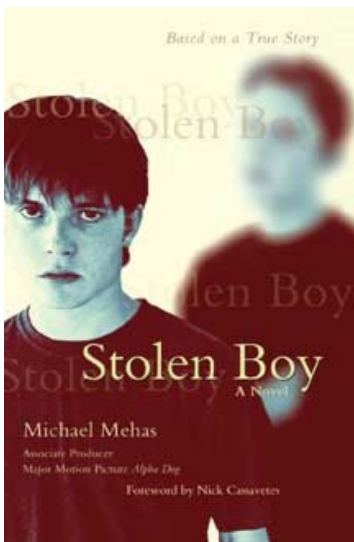


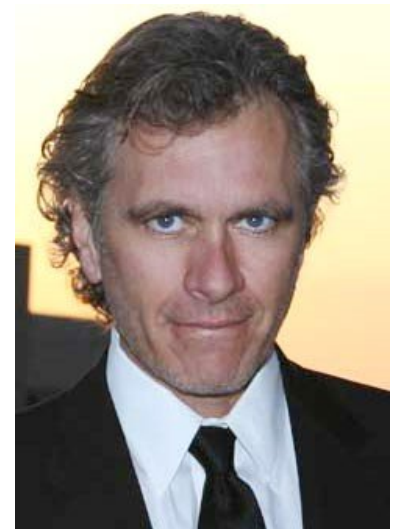
STOLEN BOY



On March 8, 2005, the day Brazilian Federal Police captured Jesse James Hollywood 60 miles outside of Rio de Janeiro, Michael Mehas' work on *Stolen Boy* suddenly took on a heavy pathos. His research had led him to meet with many of the key players involved in the real-life tragedy, and Hollywood's arrest caused Michael to experience conflicting emotions he had difficulty sorting through. On the one hand, he empathized greatly with the tumultuous emotions the victim's family had to be feeling at that moment. He could also understand the sorrow Hollywood's family must have felt for their son—who had been tirelessly on the run for nearly five years—and would now face a serious battle with the state of California for his right to live. Two days later, when law enforcement authorities transported Hollywood back to the US, Michael met with Jesse's father, Jack Hollywood, who was in custody, having been arrested on drug charges just before Jesse got nabbed in Brazil. From behind iron-meshed windows Michael told Jack Hollywood that the author needed to meet with Jesse's lawyer, in hopes of gaining access to [his client](#) (1) and deriving greater insight into certain issues dramatized

in Mehas' book. For his efforts, the author got much more than he bargained for.

[James Blatt](#) (2) is one of America's most astute criminal defense attorneys. He dresses like a zillion bucks and wears the disarming smile of a ruthless professional. Jack Hollywood had told him about all the information Michael had gathered during his research for the film and book, and when they met, [Blatt questioned the author](#) (3) about it. By the end of the meeting, the defense attorney appeared quite impressed with what he had heard. Late that summer, he asked Michael to testify in [Hollywood's death penalty](#) (4) case. Blatt wanted to build a record of all informational exchanges between Michael and Senior Deputy District Attorney Ron Zonen. He wanted to recuse the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office for prosecutorial misconduct, for turning over to Michael confidential case files. Over the next several months, Michael would [testify twice](#) (5). Ron Zonen would eventually get kicked off the case, and both sides would appeal the issue all the way to the California Supreme Court, where the matter presently resides.



To this day, Jesse James Hollywood continues to battle for his life, and Ryan Hoyt already sits on California's [Death Row](#) (6). Hollywood's remaining co-defendants include Jesse Rugge, sentenced to life with the possibility of parole; William Skidmore, who's serving out the remainder of his nine-year sentence; and Graham Pressley, who serves his time with the California Youth Authority until he reaches the age of twenty-five. *Stolen Boy* is a book you will not want to keep to yourself. This page is designed to stimulate discussion of Jesse Hollywood's story, extending beyond any conversation generated by *Stolen Boy*. We hope it will broaden your understanding of the tragically bizarre circumstances experienced by those involved.

