



Sleuth and beauty

Sex 'n' snooker on the mean streets of Tulse Hill.

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man.'

Raymond Chandler's classic quote describing his fictional private eye, Philip Marlowe, set the standard by which all practitioners of the crime genre have measured their creations. In America, that is. English crime stories are mundane by comparison with their US counterparts: Ruth Rendell's Inspector Wexford, PD James' Inspector Dalgleish and Colin Dexter's Inspector Morse have as much in

common with Chandler's Marlowe and Hammett's Sam Spade as 'The Bill' has with 'NYPD Blue'. And it was accepted that the British PI was a non-starter.

Then along came Mark Timlin to prove them all wrong, and now his South London based Private Investigator Nick Sharman is about to hit the small screen and blow away the cobwebs hanging round TV's cosy crime series in **'The Turnaround'**. Sharman is an ex-cop, ex-druggie, invalidated out of the Met after a stray bullet in the foot saved him from an investigation into missing evidence from a drugs haul, and is as much an

idealised alter ego of his creator as Sam Spade was of Dashiell Hammett and Philip Marlowe was of Chandler: the lone champion, fearlessly stalking the mean streets of Tulse Hill where drugs, sex and casual violence go with the territory.

Timlin's experiences as a roadie (for T-Rex and The Who among others) have armed him with the material necessary to make crime fiction fun. 'I worked with bands for about 12 years from 1969 until 1983, mostly as a roadie, and I really wanted to be a rock and roll singer but I couldn't sing or play the guitar and that was a problem.' Timlin grins a big grin. 'I'd always read a lot of crime - especially the hard-boiled stuff - so I turned to writing myself and got published straight off. I haven't looked back since'. Carlton are kicking off with a 90-minute film of his fifth book, 'The Turnaround', with the excellent Clive Owen (pictured) playing the main man. In this fast-paced thriller, Sharman is hired to find out who murdered his client's sister, her husband and daughter after the police had given up hope of bringing the perpetrators to justice. Missing money, skulking thugs and dead bodies litter the investigation like oak leaves in autumn, as Sharman speeds through the outer reaches of south London in pursuit of the truth.

Ninety minutes is a bit too long to maintain the pace of such an action-packed drama, but the settings around Peckham, Streatham and Tulse Hill are splendidly noirish: clouded with a near-monochromatic menace that provokes shivers of fear, while the dimly lit bars and smoky snooker halls are as seedy and squalid as a cheap hooker's diary. Only once did I suspend belief: when Sharman confirmed to a friend that pub singer Fiona (Rowena King) was his, his mate said with wonder. 'I don't know how you do it.' I'd like to meet someone who doesn't fancy Clive Owen, but that's a minor gripe among the many superlatives. *Maria Lexton*
'The Turnaround', 8.30pm, ITV.