - around Valentino. Some were born from the fact that both of Valentino's wives were lesbians and Valentino himself was often accused of being a homosexual. Even the superstar's death was scandalized. Although the official cause of death was peritonitis resulting from a ruptured appendix, rumors suggested that Valentino was poisoned, shot, or died from syphilis.

Chapter fourteen, "The Dirty Hun," details the debauchery behind the films of director Erich von Stroheim. Stroheim was known for his over the top films, which were often filled with elaborate sets and large scale orgies. Stroheim knew about Hays' purity stance and many believe that the famed director purposely put scenes in his movies to cost the studio money when the unacceptable footage was edited out.

In chapter fifteen, "Hollywood Headlines," the reader meets two of the most notorious women in Hollywood - Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. The two women, who wrote all of the most scandalous Hollywood headlines, would come to be both revered and feared by Hollywood elite.



Chapter sixteen, "Clara's Beaux," introduces the reader to starlet Clara Bow, often dubbed the "Hottest Jazz Baby in Films." Bow was caught up in her own scandal when it was discovered that she had been intimately involved with the doctor who was supposedly helping cure Bow's bad case of nerves. The doctor's wife found out and Bow ended up paying \$30,000 to the soon to be ex-wife.

The worst scandal exploded when Bow's private secretary revealed to the world every last bit of dirt on her former boss. The secretary had attempted to blackmail Bow to keep secret the orgies, affairs, and other goings on at Bow's mansion and was fired. Everything was out in the open. Although the secretary's claims were denied by Bow and the woman was sent to jail for embezzling the star's money, Bow's career was over.



Chapters 17-23

Chapters 17-23 Summary and Analysis

Chapter seventeen, "Saturn Over Sunset," depicts the years following the Jazz Age, when talkies became all the rage and many careers were ended by the inability to make the transition to the new form of entertainment.

One of the first stars to fall from the sky was legendary actor John Gilbert. Gilbert had been the highest paid star in 1928, pulling in \$10,000 a week. Gilbert had just ended an affair with Garbo and soon discovered that his stock investments had left him with no money. On the rebound, Gilbert married Broadway actress Ina Claire. Gilbert consoled himself with the unbreakable contract he had with MGM but the relationship soured when Gilbert's first talkie was brutally referred to as a "shriekie." Gilbert and Marie Provost, another actor sacrificed to the introduction of sound, held a contest to see who could drink oneself to death first. Gilbert won.

Other stars and Hollywood bigwigs suffered from the new age as well. In 1930, William Fox, founder of Fox Studios, was cast out from his own company for misappropriation of funds. Even Adolph Zukor, who was reputed to have a personal fortune of \$40,000,000, was almost broke. Mae Murray, Macy's clerk turned movie starlet, also went broke and was dumped by her husband, Prince Mdivani. Murray ended up a vagrant.

Chapter eighteen, "Drastic Doubts," relays the almost effortless transition from silent films to talkies for those dubbed "Lucky Stars." One of those stars was jazz baby Joan Crawford. Crawford took it upon herself to attempt to revive the economy by encouraging people to spend money. Crawford never lost her brassy sensibilities and was determined not to go back to the place where she started.

The author revisits other scandals of the 1930s, from the trial between Clara Bow and her secretary to the unhinging of the brilliant Buster Keaton.

Chapter nineteen, "Enditalls," details some of the lives of stars who did not survive the combination of the birth of the talkie and the stock market crash. Anger lists a long line of stars who committed suicide, no longer able to make their way in the coveted Babylon.

Chapter twenty, "Babylon Babblers," reveals some of the more popular rumors of the day, including who was sexually promiscuous and who were the junkies and drunks. Future tabloids were also fascinated with the homosexual aspect, making near constant references to the private lives of megastars such as Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Claudette Colbert, and Cary Grant. Some stars, such as Garbo, were intensely private, which made it harder to get dirt on the rich and famous. That would change soon enough when gossip became a multi-million dollar industry.