Discussion Points

1. Was it appropriate for a journalist to obtain the type of information Michael Mehas received directly from the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office? Should it be legal for a journalist to [possess and exploit](#) (7) confidential files such as the ones Michael received from law enforcement authorities?
2. Did Santa Barbara County Senior Deputy District Attorney Ron Zonen commit any ethical violations by providing so many confidential materials to the researcher? Should he have been prosecuted under California law for handing over this confidential information? If so, why?
3. Should prosecutors in general be allowed to use the press to help try their cases? Should defense attorneys?
4. Is it in a criminal defendant's best interests for his defense attorney to try to get a jump on the spin game by utilizing the press in an effort to enhance his client's image before the public? Could such a strategy backfire against his client's chances at getting a fair trial? If so, how?
5. How far should prosecutors be allowed to go when zealously pursuing their defendants through the media? Should law enforcement agencies in general have stricter guidelines placed on them when it comes to providing their version of a particular case to the media before a jury has been given the opportunity to hear the admissible evidence of that particular case? What should those guidelines be?
6. Should a defendant's rights be waived if he avoids arrest and takes flight? If so, what rights should he lose? Is it fair that [Jesse Hollywood](#) (8) should have to counter law enforcement's version of events as spun through the media during the nearly five years of his disappearance?
7. Should a movie and/or book, that generated its own facts and handed down its own judgment as to a character based on a particular real-life defendant, be released before that defendant has had a chance to defend himself in a court of law?
8. Is it possible that the release of the book *Stolen Boy* and movie *Alpha Dog* could negatively influence a potential jury pool of Jesse Hollywood's peers for his upcoming death penalty trial? Might he be denied his right to a fair trial as a result thereof? Should it matter?
9. Could prosecutor Ron Zonen's failure to win a conviction against [Michael Jackson](#) (9) have had any direct influence on his recusal from the [Jesse James Hollywood case?](#) (10)

(1) On the day law enforcement authorities transported Jesse James Hollywood from Brazil to Santa Barbara, California, Michael Mehas attended the press conference given by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, at which Nicholas Markowitz's parents spoke. It was unclear at the time whether Jesse had an attorney representing him or not. As a criminal defense attorney who understood Hollywood's story well, Michael Mehas anticipated what might have been spinning through the kid's head. He knew Jesse had to be scared to his core as they paraded him before the press in shackles. His hair was messed up, there were dark circles under his eyes, and he sported that lost-deer-in-headlights look. Michael understood the legal and political climate Hollywood found himself in, and he believed Jesse was in line for one intense battle to save his own life. The public's perception of Jesse Hollywood was that of a worthless, murderous thug who deserved to die based on crimes he had allegedly committed. This was basically the opinion expressed by Ron Zonen and others to the author.

Once they had Hollywood in custody, Brazilian and American authorities no doubt worked him for information. But Jesse was a savvy kid, who had been taught by the best, and Michael believed he would have said nothing to hurt his case against the government. When the press conference ended, Michael contemplated walking into the Santa Barbara County jail, flashing his bar card, and speaking to Hollywood. The attorney would have treated Hollywood as a client, introducing himself and telling the kid to keep his flap shut at all times, except when speaking with his attorney. The journalist side of Michael would then have wanted to ask Jesse to fill in some holes to his story. Michael had been working on the film and book projects for two years at this point and needed to hear from the former fugitive's lips to his own ears what Hollywood's version of events was. Michael already knew everyone else's.

As an attorney, however, Michael understood that trying to speak with Jesse Hollywood at that time would not have been appropriate. Michael knew Jesse's father well—had asked him tons of questions and gotten tons of answers—and he figured Jack Hollywood would already have taken care of Jesse's lawyer business long before Jesse got snared. And Jesse Hollywood's attorney was probably on his way to Santa Barbara at that very moment to meet with Jesse. And that attorney would probably have had a seizure if he had found out some lawyer/journalist had wormed his way into jail to speak with his infamous client. Furthermore, obtaining information that might eventually end up in a book or movie that would cast judgment upon his client before Jesse Hollywood ever had the opportunity to address a jury on his own behalf in his own death penalty case. And especially before the attorney had his first chance to speak with his own client. So Michael proceeded with plan B instead. He headed south on the 101 to the Van Nuys jail to get some answers from a roughed up Jack Hollywood who looked like he'd spent the past month vacationing at Abu Ghraib.

