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### RUFOS, JFK, and Richard Belzer

From: Stig Agermose <[stig.agermose@get2net.dk](mailto:stig.agermose@get2net.dk)>  
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Stig

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Stand-Up Conspiracist

UFOS, JFK, and Richard Belzer

by

Jason Vest

\*

Washington— The baby looked utterly horrified upon beholding the approaching man in a dark suit and even darker glasses .

And who could blame him? Even if his cognizance of the shadowy world of conspiracy theories couldn't be articulated, the infant seemed to instinctively know that a visit from a man in black does not portend pleasantness. Forget the fact I'm strapped to mom's chest and in the middle of a bookstore, his terror-stricken face seemed to say. This dude is bad news.

The refrain seemed to frighten the baby even more, and Richard Belzer gave up, handing him back to his mother. "Whip out the breast, babe, because I don't want him crying when I read," he snapped, and made his way to the podium surrounded by a deluge of Homicide fans and conspiracy buffs, all assembled to hear the actor-comedian riff off his book, UFOs, JFK, and Elvis: Conspiracies You Don't Have To Be Crazy To Believe. According to some, you do indeed have to be crazy to believe what Belzer serves up; in the book, he unabashedly worships at the altar of Jim Marrs, a Texas journalist whose book on the Kennedy assassination, Crossfire, is regarded by many serious researchers with skepticism, and whose recent offering, Alien Agenda, is, well, out there. And the format of Belzer's book— short chapters, lots of sidebars and boxes, no footnotes— doesn't exactly buttress the jacket's claim that "the truth is in here."

But, as Belzer explains, the book is better read as provocation, not as Revealed Truth. "What I really want to do is goose people's imaginations," he says. "It's clear I believe there was a conspiracy involved in the murder of the president, but I make

clear what I believe and what is theory. This is stuff I've wanted to get off my chest and brain for a long time."

Blend the personification of "just because you ain't paranoid don't mean they ain't out to get you" with the sensibilities of a latter-day chautauquan gone cynical and you have Belzer in a nutshell. He rues the stratified oligarchy that he sees being constructed on the somniferous ruins of democracy. Like the Homicide character Detective John Munch, he believes that if people have an opportunity to take advantage of others, they will. Given this view of human nature, the word "conspiracy" has no stigma for Belzer; as he points out, its Latin root simply means "to breathe together," and, to him, conspiracies are as natural as breathing. If a conspiracy led by a drunk, out-of-work actor could kill a president over 100 years ago, he asks, is it so ridiculous to believe more sophisticated people in power can't execute any number of nefarious plots? Is it so absurd to entertain notions that involve ulterior motives and hidden agendas?

"One of my purposes is, I want to convert people to looking at things in a different way— there's a lot out there that's not blaring across the front page, but people can find out for themselves," he says. "There's more going on than we ever suspected. I mean, look at all the tourists who come to Washington. It seems that Washington is really beautiful. But what it really is is a beautifully wrapped package with maggots and shit inside." Which was part of the reason, he says, that he reveled in the Homicide□Law & Order crossover episodes set in Washington last season in which the shows' characters found themselves overwhelmed by a maze of lies and abuses of power. "I loved those episodes because they showed what people with power can do and how people and information can be manipulated."

This theme is one that has held Belzer's interest most of his adult life; working in Connecticut as a reporter at his hometown Bridgeport Post in the late '60s, he keenly recalls his latent anti-authoritarian notions being stoked by a sense of revulsion at what he saw covering courts and cops. "Hearing these people talk, I was like, these aren't the pristine authority figures I had grown up believing to be always right— I didn't realize how sinister and cavalier people in power are until I really got to be around them," he says. "I remember hearing the police commissioner talking about people in this kind of patronizing— I don't want to say racist [way], but let's say he showed contempt for certain kinds of people— and this really, really disturbed me."

Leaving Connecticut journalism to move to New York, Belzer was further radicalized by alternative media. Ever the voracious reader, he still dives into books and devours at least five newspapers a day. He used to think of himself as a stand-up journalist, and to some extent, it's still the best description for what Belzer does best. As Belzer continually emerged like a town crier from his trailer on the set of Homicide after hours of news and conspiracy research, the show's writers began to integrate his political rants into scripts, which fit nicely with his Detective Munch character. A '60s-era pothead alternative journalist who, because of a love for the slick TV detective shows of his youth, ends up using his bullshit detection skills in the service of The Man, who he clearly doesn't trust. Indeed, Munch may be the only TV cop who isn't down with the War on Drugs because he knows the conspiratorial history of marijuana criminalization. "It was true, so [NBC] really couldn't censor it," he says. "And I liked it because it showed there are people who work for the state who aren't happy with the state."

That said, though, discerning readers might wonder if Belzer, in his zeal to inspire political vigilance, has let his ardor trump his intellect. According to a veteran conspiracy researcher and fan of Belzer's, by relying on the work of Jim Marrs— who, among other things, asserts that the moon moves not in an ellipse but in an almost precise circular orbit, and thus was placed off earth by aliens— Belzer does his intellectual reputation a disservice. "He's so much smarter than that!" says the researcher. But Belzer's not fazed. "Friends of mine say, 'You're crazy' or 'You're making that up,' and I just say I'm a messenger. That's why I include a bibliography. I just want people to look deeper."

Take Rudy Giuliani's New York, he says. "It seems like all the homeless people are literally disappearing. I had a cabbie tell me last year, 'It's great, but where are they?' Curious how the undesirable people disappear as things start gentrifying, isn't it?" It may be a phenomenon Detective Munch can investigate this fall; despite Homicide's cancellation, it looks like Belzer will return as the conspiracy-spouting investigator on the new Law & Order spinoff. Though it's hard to picture a cop who sounds like Richard Belzer lasting long on Howard Safir's NYPD if he voices anything like what Belzer believes: "I think you can have a clean, civil city without being so heavy-handed and mean-spirited."

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[editor@villagevoice.com](mailto:editor@villagevoice.com)

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