Chapter twenty-one, "Monster Mae," focuses on film legend Mae West. West was already a star and notorious vixen who had made a big splash on Broadway. West was known for her unbridled sex appeal and was a good choice for the silver screen. Paramount took a chance on West and it paid off big after the actresses first appearance in "Night After Night" was a hit. Not everyone loved West, however. Mary Pickford thought that the fellow actress was obscene, as did the moral majority who sought to ban West's films. The religious right devised a new set of restrictions for imposing purity on Hollywood, which was required to be followed by the industry's former obscenity Nazi, Hays. West and others scoffed at the requests.

Eventually, the pious men in charge of condemning Hollywood published a black list of stars who were dubbed "Box Office Poison" for being difficult or obscene. Some of the newly blacklisted stars included the difficult Katharine Hepburn and Fred Astaire and the unwholesome Mae West and Marlene Dietrich.

Chapter twenty-two, "Diary in Blue," tells the tale of character actress Mary Astor and her penchant for keeping a tell-all journal. The journal was discovered by her husband, Dr. Franklyn Thorpe, who was distressed to uncover that his wife was having an affair with the legendary George S. Kauffman. Astor refused to break off the affair and, in retaliation, Thorpe began to flaunt his new affairs with various actresses. In court, Astor's diary was brought into evidence, deemed to be obscene, and was burned.

Chapter twenty-three, "Death Garage," is the tale of the death of Thelma Todd. Thelma was found dead in 1935, the same year as the Astor-Thorpe scandal. Todd had died in the garage she shared with her married lover Roland West. The actress was sitting in the car, covered in blood. Oddly enough, the official cause of death was asphyxiation by carbon monoxide poisoning. When the verdict was questioned, it came out that Todd and West had a violent argument the previous night. It was also surmised that Todd may have been killed by Lucky Luciano, who had recently been rebuffed by Todd in a would-be business deal.



Chapters 24-29

Chapters 24-29 Summary and Analysis

Chapter twenty-four, "In Like Flynn," details the travesty of a trial involving superstar heartthrob Errol Flynn. Flynn was arrested and put on trial for the statutory rape of two girls, both under the age of 18. Flynn claimed to have no knowledge of the incident and due to the lack of evidence, the case was dismissed. The Los Angeles district attorney apparently was not willing to let it go and set up a lengthy trial, overturning the court's decision. The girls' characters had been maligned and again, Flynn won. It was discovered later that some corrupt politicians were out to persecute the movie industry by attacking a big name leading man due to the lack of "juicy kickbacks."

Chapter twenty-five, "Who's Daddy? Sugar Daddy," contains the bizarre tale of an incident that turned Chaplin bitter and Hedda Hopper less than revered. In 1942, a young actress named Joan Barry hit Hollywood with the hopes of making it big. Barry was introduced to Charlie Chaplin who eventually hired her to act in one of his films. Barry was nothing but trouble from the start. During preparation for the movie, Barry did more than prepare for the role and as a result, underwent two abortions.

Barry's work was sub-par. As time went on, Chaplin became increasingly dissatisfied with Barry's work and drastically cut the young actress' salary from \$75 per week to \$25 per week. Barry, enraged, went to Chaplin's home and threatened him with a gun. Apparently, Chaplin was enthralled by the hysterical, gun toting woman and had sex with Barry on the bearskin rug in his living room. Later, Chaplin would be accused of fathering Barry's daughter.

During the trial, Hedda Hopper took every shot possible at Chaplin, a man whom she openly despised. As revenge, Chaplin gave Lolly Parsons any juicy news including exclusive information on his wedding. Eventually, Chaplin was proven innocent of paternity through blood tests. Both Hopper and Parsons covered the trial. Parsons told the whole story while Hopper somehow missed the tidbit about Chaplin being exonerated by the paternity tests. Regardless of the verdict, the court ordered the millionaire actor and director to support Barry and her child.

The end of the trial did not stop Hopper from criticizing Chaplin at every turn. Some critics saw this as the beginning to Hopper's end.

In chapter twenty-six, "Daughter of Fury: Frances, Saint," the author tells the tale of Frances Farmer, an actress who had a short lived career as "The Next Garbo." Farmer was a hit in Hollywood until her own personal demons and unchecked temper and hatred for authority landed her in jail on more than one occasion and was eventually committed by her own mother.