(2) Much has been written about Jesse Hollywood's defense attorney and the unusual array of motions he has filed in his client's death penalty case. Members of the public and media have at times questioned James Blatt's motives. They have scrutinized the manner in which he orchestrated getting prosecutor Ron Zonen thrown off the case. Some have called James Blatt a clever legal tactician. Others have called him a media hound. While still others have questioned the morality behind many of his legal manipulations of the case. Michael Mehas, for one, recognizes how smoothly Blatt played him like the unwitting fiddle. How the scribe believed from the very beginning that he would be the one taking charge of his meetings with the defense lawyer, getting the mother lode of all information for his story, and then moving on. Yet, it turned out to be Blatt—playing the guileless seducer—who turned the tables on Michael. By forging a delicate relationship with the filmmaker and nurturing that relationship through several months of intense meetings, Blatt was able to coax Michael into acknowledging what information he had in his possession. This ultimately led to...

Michael Mehas testifying for the first time on Wednesday, November 22, 2005, the day before Thanksgiving. From the beginning, Hollywood's attorney had the author off balance while testifying about what materials he had received from Zonen—which was the only thing Mehas thought he was there to testify about. Suddenly, Blatt changed directions, sucker punching his witness with the true nature of the day's business. He started questioning Michael about everyone the author had ever spoken to regarding the murder. Blatt wanted to hear everything the witnesses had told Michael during their interviews. He wanted to know about all the information Michael had gathered on Ben Markowitz. Blatt wanted all the information Mehas had gotten from everyone he had ever gotten information from. The author answered the questions, but when asked to turn over the actual tapes and notes from his interviews, he refused. From the witness stand, the red-faced witness told his inquisitor, "That's my work product you're talking about. And that's going into my book."

The judge then turned to the witness and ordered him to hand over all the notes and tapes from every witness he'd interviewed. Michael sat there, dumfounded. He qualified for no legal privilege. He either followed the court's order—and turned everything over—or most probably would have ended up going to jail for contempt of court. Thus, the following Monday, Michael turned over every one of his notes and tapes. And he regretted every second of it. He regretted ever having talked to Jesse Hollywood's lawyer. Then he started hearing the rumblings again. This time about Blatt trying to get him back into court. That Hollywood's attorney had questions as to whether the filmmaker had complied with the court's previous order. Michael was again furious with the defense attorney. He felt he had bent

over backwards to give Hollywood's defense the information he had provided them with in the first place. If it wasn't for the author, Blatt never would have been aware of what had transpired between Michael and Zonen. Michael had compliantly turned over to the court all his interview notes and tapes, so what else did the guy want? It turned out, plenty.

In early 2006, Michael brought his own lawyer to court with him and testified for a second time before Santa Barbara Superior Court Judge Brian Hill. With Jesse Hollywood's supporters and curious observers filling one side of the gallery, and the Markowitz family and friends and press members encamped on the other, Blatt chipped away at every piece of evidence the nervous witness might ever have known about. Hours later, when he had finished the examination, Mr. Blatt asked the court to order Michael Mehas to turn over to the court his 239-page story chronology, his book, his character profiles, and much more. This time, however, with the help of some strong argument from the author's attorney, the judge denied Mr. Blatt's request. And Michael was finally free to finish his book.

At the time, Michael had felt manipulated by Hollywood's attorney. He was annoyed at being misled. He resented being dragged into the middle of Hollywood's death penalty case. He did agree to answer some of Blatt's questions, but he had never agreed to turn over any of his materials. Michael just wanted Hollywood's attorney to be aware of the legal issues regarding the evidence that he knew existed. But Mehas understood why Blatt did what he did. Why he put so much legal pressure on the author. Everything James Blatt does in the case is with the idea of saving Jesse Hollywood's life. The Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office and Nick Markowitz's family have but one collective thought on their minds regarding this case: to bring death to Jesse Hollywood. James Blatt poses Jesse's last line of defense to that very real threat. Just ask Ryan Hoyt what that's like. There is no one else standing between Jesse and the death sentence. Blatt has no choice but to cover all the legal bases to prevent his client from dying. Hollywood's lawyer has a case filled with issues of first impression. Jesse's case already has and will continue to set legal precedent in diverse areas of the law. This case will continue to be talked about in legal circles everywhere due to the many unique aspects of law it has touched upon. That's why men like James Blatt do what they do. And why men like Michael Mehas need to learn how to better dodge the legal freight train when searching for more information for their books.



