

Rod Taylor's Simple Formula For Happiness: Keep Working

HOLLYWOOD. . . . Rod Taylor has been a Hollywood star for years, and through shrewd investments would never have to work another day in his life, but he keeps driving himself like an energy machine that's just had a transfusion. "They tell you life is for the living," he explains, just back from location filming of his latest motion picture, Cinema Center Films' "DARKER THAN AMBER," which introduces the world-famous Travis McGee character to the screen in the person of Taylor as author John D. MacDonald's tough, no-nonsense anti-hero. "Well, I live by keeping busy. It's as simple as that."

National General Pictures' release of "DARKER THAN AMBER," gives Taylor the kind of rough-and-tough action role for which he is famous. "As MacDonald's McGee," Taylor explains, "I live aboard The Busted Flush, a luxurious houseboat in Florida waters which McGee won in an all-night poker game, and I drive a vintage Rolls Royce affectionately known as Miss Agnes when on land. McGee's crime-smashing junkets establish him as something of a salvager although he denies he has any formal profession."

The McGee character fills the screen with action in "DARKER THAN AMBER," as murder and beautiful girls occupy his time. "I enjoy the McGee role," Taylor admits. "He's got verve and energy and humor. He's a real man, and very much of an anti-hero."

Taylor likes to keep busy and he crowds up to three films a year in his schedule. "I'm never idle long," he tells, "and when idleness catches up with me, there's always something exciting and compensating, if I'm not working. Such as my own thoughts. I've got a lot churning around in my head, and I don't think there is anything more satisfying for a person than to reach his own conclusions about any number of vital issues in our society."

The time to think has made him a healthier person. "I don't suffer any feelings of insecurity. I'm not afraid of leisure. Let's say, rather, that I don't enjoy it as well as work." But he's got a philosophy about being between pictures, too. "When I'm not working," he explains, "I'm always optimistic that I will be soon again."

Travis McGee Creator Sees His Hero Hit Screen In "Darker Than Amber"

MIAMI, FLORIDA. . . . Author John D. MacDonald looked proud as a new father who'd just been told he'd sired quintuplets as he surveyed the movie set at the Bahia Mar Yacht Club in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. And, in a way, he was watching his own children at play—even if Rod Taylor, Suzy Kendall, Theodore Bikel and Jane Russell share no blood ties with the phenomenally successful creator of the Travis McGee adventure stories.

He was watching Hollywood turn the first of the McGee books into a movie, Cinema Center Films' "DARKER THAN AMBER," which opens at the Theatre, and he was happy.

"I always looked upon McGee as the dauntless salvager of the innocent caught in the coils of the criminal," MacDonald commented as he watched the crew set up a shot. "I couldn't be more pleased with the choice of Rod Taylor as McGee, whose personality combines the gentleness that wins women and the manliness that appeals to males."

Although the Travis McGee stories are his most successful books, MacDonald has written nearly 60 other novels with an audience of 40 million readers. National General Pictures' release of "DARKER THAN AMBER" is the first to be brought to the screen, but negotiations are under way to turn the McGee character into a movie series.

MacDonald's writing career began almost by accident in 1945 when he was an Army lieutenant colonel stationed with the O.S.S. in Ceylon. "The only kind of letters you could get through censorship then made pretty dull reading," he recalls. "So, instead of a letter, I wrote my wife a short story." When his wife sold the story to Whit Burnett's STORY magazine for \$25, MacDonald decided that writing might be a good way to make a living.

"He's going to face it from now on," the author notes about Rod Taylor in "DARKER THAN AMBER." "In the public mind, up to now, readers have confused me with McGee and they're disappointed when they meet me. Now Taylor can be McGee and I can be who I am, and I won't be minding that a bit."

And 40,000,000 readers can follow their hero to the screen.

"Darker Than Amber" Fight Scene Comes A Little Too Close To Life

NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS. . . . The incredibly brutal fight scene that frays the nerves during the climactic sequence in Cinema Center Films' "DARKER THAN AMBER" came a little too close to becoming real when the dangerous scene was filmed on location in Nassau.

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The producers have packed a little something for everyone into the motion picture. The little something was amplified a bit during the fight sequence and some of the cast and crew came away with a little more than they'd bargained for, including broken bones, sprained backs and blood that wasn't from the prop department.

Taylor, as McGee, has set plans to trap the villain, played by king-size William Smith, by getting him paralyzingly drunk. Smith, recovering from his hangover, goes berserk, killing his girl friend-accomplice and lunging after Taylor with a brutality that would make King Kong look like a tranquilized canary.

Although great effort was made to simulate the action so that no one would get hurt, Taylor suffered a sprained right hand when he miscalculated a punch before quelling the movie's villain.

Smith, who takes quite a beating before he goes down for the last count in "DARKER THAN AMBER," emerged from the fracas with shoulder injuries and pulled muscles in his back. Stuntman Jesse Wayne was sent home to California following the first day of the battle (which took a full week to film) when he broke his heel.

Tom Edwards, another actor, was slammed against a fence and suffered back injuries. One of the principal sufferers was Frank Lasiter, head of the film's transportation, who, although he wasn't actively involved in the scrap, accidentally came into contact with a stuntman who plunged into him, costing Lasiter six broken teeth.

Rod Taylor, exhausted after the sequence was completed, commented to a co-worker that a girl standing in the sidelines had the right idea with the button she was wearing on her sweater: MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR. It's a lot safer.