

# Criminals At Large

By NEWGATE CALLENDAR

"Jesus Christ Superstar" tells the story of Christ from the point of view of Judas. Suppose a Dead Sea scroll is found and authenticated as being the words of Judas himself. And suppose it presents a somewhat different story from the Authorized Version. Suppose Peter, not Judas, was the traitor, and that Peter had framed Judas, and that Jesus was, in a way, not unlike the leader of a hippie commune as described in "Superstar."

In **THE JUDAS GOSPEL** by Peter Van Greenaway (Atheneum, \$6.95), an archeologist and specialist in old Semitic languages does find such a scroll: The Testament of Judas. Of course, he instantly realizes what this would mean to the Catholic Church and, indeed, to all organized Christian religions. The document is far too hot for him to handle. For certain reasons, he does not want to publish it in a scholarly magazine. So he decides to sell it to the Vatican and let the pope do with it what he will. An emissary—a very dangerous emissary—is appointed by the Vatican to take care of the negotiations.

The idea is startling, and Greenaway handles it with real virtuosity. He knows how to build up suspense; he sees sympathetically into people and their motivations; and he has come up with a spellbinder. There is not only plenty of action; there also is a commentary on revealed wisdom as opposed to 20th-century skepticism. "The Judas Gospel" can be read on several levels, and all of them are absorbing.

Two other books that are hard to put down are **THE SHOOTING GALLERY** by Hugh C. Rae (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, \$6.95) and **THE EIGER SANCTION** by Trevanian (Crown, \$6.95). The Rae book, a story about the drug traffic in Glasgow, is as much a straight novel as a crime story. Rae is as much interested in character as he is in plot, and some readers might

find it a bit slow-moving. Sections of it could have been trimmed: Rae often is sidetracked into long descriptions and internal soliloquies. But this is a serious piece of work by a first-class stylist, and it builds up to an imposing climax.

The author who writes under the name of Trevanian is primarily interested in giving the reader a good time, and he resoundingly succeeds in this book about a professional assassin (in government employ) out on a job. But this particular agent is a highly-cultured professor of art, a skilled mountain climber, a demon with the ladies and a murderous, pitiless infighter.

Trevanian goes about everything skillfully. There is plenty of action, plenty of sex, some rather bright dialogue, and a quality of intelligence that makes "The Eiger Sanction" a little more than another post-Fleming exercise in mayhem. Trevanian has a lot of fun making up names for his characters. Most of those names have sexual connotations: George Hotfort (a woman), Randie Nickers (another woman), Anna Bidet. The hero's name, by the way, is Jonathan Hemlock. Read the book and see why.

In Ritchie Perry's **THE FALL GUY** (Houghton Mifflin, \$5.95) there also is an agent working for a hush-hush department. Much less suave than Hemlock, he is one of those tough wise guys you've run across any number of times—and he has a hard time in this first novel. He constantly is getting knocked on the head, kicked in the genitals, shot in the thigh, thrown down stairs, poked at by live cigarettes, worked over with a truncheon. All that stimulates him to a really strenuous effort. On the whole, this novel about the drug traffic in Brazil is conventional stuff, awkwardly written.

So is Paul Kruger's **THE COLD ONES** (Simon & Schuster, \$5.95). The hero is the lawyer-investigator, Phil Kramer, who has figured better in previous Kruger books. In this one the characters are uninteresting, the writing is routine and full of clichés. "I just—I can't believe it's true, Phil. I keep thinking it's a nightmare and I'll wake up." Come on, Kruger. You can do better than that. ■