(3) Michael Mehas first met with James Blatt in early April of 2005. Upon his release from custody, Jack Hollywood had set up the meeting and the three men met at Jerry's Famous Deli in Encino. Blatt appeared very courteous and genuinely surprised at how much Michael knew about the case. Having practiced criminal defense in his own legal career, Michael had formed certain opinions about Mr. Blatt's client and the case the government had against him. After all, Michael was writing a book that was based on both sides of the story, and he considered himself an authority on the two matters. Yet, after first being questioned by Jesse's attorney about the information he had received, Michael felt a concern as to how much he should reveal. The author did not want to violate any confidentiality he might have had with the people who had supplied him with the information in the first place. Since Michael was not an attorney of record on the matter, and he conducted his research on behalf of the film and book projects, he was not obligated to speak to anybody about anything. But the more he dwelled upon his predicament, the more he understood he really had no choice.

As a member of the criminal defense bar—who possessed *inside knowledge*—Michael understood the situation as well as anyone: Jesse Hollywood stood out like a clipped goose waiting to be slaughtered by the powers of the state of California. He was charged with an ugly crime, and while he had been on the lam, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department and the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office had joined forces with the press to all but convict Hollywood in absentia. Headlines like "Police Link West Hills Teen's Killing to Brother's Drug Debt" began sweeping across newspapers all over the country. A Los Angeles Times subheading read in part: "...arrested in the case authorities tied to \$36,000 owed."

These and other headlines distorted the truth of how much was owed for what, and demonized Jesse Hollywood in the public's perception in the process. They didn't come close to describing with any detailed accuracy who Hollywood truly was, and they never addressed the delicate intricacies of what really happened to whom and why. There was no \$36,000 debt owed to Jesse Hollywood by Ben Markowitz or anyone else. Ben Markowitz explained this to anyone who asked. The crimes against Nick Markowitz were not committed as revenge for a drug debt, which many newspapers claimed. The kidnapping happened for very different reasons, and those specific reasons have yet to actually see the light of day in any court or in the media. The public image of James Blatt's client was filled with inaccuracies that the press and Santa Barbara law enforcement authorities had helped to perpetuate and indelibly brand into the minds of the potential jurors who would one day cast judgment upon Jesse Hollywood. This was the first thing the author told Mr. Blatt when they finally sat down and spoke.

(4) As a criminal defense attorney who had objectively reviewed the state of evidence against Jesse James Hollywood, Michael Mehas knew he had no legal obligation to reveal the information he possessed to anyone, especially the defense in the Hollywood case. It was the moral obligation that split his insides. When putting the story together, Michael had formed certain opinions about Hollywood and his potential defense against the death penalty. But Michael had found himself unable to share those opinions with anyone without violating certain personal confidences, one of them being with Ron Zonen. On the one hand, the Senior Deputy District Attorney had been as thoughtful and cooperative as anyone in aiding Michael's research. Yet, the fact that Mr. Zonen was attempting to prosecute Hollywood to death affected things dramatically. If Michael chose to express his opinions to Mr. Blatt, the information he supplied might actually be used to help save Jesse's life, although it could also be used as evidence to help prosecute the Santa Barbara Senior Deputy DA for prosecutorial misconduct. If the author remained silent, however, and Hollywood was convicted and sentenced to death, and it turned out that Michael might have been able to help avoid that fatal end result, he never would have been able to live with himself. That's why he agreed to answer James Blatt's questions in the first place. And that's why he told the defense attorney about the statements made by Hollywood's co-defendant and admitted shooter, Ryan Hoyt.

Ryan Hoyt had never been arrested before this case, and during the preparation for his death penalty trial his lawyers worked up a psychological evaluation wherein Ryan made the following statements: "(Jesse) Hollywood (is) one of my best friends in the world. (He) done a lot for me. (My) family (never) did anything. Never had too much family. That was family to me. Mom, Dad, his little brother. He paid off parking tickets, a lot. He covered the 'bone headed shit' I did. Needed a place to stay, he would take me in." At another point, Hoyt said, "I needed something that I was not getting at home. Trust, vindication, acceptance, acknowledgement. Jesse gave that." Hoyt's doctor then concluded in part that Ryan's "personality features of dependency, neediness, fear of disapproval, submission to authority, presence of dissociation for a defense mechanism, and chronic depression with drug abuse make a credible explanation for a false confession, but they make even a better argument for excessive compliance and submissiveness based on fear of abandonment recapitulating his early life reality. That would have been something he could not bear to face."

