

From Cowboy to Mogul to Monster

Linda Schreyer

(June 2008)

Softcover \$19.95 (531pp)

978-1-4343-7737-1

The five years that television writer and producer Linda Schreyer took to complete her “neverending” biography of entertainment mogul Mark Damon (aka Al Harris and Marco Damone) was time exceptionally well spent. Her collaborative effort with Damon who was born April 22 1933 in Chicago sets the standard for readable and interesting biographies of notable television and film personalities. An objectively written “warts and all” piece about Damon it’s intriguingly structured to read like a film with perfectly timed flashbacks and smooth transitions between episodes of Damon’s tumultuous life and the rollercoaster ups and downs of the various companies he formed.

Damon’s years as an actor singer producer and film financier are well documented and told in a captivating anecdotal style with plenty of supporting photographs. Family influences are noted as are early successes in a crossword puzzle business. The disappointments in his early acting career are accounted for too. But Damon’s “need to be important” and “to be number one” became the ambitions that motivated him to jump start his stalling career in North America in order to become a superstar in Italian spaghetti westerns. Then he went on to create the film world’s first ever independent financing company PSO where he micromanaged epics such as *Das Boot* and *9 Weeks* as well as *Monster* for which Charlize Theron won an Academy Award. The politics that led to the break-up of PSO with Damon as the designated demon reads like a novel of internecine warfare.

Besides his push to succeed in his career endeavours Damon had a compelling desire to bed his female co-stars. “I had to have almost any woman I was dating” he says. So throughout the book a legion of names appears beginning with his “first true love Susan Kohner” who is followed by many well-known Hollywood women and finally his current wife and lasting love Margaret “Maggie” Markov the mother of their two grown children. With his poster boy good looks Damon was even hit on by famous male Italian directors whose advances he successfully avoided in favor of affairs with several Italian and European beauties.

Schreyer’s book is expertly written and will appeal to general readers. For film researchers and pop culture critics there are the value added benefits of its backmatter including an eight-page filmography of Mark Damon as actor and producer.

M. WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (August 14, 2008)

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