

Eliot Ness and the Mad Butcher: Hunting a Serial Killer at the Dawn of Modern Criminology – The Epic True Crime Story of the Untouchable Who Faced His Greatest Case

By: Max Allan Collins

About the Book: Ness had risen to fame in 1931 for leading the “Untouchables,” which helped put Chicago’s Al Capone behind bars. As Cleveland’s public safety director, in charge of the police and fire departments. Late in the summer of 1934, pieces of a woman’s body began washing up on the Lake Erie shore—first her ribs, then part of her backbone, then the lower half of her torso. The body count soon grew to five, then ten, then more, all dismembered in gruesome ways. As Ness zeroed in on a suspect—a doctor tied to a prominent political family—powerful forces thwarted his quest for justice. In this battle between a flawed hero and a twisted monster Collins finds an American tragedy, classic in structure, epic in scope.

About the Author: Max Allan Collins is a New York Times bestselling author of original mysteries, a Shamus award winner and an experienced author of movie adaptations and tie-in novels. His graphic novel Road to Perdition was made into a major motion picture by Tom Hanks's production company, Playtone.

People:

- **Eliot Ness:** Public Safety Director
- **Edward Andrassy:** discovered on September 23, 1935, his head was found buried separate.
- **John Doe I:** White Male found decapitated
- **Florence Polillo:** Discovered on January 26, 1936. Her head was never found
- **John Doe II:** Found on on June 5, 1936, head found separate from his body. This victim had six tattoos
- **John Doe III:** July 22, 1936, the severely decomposed, decapitated remains of a white male were located. Found the man’s skull away from the body. his was the only known West Side victim of the Torso Murderer.
- **John Doe IV:** Two halves of a male torso and lower legs floating in a stagnant pool, no head or other body parts were ever found. His stomach and liver were also missing
- **Jane Doe I:** On February 23, 1937, the upper portion of an unidentified female victim was found washed up. The legs, arms and head were never found
- **Jane Doe II:** The eighth victim was located. June 6, 1937. Lying in a rotting burlap bag, along with a newspaper from June 1936. The body was decapitated and missing a rib. She was tentatively identified as prostitute Rose Wallace (40)
- **John Doe V:** On July 6, 1937, the upper portion of a man's torso wrapped in a burlap sack for chicken feed, plus his two thighs, were discovered floating. he head, as well as the internal organs within the abdominal cavity and the heart, were never found.
- **Jane Doe III:** On April 8, 1938, a woman's leg was located, A month later on May 2, two burlap bags containing a woman's nude bisected torso, thighs and feet were discovered

floating. Her head and arms were never found. She is the only victim known to have morphine in her system.

- **Jane Doe IV and John Doe VI:** On August 16, 1938, a dismembered body was found (The body of a woman was wrapped in rags, brown paper and cardboard). Uncharacteristically, the head and hands were found with the rest of the body. The victim's head had been disarticulated at the level of the third intervertebral disc. On the same day, the body of John Doe VI was discovered in plain view of Ness' office at City Hall. Similar to the other victims, the head was severed from the body and the victim remains unidentified. The head was disarticulated at the level of the third inter-vertebral disc and had knife marks on the dorsum of the second and third cervical vertebrae. Extremities at all the major joints were all disarticulated as well.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the backdrop of 1930s Chicago contribute to the story?
2. What does the book reveal about the state of criminology and policing during this era?
3. How is Eliot Ness portrayed in the book?
4. What aspects of the Mad Butcher investigation struck you as most compelling or disturbing?
5. How did the author balance real-world facts with narrative pacing?
6. What ethical dilemmas did Ness and his detectives face?
7. Discuss the public reaction to the case.
8. What themes emerged for you from the book?
9. Why do you think true crime stories have such lasting appeal?
10. How did Max Allan Collins's writing style influence your engagement with the subject?
11. Did the author succeed in humanizing the historical figures?
12. Which part of the book impacted you most personally — emotionally or intellectually — and why?
13. After finishing the book, what questions remain in your mind about the case, Ness, or the era?

Read Alike:

- The bishop and the butterfly: murder, politics, and the end of the Jazz Age By: Wolraich, Michael
- Scotland Yard: a history of the London police force's most infamous murder cases By: Read, Simon
- The peepshow: the murders at Rillington Place By: Summerscale, Kate