Chapter twenty-seven, "Chop-Suicide," details the suicide of Lupe Velez, another victim of The Suicide Syndrome in the 1940s. Lupe, who had been in the industry since the late 1920s, made a splash as the Mexican Spitfire and exhausted several leading men. Lupe eventually married Johnny Weismuller, a tempestuous union that lasted until 1938. Afterward, Lupe continued to have flings and watched as her spitfire began to go out. At age 36, pregnant, heartbroken and nearly broke, Lupe took her own life.

In chapter twenty-eight, "Mr. Bugs Comes to Town," the reader is introduced to one of the most notorious gangsters of the age - Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel. Siegel had been a dope pusher for Lucky Luciano, rapist, hired hit man, and bootlegger for Players Lasky. One of the biggest planned hits was concocted by Siegel and Lasky, who was tired of Prohibition, against US Attorney Thomas Dewey. It fell through. Regardless, Bugsy saw an opening in Hollywood for untold riches to be gained through illegal activity and beat Chicago mobsters to the punch.

Siegel made quite a splash in Hollywood. Not many were surprised when Siegel also branched out into Las Vegas. Siegel had big plans and the connections and ambition to pull them off. It was Siegel who helped launch Vegas with the creation of the Flamingo, a \$6,000,000 casino. Siegel considered the Flamingo to be just the beginning. The gangster wanted all of Nevada to himself.

Although there is much speculation about the shooting death of Bugsy Siegel, it is commonly thought that the New York hood turned Vegas heavyweight ended up dead by the hand of Lucky Luciano. Luciano's involvement was never proved.

Chapter twenty-nine, "Red Tide," examines the birth of the anti-Communist campaign in Hollywood and the rest of the US. Many famous people were on the bandwagon to promote the Preservation for American Ideals, including John Wayne, Charles Coburn, and Hedda Hopper. One goal was to blacklist all movies featuring Communist actors. Other actors, including Gene Kelly, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, flew to Washington DC to protest the invasion of privacy of American citizens. The group faced stiff opposition and by the end of The Red Hunt, many lives and careers were ruined, without much benefit to the cause.



30-33

30-33 Summary and Analysis

Chapter thirty, "Peep Show Peccadillos," reveals more scandals of the movie era. The first is the 1948 suicide of Carole Landis, who could not recover from her unrequited love with Rex Harrison. Another details the arrest of Robert Mitchum in 1948 for the possession of marijuana. Mitchum served two months in jail but his career did not suffer. Anger also mentions in passing episodes involving Gertrude Michael, Walter Wanger, and expatriate Ingrid Bergman.

Chapter thirty-one, "Con Game," relays the movie industry's love affair with sex for hire. In 1951, famed madam Billy Bennett's house in the Hollywood Hills was raided and her ledger full of famous names was confiscated. The guilty scurried away like rats and after a while, the studios managed to hush up the whole situation, permitting its actors to come back to town.

In 1952, Confidential hit the newsstands for the first time, promising that this new rag "Tells the Facts and Names the Names." Although scandal sheets were not new to Hollywood or the rest of the world, Confidential took it a step farther, claiming that all its facts were actual facts. Confidential was so successful that its publisher paid out \$1000 for each tidbit of gossip, soon collecting a core group of spies. Many of Confidential's spies also happened to be call girls.

Publisher Robert Harrison took it up a notch. Factual stories were "embellished" to the point that stars became angry and combative. Someone even took pot shots at Harrison during a hunting expedition. The end of Harrison's unchallenged reign came in 1957 when Dorothy Dandridge filed the first law suit to the tune of \$2 million. The lawsuit opened the floodgates for all the other stars who had been wronged by Harrison's stories. The Trial of a Hundred Stars cost Confidential dearly, although by today's standards, Harrison got off easy. The trial also spawned a flurry of celebrity autobiographies by those who thought they should be the ones making money off their own exploits.

In chapter thirty-two, "Blood and Soap," Hollywood's most famous criminal attorney, Jerry Geisler, receives yet another call from a star in trouble. This time the star is Lana Turner. The date was April 4, 1958. The problem turned out to be the corpse of Lana's latest lover, Johnny Stompanato, aka Johnny Valentine.