Upon reading this Michael began to wonder aloud whether such a dependence upon someone might cause a young man to unilaterally commit a crime to protect the source of his dependence. In other words: Was it possible that Ryan Hoyt acted alone, committing the crime out of his desire to keep Jesse Hollywood from getting into trouble for the kidnapping, which would have resulted in life in prison for Jesse, and destroyed the only real home or family Ryan Hoyt ever knew? It was a

complex question, one that Hollywood's lawyer needed to ask, and Michael wondered if James Blatt had ever asked it. When queried, Mr. Blatt said he hadn't.

He also said that he never received from the prosecutor any of Ryan Hoyt's psychological records, from which Michael derived his information. This was not surprising, since Mr. Zonen had most probably considered Hoyt's psychological records to be nothing more than rubbish and thus immaterial to Hollywood's defense. As a journalist, Michael Mehas had gained the privilege of searching through the prosecutor's entire file regarding the prosecution of Hollywood's four co-defendants. No defense attorney would ever be granted such a privilege. He could expect to receive what the prosecutor, in his professional opinion, deemed relevant to his client's defense, which is exactly what Mr. Blatt got, until his conversation with Michael.

(5) Once defense attorney James Blatt had become familiar with the types of materials Michael Mehas had received, he asked the author to acknowledge all the information in an affidavit to the court. Mr. Blatt planned to go after Ron Zonen for supplying his file to Michael for the purposes of making a film and book, and he wanted the entire Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office recused from the case. The California Attorney General's office would then step in to prosecute in place of the DA, and Blatt no doubt harbored the feeling that the AG would be more willing to deal the case than the District Attorney's office had been. The Santa Barbara DA had offered Hollywood nothing but death penalty by trial. There would be less political pressure on the Attorney General to pursue death against Hollywood.

Ron Zonen, on the other hand, was tied to the hip with the Markowitz family. He had previously pursued Hollywood's four co-defendants with vigor and was hellbent on bringing death to Jesse on behalf of the victim's family, just as he had previously done to Ryan Hoyt. Yet, Michael remained apprehensive about providing Blatt the affidavit he sought. Michael had realized that he was the only witness who could testify about what information Ron Zonen had provided, because the author was the only one outside the DA's office who had direct access to their file. The information Michael garnered was then used as the basis for the stories behind the book and movie.

If Michael said nothing, however, and provided no information, Hollywood's lawyer would have a nearly impossible task in proving what all materials Zonen had provided to the film people, and Hollywood's defense would suffer a major setback against the Santa Barbara prosecuting machinery. Feeling internal division over breaching his self-imposed confidentiality of what he received from the DA,

Michael phoned Ron Zonen and told him about his conversations with Hollywood's attorney, including Blatt's desire to get an affidavit from him. The phone drew silent for an interminable period of time. To say the Senior Deputy District Attorney had seemed distressed with Michael's proclamations would be a gross understatement.

Zonen finally started to speak. And his voice grew with emotion. He began cross-examining Michael about his involvement with *Alpha Dog*, Nick Cassavetes, Jack Hollywood, and others. That morning Michael had already been worked over hard by James Blatt, and he was getting pretty sick of the whole routine. Michael was tired of being interrogated by the defense. And now he was tired of being interrogated by the prosecutor. And then Ron Zonen threw in the kicker. In a somber tone, the Senior Deputy District Attorney expressed a concern that he could be exposed to criminal prosecution for his alleged "misconduct" in his dealings with the author. This bit of information rocked Michael's world. The filmmaker suddenly wondered if *he* too could be criminally liable. Then he found himself facing the unenviable quandary of either not giving an affidavit, which could seriously harm Jesse Hollywood's fight against dying, or give the affidavit, and have his testimony be used as the lynchpin for criminal prosecution against Ron Zonen, a man he considered his friend and a professional who had been nothing but helpful and courteous to the author from the first day they had met.

