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Hunting for Hans in Vienna

THE LORD IS A MAN OF WAR. By
Stanley F. Donath. New York: Al-
fred A. Knopf. 1944. 338 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

DURING recent years we have had a number of novels concerned with individual invasions of Hitler's Reich, the protagonists of which have ranged all the way from an elderly Jew in search of a small boy's mother to a keen-eyed sportsman, armed with a highpower rifle, on the prowl for the Fuehrer's corpse. Here is another of the kind, by Stanley F. Donath, born in Vienna, "Czechoslovakian by heritage," who now finds himself in this country writing for our most popular magazines, but who, before his short stories began to sell, supported himself and his wife by getting "employment of a kind as a counter-termer at the World's Fair."

It is from a counter at New York's World's Fair that Mr. Donath's hero, Jan Dvorin, a native of Moravia, starts his personal invasion of Hitler's Europe. His motive, for those who believe in the efficacy of revenge, is unquestionable. Having scrimped and saved, cent by cent, to pay his father's passage to America, he learns that his father has been shot by order of an S.S. officer named Hans Fliegl. Jan knows Fliegl—he went to school with him—and he dedicates himself to the task of tracking down and killing the Nazi murderer. Saying farewell to an adoring heiress and the prospect of a soft berth in life, he journeys to Vienna by way of Montevideo and Santander; and in Vienna he finds his man, talks with him, drinks with him. What else Jan does is Mr. Donath's story and his

business. How he tells his story is our business.

He tells much of it well enough to make one regret that he does not tell all of it better. He is good at incident, good on occasion at getting past a given point with a minimum of effort, although at other times he bogs down; and, having seen and heard and touched and smelled his world with lively senses, he knows how to put sensations into words. But his parts are better than the whole, and, in the kind of novel in which pace matters tremendously, his pace is uneven. Then, too, there are his women. Froude wrote that "It would have been well for Henry VIII if he had lived in a world in which women could have been dispensed with; so ill, in all his relations with them, he succeeded." On a less conspicuous stage than Henry's, Mr. Donath suffers from the same misfortune. Kathrin O'Brien, his Long Island heiress, simply does not exist; and Liza Dzershavin is nothing better than a stand-in for a Hemingway heroine. Because of such shortcomings, this story of a man-hunt moves on a detective-story level, despite its philosophical passages, which, by the way, after all their words, leave the reader in doubt as to the author's final judgment of his hero.

However, there is action here, there is adventure, there are pages with which to pass an hour or two; and there is considerable talent, backed by a masculine intelligence. Were the partial success less, the partial failure would not merit comment. Incidentally, when Hollywood films the story it will be far less coy than is Mr. Donath regarding the fact that boy finally gets girl.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

| Title and Author | Crime, Place, and Sleuth | Summing Up | Verdict |
|---|--|---|------------|
| IT'S MY OWN FUNERAL Dana Lyon (Farrar & Rinehart: \$2.) | Californian who took prison rap for worthless wife gets private dick job that turns up extraordinary racket. | Tough—and not too credible—yarn about an unusually clever criminal gang. Full of action and surprises. | Average |
| BEYOND THE DARK Kieran Abbey (Scribner: \$2.) | Young Manhattan couple incur suspicion of both police and criminal group and have tough time eluding both. | Swiftly paced adventure-espionage yarn with murderous episodes, romantic overtones, and plenty of suspense. | Good grade |
| CASE OF THE GIANT KILLER H. C. Branson (Simon & Schuster: \$2.) | John Bent, called in to investigate death of small-town businessman, runs into plot with terrifying ramifications. | Shrewd detecting, ample action, interesting group of characters, and finish that packs real punch. | Rewarding |

The Great Overfed

THE FACE IN THE ASPIC: Tales of Club Life Among the Overfed. By Thomas Mario. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1944. 194 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by JULIAN STREET

THE author is described by his publishers as a young American, the executive chef and maitre d'hotel of a luxurious New York club, and his book is described as a report of the upstairs, downstairs, and backstairs life of the establishment, done "in a style compounded of malice, wit, and dead-panned wonder." We are told that the book is "HILARIOUS" (their caps), that it has been called "the rich man's 'Grapes of Wrath'"; Peter Arno is alluded to in a manner not unflattering to Mr. Mario, and if Ludwig Bemelmans goes unmentioned the subject matter and the title inevitably bring him to mind.

This sort of advance billing is not easily lived up to. In the present reviewer it created a keen appetite for Mr. Mario's aspic, and when the aspic turned out to taste like ordinary gelatin, he was not only disappointed, but was so irritated that the danger now is that he may fail to give Mr. Mario his due. The reviewer remembers that when reading the book he found himself chuckling now and then. Some of the author's characterizations and situations are bizarre and even comic, but usually one feels him straining, and one cannot believe that the figures he attacks are much more than fat old dummies stuffed with excelsior.

In this book Mr. Mario attempted something very difficult. He set out to write of stupid people without himself sounding stupid. Many a better man has fallen down on that before. Moreover, his kind of stupid people are passé and of no consequence. And worst of all, perhaps, they have already been dealt with by Mr. Arno and Mr. Bemelmans with such brilliance that any one else invading this field invites comparisons which are almost certain to be unfavorable.

One perceives clearly that Mr. Mario is a great admirer of Mr. Bemelmans, a sentiment that does him credit. Had his admiration been more judicious he would have realized that only Bemelmans can write Bemelmans.

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