Turner and Stompanato met after the man called up the recently separated starlet. Lana was vulnerable at the time and she agreed to meet Stompanato. Although it was known that Stompanato had ties to the criminal underworld, Lana did not care. In fact, it may have made the man even more attractive since Lana was always involved in some kind of romantic chaos. It did not take long before the romance became violent. The relationship took on an on again - off again feel. Johnny began to dominate Lana and



threatened Sean Connery with a gun to make sure he would stay away from Lana during the shooting of "Another Time, Another Place" on location in England. Sean Connery and Scotland Yard forced Johnny out of England.

After a reunion in Mexico, Johnny and Lana returned to Hollywood. During a particularly violent fight during which Lana refused to pay Johnny's gambling debts, Johnny threatened to kill Lana and her entire family. Lana's fourteen-year-old daughter, in her mother's defense, stabbed and killed Stompanato. Cheryl, the daughter, went to trial and the verdict came back as justifiable homicide.

The world took sides for and against Lana and Cheryl. Lana's love letters, found at Stompanato's home, were splashed across the front pages of newspapers all over the country. Not since the diary of Mary Astor had such intimate details been revealed.

Despite all of the drama and trauma, Lana rode out the storm and her next two films only heightened the starlet's success.

Chapter thirty-three, "Hollywoodämmerung," laments the death of Old Hollywood. By the time the 1960s rolled around, the entire face of tinsel town had changed. The stars of yesteryear, troubled but usually professional, were replaced with a new breed of lesser stars. Anger recounts the great number of deaths by drink and drugs, those involved in deadly car accidents, such as the one that took Jayne Mansfield, all the way to those who preferred self-termination, such as Judy Garland. Also included are the ghastly murder of Sharon Tate and the highly questioned death of Marilyn Monroe.



Characters

Charles Spencer Chaplin

Charles Spencer Chaplin (1889 - 1977) was an English actor, producer, director, musician, and savvy businessman. Chaplin was one of the biggest stars in the silent film era, becoming known for his role as the "Tramp."

The son of entertainers, some say that Chaplin was born with show biz in his blood. Chaplin eventually moved to Hollywood where he took the film industry by storm. The comic delved into the world of film, focusing his talents in every area from scriptwriting to acting, directing, and production. As the industry grew, so did the control asserted by the studios. Chaplin could not work without full creative control. In 1919, Chaplin joined colleagues DW Griffith, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks to create United Artists.

The biggest shock to Hollywood during the 1920s was the invention of the Talkie. Chaplin was one to hold out on creating a film with dialogue. Finally, Chaplin did give in and created some of his most well known work in the new medium, including "The Kid."

Chaplin's personal life was often colored by scandal. Chaplin had a fondness for younger women, some of which were underage. This caused a lot of controversy and roped Chaplin into more than one marriage spawned by obligation. One such relationship with Lita Grey was almost the end for Chaplin's mental stability.

In 1972, Chaplin finally received the knighthood that had first been proposed in 1931 and again in 1956. Chaplin died at age 88 of natural causes.

William Randolph Hearst

William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) was a highly visible character in old Hollywood. The son of a self-made millionaire, Hearst began his career in the newspaper business while at Harvard. Hearst Sr. had won a newspaper as the result of a gambling debt and the younger Hearst took it over. It wasn't long before Hearst began to develop his empire of newspapers, which would eventually branch out into magazines and become the richest most widely recognized publishing company in the world.

Hearst was married but maintained a long-term affair with actress Marion Davies. The couple lived together for many years while Hearst's legal wife had her own life in New York.

Over the years, Hearst gained a reputation as a jealous and unforgiving man. It was rumored that actor Thomas Ince died by Hearst's hand after Hearst shot him, thinking that it was Chaplin who would die for his dalliances with Marion.



In addition to his vast art collection, Hearst also had a love of architecture. This can be seen in two of his homes, Hearst Castle in California, now a museum; and St. Donat's Castle in Wales, a gift to Marion Davies that is now part of a university.

The classic film Citizen Kane is reported to be based on Hearst's life.

Clara Bow

Clara Bow - Known as the "It" girl in Old Hollywood, Bow was a highly successful actress.

Errol Flynn

Errol Flynn - Actor known for his swashbuckling adventure movies.

Rudolph Valentino

Rudolph Valentino - Known as "The Great Lover," Valentino was the epitome of the silent screen movie star.

Louis B. Mayer

Louis B. Mayer - Dope pusher turned extremely influential studio head and partner in Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

Marlene Dietrich

Marlene Dietrich - Androgynous actress known for her foreign sex appeal.