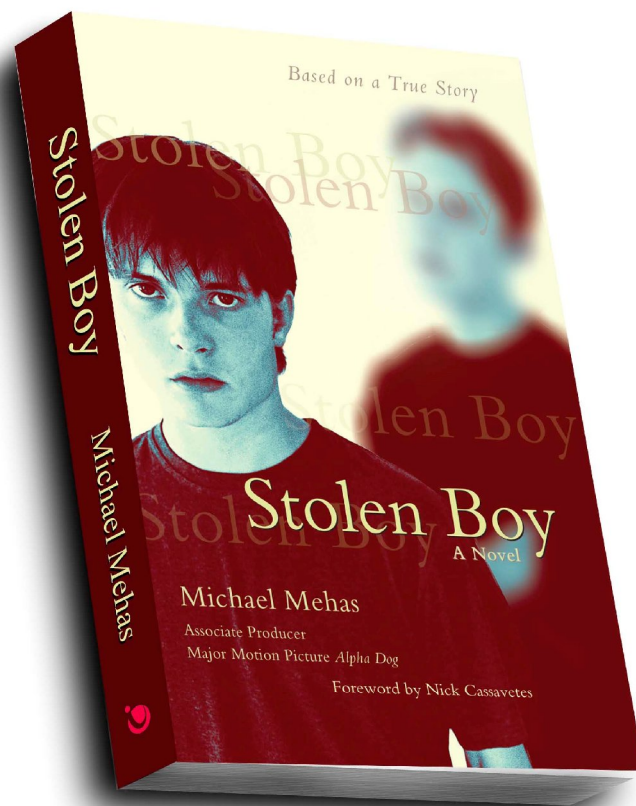
Michael's greatest concern turned out to be for Hollywood and his family. He knew Jesse had a little brother and mother, family and friends who loved him tremendously. The author also knew Hollywood's father Jack; had drilled the man with hundreds of questions regarding his family's part in the story. The Hollywoods had found themselves in a terrible emotional reality and were coping with it as best as they could, doing everything in their power to support Jesse in his battle against death. Michael's final decision came down to him wanting no part of Ron Zonen being criminally prosecuted based on his work with the author. That's why Mehas told James Blatt that he could provide no affidavit. Hollywood's attorney appeared devastated at the news until Michael assured him that he might still be able to help. Although the filmmaker would not provide a declaration, he agreed that if he could be reasonably assured that Mr. Zonen would not be criminally prosecuted based on his statements, Michael would subject himself to in-court testimony. He would answer all questions about what information he had received from the prosecutor. This would allow both sides ample opportunity to examine and cross-examine the author, under oath, as to what he did or did not receive. Months later, upon learning that the Attorney General would not be pursuing criminal charges against Mr. Zonen or his office, Michael did agree to cooperate with the defense and testified in the case.

(6) There has been a gross misconception made by some that to be an anti-death penalty advocate—or to wish that Jesse James Hollywood never be ordered to die—is to hold a position that is somehow slanted against the interests of Nicholas Markowitz or his family. Michael Mehas believes nothing could be further from the truth. The author had the opportunity to meet with each member of Nick’s immediate family, and he appreciated them as the caring and fragile human beings they were. Michael watched how—under emotionally difficult circumstances—Nick’s parents shined with the stars at the world premiere for *Alpha Dog*. He admired how Nicholas’ half brother and half sister displayed their courage while answering emotionally charged questions concerning their family’s ordeal made by the author while conducting his research. The family’s honest realizations and heartfelt recollections seemed to provide depth and understanding for both questioner and interviewee alike. Michael found himself identifying with the family as much for its common sense of loss as the depth of each member’s newfound appreciation for one another.

Michael Mehas wishes that we all might feel compassion toward the Markowitzes for what they’ve endured. He also hopes that we can find it in our hearts to display that same type of sympathetic consciousness for all the families who suffered so tremendously as a result of what took place in August of 2000. There are others whose loved ones were involved in the tragedy and whose lives are presently at stake—and can still be saved. *Stolen Boy* tells its story as if assembling the pieces to a puzzle of humanity. As the story progresses, the reader will see that each character—as a piece to the story puzzle—becomes critical to the final picture. Every player’s freewill to act or not to act is so interrelated with every other player’s freewill that each character emerges as a potential life-or-death difference by story’s end.

