

Holmes' game is afoot

Writer of musicals, songs and TV shows, Rupert Holmes turns to mystery writing in *'Where the Truth Lies'*

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Rupert Holmes has always been a bit of a novelty writer.

His Tony award-winning musical, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," asked the audience to sing along and solve the crime themselves, while his most successful pop tune, "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)," a similarly unique cultural phenomenon, has managed to fade from the public consciousness faster than fern bars.

So what could be more natural than for Holmes to follow up these ephemeral confections with—well, what else?—a novel? His first foray into fiction is titled "Where the Truth Lies" (Random House, 400 pages, \$24.95), and surprisingly, it's anything but a novel novel. In fact, its two lead characters, the comedy team of Vince Collins and Lanny Morris, barely qualify as original literary creations.

They are instead meticulous replicas of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, right down to Dino's cream-colored cardigans and Jerry's telethonic tendencies. The only discernible difference is that Holmes' croon and clown combo may have done something terribly, terribly wrong back in their 1950s heyday, something like murdering the nubile redhead who was found floating in their hotel bathtub.

Fast-forward 15 years to the druggy '70s, where our tres chic narrator, K. O' Conner, a bi-coastal entertainment journalist of the spunky go-getter variety, is investigating the unsolved murder yet again, in an effort to find out, once and for all, where the truth really does lie. O' Conner is unquestionably the best part of the book. She's young, adorable, and full of wit (when

served a booze-free Bloody Mary at Disneyland, she renames it a "Bloody Shame").

She's also a wonderfully elaborate liar. Early on, she assumes a false identity so Lanny can seduce her without suspicion, and later fabricates a phony dying brother to extricate herself from an awkward meeting. In other words, (joke coming) wit ain't all she's full of.

O' Conner lies so much that nearly all of the novel's suspense is generated from her high-risk attempts at deception. When will she be caught? How? By whom? Not that we think any less of her. After all, it is the prevaricating Watergate '70s.

Like Holmes' AMC television series, "Remember WENN," set during the golden age of radio, there is a palpable air of nostalgia hanging over "Where the Truth Lies," except that in this instance he's waxing misty over a decade most of us would rather forget (myself included—teething was a terrible ordeal).

The novel is deep-fried in '70s kitsch. It's all there. The good: upstairs cocktail lounges on 747s, Szechwan cuisine (brand new in the States). The bad: theme restaurants, Pong. And the ugly: flared bellbottoms and pageboy haircuts on men.

Oh, and don't forget all the pre-AIDS, pleasure-first promiscuity; there's plenty of lovin' going on, but it's the sort of swinging that brings out the not-so-veiled misogyny in sexual liberation. The men always seem to be having more fun, and usually at the women's expense.

"Where The Truth Lies" is a plot-oriented book, so I won't reveal any story points. Like most mysteries, it twists and turns, and ends up pretty much the same way—with a series of revelations and counter-revelations, each one sleazier and more shocking than the last.

Afterwards, you'll probably feel dirty and degraded. You may even need a shower. And you'll never, ever be able to watch a Martin and Lewis comedy again without fighting off a few lingering, unpleasant images.