Mae West

Mae West - Broadway actress turned Hollywood star, known for her sex appeal.

Gloria Swanson

Gloria Swanson - The highly glamorous flapper who became one of Hollywood's richest stars.

Louella Parsons

Louella Parsons - Famed gossip columnist of Old Hollywood.



Fatty Arbuckle

Fatty Arbuckle - Comedic actor whose great success ended abruptly with a murder rap. Although Arbuckle was acquitted, his career was ruined.

Hedda Hopper

Hedda Hopper - Famed gossip columnist of Old Hollywood.



Objects/Places

Hollywood

Hollywood, California started out as Hollywoodland, a haven for the up and coming movie industry. Hollywood's first studios, Paramount and Universal Studios were the two first major film studios to open in 1912. The companies were heavily invested in making silent films and creating a mystique through the medium of film. The industry was new and exciting - and everyone wanted a piece of the pie.

The Golden Age of Hollywood began in the 1920s around the time that the silent era ended. The silent era had been very good to Hollywood and introduced many stars including Clara Bow, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Charles Boyer, Fatty Arbuckle, Charlie Chaplin, and Buster Keaton.

The birth of the Talkies had its ups and downs, both creating and destroying careers. The introduction of sound was unfortunate for stars whose voices did not match their characters or overall image. It was fortunate for others who had the entire package.

There were many stars created in Hollywood and the money that went along with success was an impetus toward booze, drugs, sexual indiscretion and all around Bacchanalian behavior.

Things changed drastically after the 1940s and Hollywood moved into an entirely different arena. Critics refer to Hollywood as having four stages to date: The silent era, the Golden Age, the Classic period, and Contemporary of Modern era.

Paramount

Paramount - Paramount was by far the biggest movie studio in Hollywood during the silent era and golden age of Hollywood. The company had a well known subsidiary, Players Lasky, which started the careers of many major movie stars and directors, such as Alfred Hitchcock.

Paramount was founded by Adolph Zukor, a man that would become extremely wealthy and powerful as the movie industry grew. Zukor was a man who was used to being in control. Although Paramount agreed to distribute works by the Lasky Players, Paramount eventually talked Lasky into forming a lucrative partnership, the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation.

Zukor was responsible for introducing most of Hollywood's heavyweights to the world. Some of the stars included Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Wallace Reid, Rudolph Valentino, Gloria Swanson, and Clara Bow.



Zukor maintained his position as movie mogul even when the combination of the stock market crash and birth of the Talkies threatened his fortune and his livelihood. Zukor managed to stay on top, introducing new stars such as Marlene Dietrich, Carole Lombard, Dorothy Lamour, The Marx Brothers, and Gary Cooper.

Sunset Boulevard

Sunset Boulevard - Popular location in Hollywood, known for star sightings.

MGM

MGM - Movie studio operated by Louis B. Mayer.

UK

UK - Home to Charlie Chaplin and location of Hearst's St. Donat's Castle

San Francisco

San Francisco - City used by Hollywood elite to escape. Site of Fatty Arbuckle's alleged criminal activity and death of Virginia Rappe.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles - LA is city to the stars and the heart of Hollywood.

United Artists

United Artists - Studio founded by Charlie Chaplin, DW Griffith, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks.

New York

New York - Home to Broadway and Hollywood big wigs such as Mae West and Bugsy Siegel.

Courtroom

Courtroom - Site where many of the stars' fates were decided by the court system.



Themes

Money

In the early days of Hollywood, money was certainly a benefit but it was not often the sole reason one went into acting or directing. Actors and directors did not make the kind of money that movie industry moguls make today. However, as the industry became more popular, the money began to flow, which was both a blessing and a curse.

It seems that the more money the stars made, the more they wanted, and perhaps more importantly, the harder they were to control. During the days of Prohibition, stars were not subjected to the same restrictions as the rest of the country. Stars could get whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted it. The studios often had people who did nothing but attend to the wants, needs, and whims of their money-makers.

Along with a great deal of money came a great deal of excess. Hollywood was becoming equated with sin because of its parties that never seemed to end. Cocaine and heroin were very popular on the Hollywood scene, a fact that caused the downfall of many great actors and actresses. There was also a great deal of booze, and paired with the booze and drugs are orgies or other outrageous behavior.