As the pieces to *Stolen Boy* start to assemble into a coherent pattern of meaning, the reader can begin to understand how that same interconnectedness experienced by the players in the story applies to our own lives. How, in our day-to-day living, each act we commit can influence the way others around us feel—positively or negatively. How this pattern can continue indefinitely, affecting all who are touched, like the ripples in a pond from a stone’s throw. Being anti-death penalty is not the antithesis to victim’s rights. It is not tantamount to being insensitive toward those who have been victimized by crime. Anti-death is like being pro-life. It’s about saving a piece of ourselves by not allowing that piece to die—by letting all living things live no matter how socially unworthy they might be deemed by some. By promoting life we expand the universe of human consciousness through life-giving measures rather than shrink it with thoughts of hatred, revenge, and death.

(7) When he finally decided to testify, Michael Mehas had no personal concerns about being criminally prosecuted for his actions with Ron Zonen. Since he had not represented anyone in the case, the attorney maintained no ethical obligations for confidentiality. He was free to possess and write about the confidential documents, photographs, videos, and audiotapes he obtained from Santa Barbara law enforcement authorities. Before testifying, Michael thoroughly researched the matter. He discussed it extensively with his own attorney, lawyer friends, and card-carrying uncle from the ACLU. Even James Blatt, in trying to persuade his witness to testify, informed Michael that he had done nothing legally wrong. Of course Mr. Blatt offered no such vote of confidence for Ron Zonen.



(8) Santa Barbara County Senior Deputy District Attorney Ron Zonen had the right idea. He wanted to popularize Jesse James Hollywood's name and image around the globe, hoping that someday someone somewhere would find them useful in helping to identify and capture the fugitive. Mr. Zonen had felt a strong personal responsibility to prosecute the last piece to the puzzle and avenge the loss suffered by the Markowitz family, and that's why he agreed to work with filmmakers. A thorough investigation into the matter has proven that Mr. Zonen did nothing other than his best to stick between the lines of legal aggression and professional responsibility in his prosecutorial work. He is a victim's advocate who fights to the best of his abilities on behalf of those who sometimes cannot defend themselves. And he's a public hero, who should be praised for zealously representing the people of California, not ridiculed for attempting a novel approach to apprehend a fugitive. All prosecutors do it, and their infatuation with the mass media has changed the very nature of the way criminal cases are now handled. That's why it is the system that needs to be examined and then overhauled.

Early on when Jack Hollywood's son was desperate and on the run, members of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department helped serve a search warrant on Jesse's parents' house in the San Fernando Valley, a suburb of Los Angeles. One of the department's commanders told Jesse's father that he hoped to be the one to find the fugitive so he could be the one to shoot and kill him. Jack Hollywood stared at the officer, mortified. In the eye of the law, his son was already a guilty man. Some law enforcement agencies are notorious for leaking information to the media that is used to demonize a defendant and help create a public perception of guilt, often before the defendant ever steps into a court of law. The defendant is then thrust into the position of essentially having to prove his innocence, a rather tall order in most cases since defendants rarely possess the financial wherewithal to counter the government's high-financed, prosecuting machinery. One can never forget that the burden of proof in all criminal matters resides with the state, not the defense. That burden is 'Guilt beyond a reasonable doubt', and prosecutors are held to the highest standard of law for very good reasons.

Law enforcement agencies have a history of being all too willing to jump into bed with an often-untrustworthy media, at the peril of often-defenseless citizens. The government has all the leverage and power in a criminal prosecution (unless maybe your name is Kobe Bryant or O.J. Simpson), and if that leverage and power is mishandled it can cause irreparable damage to ordinary people. Innocent men and women, who might otherwise be undeserving of such treatment, can have their lives ruined by the slander and innuendo fostered by the marketing aspect of over-eager law enforcement personnel; men and women who are working hard at their own jobs, trying to

obtain personal advancement in their own careers. Their efforts to ascend the bureaucratic hierarchy and yet do what is right can sometimes conflict. That's why we have the Bill of Rights, to protect the average citizen from potential governmental malfeasance. That's why—when charged with a crime—we are constitutionally guaranteed our day in court. We are entitled to confront and cross-examine all witnesses against us. And it is our right to testify on our own behalf if we should choose to do so. Jesse James Hollywood deserves these and all constitutional protections, before being labeled “Guilty by press” or “Guilty by police officer opinion.” In spite of what people may think or say of Jesse Hollywood, he—to this day—bears the cloak of innocence. The state of California has yet to prove a single count against him, beyond a reasonable doubt. Yet Jesse faces the unenviable task of essentially having to prove his innocence while faced with a negative public perception that has been painted with color and judgment by a major motion picture, a novel, and the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office.