Even during the height of the Great Depression, some stars still live lavish lifestyles, saying that spending would help to improve the economy. Others just spent money because they could.

Sex

Sex was a big deal in Hollywood. Actors and actresses were often in and out of relationships, public and clandestine. There always seemed to be rumors, accusations, lawsuits or quarrels about who was doing what to whom.

The extramarital affairs that went on in Hollywood almost seemed par for the course. One of the most publicized of the day involved actress Mary Astor, who not only cheated on her husband but recorded it all in great detail in her journal, which was later burned because the court deemed it obscene.

Things that happened in Hollywood would not have happened anywhere else in the country - at least not to the same extent. Along with sex often comes scandal and in some cases, murder. One famous case of murder was the tale of William Randolph Hearst who allegedly shot Charlie Chaplin because he was having an affair with Marion Davies. It turned out that although Chaplin had been involved with Davies, the man with Davies at that time was Tom Ince. Ince died. Hearst's behavior seems even stranger and ironic when one considers that Marion Davies was the mistress of Hearst, who was also cheating on his wife.



Sex was also responsible for many of Charlie Chaplin's troubles, from shotgun weddings to lawsuits.

One of the most disturbing references to sexual activity involves Fatty Arbuckle and the incident in which he allegedly raped Virginia Rappe with a bottle and injured her so badly that she died.

Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol are prevalent themes throughout "Hollywood Babylon." Even during Prohibition, alcohol was a big part of the scene from champagne baths to bath tub gin. The Hollywood set had its own bootleggers and drug suppliers right on the studio lots.

In addition to alcohol, which was used freely by many industry people, cocaine, heroin and amphetamines were extremely popular. Some claimed to use drugs for the first time to get through a difficult job after exhaustion set in. Others experienced their first taste at the parties that seemed to go on every weekend.

Drugs and alcohol were the downfall of many of Hollywood's big stars. Others suffered even though they were on the outskirts. One example is Olive Thomas, who committed suicide after she was unable to make a score for her heavily addicted husband, Jack Pickford. Other stars who succumbed to overdose included Lupe Velez, Marilyn Monroe, Barbara La Marr, and Alma Rubens.

It was the overwhelming presence of cocaine or "joy powder" that was responsible for inventing such manic comedies such as those featuring the Keystone Cops.

Unlike most, the stars who indulged in drugs and alcohol often had no desire or inclination to hide it. This was shocking to people like Shifty Hays who was determined to clean up Hollywood. Of course, Hays' plan did not work; it simply forced some of the stars to learn discretion.

Style

Perspective

"Hollywood Babylon" by Kenneth Anger was first published in Paris in 1959 before being released in America in its entirety in 1974. Anger was born in California in 1927 and entered the entertainment world at an early age. Anger attended dance school with Shirley Temple and made his first real foray into the business at age nine.

Anger's first book sold in 1947, establishing him as a legitimate author. From then on, Anger continued to build his reputation as a writer and also became a film director.

It is Anger's long time affiliation with the movie industry that gives him the necessary insight to portray Hollywood as it truly was, not as one may see in some fictionalized tele-drama.

It is obvious that Anger is interested in his topic and has spent a great deal of time examining the myriad aspects and facets of Hollywood. The stories are entertaining and informative, while remaining brief enough to be a part of a viable collection. Anger is also fond of adding his own humor and opinion to the tales. There are many who say that Anger's information in HOLLYWOOD BABYLON is often sensationalized and/or inaccurate.

Tone

The tone used by Kenneth Anger in HOLLYWOOD BABYLON is most definitely partisan in nature. Anger knew some of the people mentioned in the book and it is obvious that the author has definite opinions about many people, their work and their scandals and deaths.

There is a great deal of information included in these stories, some taken from factual sources, some taken from editorials and industry opinions, and even more from Anger's own "take" on the situations. Anger is fond of adding commentary to the tales, often interjecting humor or snide comments.

There are parts in the book that are strictly objective, mostly those which discuss the basic facts about an actor or actresses work or basic history. Anger saves the snide comments and witty observations for the sections in which scandals are revealed, covered up, or rectified.

Overall, Anger's tone is somewhat distracting as it takes away the reader's ability to form an unbiased opinion. This may not matter much to some considering the topic and context of the material.



Regardless of what one thinks of the tone used throughout various sections in the book, the overall tone celebrates all of Hollywood, from the most glamorous to the ugliest and everything in between.

In the end, the book has the flavor of someone who has been around the block once or twice and has seen just about everything there is to see. In the world of Hollywood, it is important to know what is real and what is not.

Structure

HOLLYWOOD BABYLON by Kenneth Anger is a work of non-fiction comprised of 292 pages, broken down into 33 chapters.

The shortest chapter is 3 pages in length; the longest chapter is 11 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 9 pages.

Chapter 1, "The Purple Dawn," gives an overview of the birth of DW Griffith's Hollywood and the formation of what was referred to as "Illusion City."

Chapters 2-4 take a look at some of the early scandals in Hollywood, from the deaths of Olive Thomas and William Desmond Taylor to the downfall of Fatty Arbuckle.

Chapter 5 introduces Shifty Hayes and the beginning of the moral issues that would plague Hollywood from that time forward. Stars began to act out as the studios attempted to rein them in through morals clauses.

The balance of the chapters tends to vacillate between individual tragedies to morals issues to scandals that rocked the entertainment world. The chapters maintain a thread of continuity, usually by date but sometimes through certain characters that have recurring roles throughout the history of Hollywood.

Readers have ample opportunity to follow the path from the silent era of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Clara Bow and others into the Golden Age of Hollywood, including the infamous jazz babies and bacchanalian behavior despite prohibition. From the Golden Age, Anger continues to move forward up to the age of Classic cinema, through to the deaths of Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield. Any sense of privacy for those who dare to step into the limelight is an illusion.



Quotes

"The shadow of Babylon had fallen over Hollywood, a serpent spell in crude cuneiform; scandal was waiting, just out of Billy Blitzer's camera range."

Page 3

"Overnight the obscure and somewhat disreputable movie performers found themselves propelled to adulation, fame and fortune."

Page 6

"The sedate, renowned hotel Carillon, on the Place de la Concorde, was a most unlikely setting for Hollywood's first scandal."

Page 15

"There might have been some hope of solving the enigma if the Paramount bigwigs had not swooped down on the dead man's house to cosmeticize the scene."

Page 35

"The 'improvement' of the movie's image entailed a bit of window dressing borrowed from the world of baseball."

Page 43

"Morals clauses would be inserted into all contracts to persuade the Golden People to shape up: male stars would henceforth be monks and women stars nuns."

Page 46

"Although public behavior was somewhat toned down, the movie people's parties were as rowdy as before."

Page 57

"The movie colony slaked its thirst with a vengeance during Prohibition, but much of the illicit alcohol was a questionable quality."

Page 60

"The New Gods were determined to live their own legends to the hilt - and to hell with Hays and Mrs. Grundys of America."

Page 71



"The excesses of the stars developed the cynicism and defiance characteristic of Jazz age youth."

Page 71

"Charles Spencer Chaplin attended other people's parties - the fancy-dress not the 'wild' kind - but he was never known to throw one."

Page 79

"While Valentino was lying in state at Campbell's Funeral Home, New York streets became the scene of a ghoulish carnival as a mob of over 100,000 fought for a last glimpse of the Great Lover. "

Pages 113-114

"That public's craving for nonstop movie-star titillation fix was mainline and bylined day by day by that syndicated, sob-sister, mutant, deadlining hunt-and-pecker: the Hollywood Gossip Columnist."

Page 133

Topics for Discussion

Do you feel that Hays' commitment to creating a Doom Book was helpful or harmful to the movie industry?

How might the industry have evolved if the "Talkies" had never been invented?

Why was it acceptable for the law to cover up some of the stars' deaths when they obviously were not accidental or suicides? Do you believe this was acceptable?

What do you think Chaplin's reaction was when he was ordered to pay support for a child he did not father?

In today's world, do you think a man like Shifty Hays could go from high level political scandals to the new voice of morality in Hollywood?

Examine the purpose behind the tabloids' obsession with Pink Powder Puffs.

Do you think Fatty Arbuckle received a fair trial? Explain.