(9) Having read that the Santa Barbara DA was moving forward with its prosecution of Michael Jackson, Michael Mehas one day asked Ron Zonen about the matter while interviewing him in his office. The journalist was snooping around for another inside scoop, and he thought he might have one when Zonen told him he would be handling much of the Jackson trial workload along with his boss, Santa Barbara County District Attorney Tom Sneddon. Top man at the DA's office trying a high profile case such as Jackson's sounded politically motivated, and Michael Mehas told Zonen as much. He also expressed to the Senior Deputy DA that his office might be better served not wasting huge taxpayer dollars prosecuting the former leader of The Jackson Five with the flimsy evidence and lack of credible witnesses the DA had thus far paraded through the press. But Zonen assured the scribe his office possessed all they needed to go after Michael Jackson, the "serial molester." Maybe it was the defense attorney in Mehas, but he didn't necessarily believe in the prosecutor's judgment of the King of Pop, a sentiment a jury of Jackson's peers ultimately shared with the author.

Michael Mehas had felt a strange sense of kinship with Michael Jackson since they had once gone to school together in Hollywood. Jackson's family had just moved from Motown to Los Angeles, and one day Mehas, who was in the fourth or fifth grade at Gardner Street Elementary School, witnessed the mini-King of Pop, with his milk chocolate skin and sixties fro, doing his thing on school grounds. A hundred and fifty screaming little girls trailed behind him across the black asphalt playground, and Michael Mehas was definitely envious. Years later, during his starving actor days, the future scribe would again run into the singer, this time during the filming of Jackson's infamous Pepsi commercial where his hair and scalp caught fire.

After finishing his meeting with Ron Zonen, Michael Mehas returned to work on the screenplay with Nick Cassavetes, and he told the writer/director about his conversation with the prosecutor. Michael informed Cassavetes that he believed they should do a movie about Michael Jackson, because he felt confident he could get all the inside information about the pop icon from the Senior Deputy DA, just as he had done for *Alpha Dog*. The director thought they should do a documentary about Jackson instead of a feature film, but he nevertheless urged his associate producer to see what he could get from Zonen. Turned out Mr. Zonen had a different set of operating principles for Michael Jackson than he did for Jesse James Hollywood. Because he refused to give the filmmaker the inside scoop on the Jackson case, informing the author, "Ethically speaking, I just can't do that." And he didn't.

(10) It's hard to tell whether Ron Zonen ever got the license plate numbers of those buses that hit him. First, he'd been licking his wounds from his battle with Michael Jackson's stable of high-priced lawyers. And then, as he tried easing his way back into the opening stages of the Hollywood case, Jesse's defense attorney cold-cocked him with a devastating blow that would ultimately knock the DA right out of the case. Like a prizefighting attorney Blatt then moved in for the kill. Based on conversations with Mehas and Cassavetes, Blatt pummeled Zonen with accusations that the Senior Deputy District Attorney had committed illegal misconduct for opening his files to filmmakers. Zonen never did get his feet firmly planted in his defense.

In responding, the prosecutor essentially fell into a trap the defense lawyer had set for him. Mr. Zonen didn't have to file a personal affidavit with his response, but he figured he had nothing to hide. So he filed with the court a declaration wherein he essentially admitted to giving the author all the materials Hollywood's lawyer had accused him of giving. Zonen's admissions created a record of the Santa Barbara County DA's potential criminal dealings with the filmmaker, and all Blatt had to do now was get the author to corroborate and then expound upon the prosecutor's admissions, and the defense attorney would be set to boot the prosecutor from the case for good. But Michael chose to back down in his dealings with Mr. Blatt. The filmmaker felt he could not be responsible for taking Zonen—and possibly the entire Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office—down. He wanted no part in allowing his statements to be used as the cornerstone for any potential criminal prosecution of Ron Zonen. And the author's initial refusal to cooperate with the defense resulted in several threatening phone calls to his home.