

Zodiac

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Zodiac Ends Silence—

'I Am Back With You'

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By Duffy Jennings

Zodiac, the cryptic and boastful killer who stalked the Bay Area in the late 1960s and was last heard from more than four years ago, wrote a new letter to The Chronicle yesterday, proclaiming: "I am back with you."

The random slayer of at least six persons, who delighted in teas-

ing police with coded messages to news media after each cold-blooded murder, claimed no new victims and made no threats in the note, but surfaced nevertheless in Zodiac's typical bold fashion.

"This is the Zodiac speaking," the letter began, exactly like the first message Zodiac sent The Chronicle in 1969. "I am back with you."

The letter, postmarked Monday in San Francisco and hand-printed in Zodiac's familiar style with a blue felt-tipped pen, was addressed simply, "Dear Editor."

He sent greetings to Chronicle columnist Herb Caen, taunted San Francisco police homicide inspector David Toschi, who has pursued Zodiac nearly nine years, and said he was waiting for a Zodiac movie.

"Tell herb caen I am here, I have always been here," he wrote. "That city pig toshi is good but I am smarter and better he will get tired then leave me alone."

"I am waiting for a good movie

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about me. who will play me. I am now in control of all things."

He signed the note, "Yours truly," as he did in his last message to The Chronicle in January, 1974.

Below that was drawn Zodiac's now infamous logo — a circle with a cross through it — and the notation "SFPD-0" — his customary method of reminding police that they have not caught him.

"It has been a long four years," Toschi said late yesterday after a handwriting expert "positively confirmed" the printing as Zodiac's first communication since he wrote to criticize the film, "The Exorcist," in 1974.

Zodiac is known to have killed at least six persons and wounded two others between 1966 and 1969, mostly in random shooting attacks on couples alone in remote Bay Area settings.

Included in the slayings were the shooting of a San Francisco cab driver in the Presidio Heights district in 1969 and the 1966 throat-slashing of a young woman student at Riverside City College.

In his last letter in 1974, however, Zodiac claimed a total of 37 victims, then disappeared and was not heard from again until yesterday.

"I could feel the excitement in my body as soon as I saw it," Toschi said after the letter was turned over to him for examination.

Toschi said he was so rattled by the development, in fact, that he picked up a cigaret and started smoking for the first time in three years.

"But I put it out right away as soon as I realized what I was doing," said the detective, his voice trembling with nervous excitement.



Homicide Inspector David Toschi was excited by the new Zodiac letter. An artist's sketch of Zodiac is shown at left

Toschi said he has talked to more than 5000 persons since he was assigned to the Zodiac case in 1969.

"I have always felt that he was alive and out there, somewhere," Toschi said of Zodiac's self-imposed 51-month silence. "I still don't know where he is, but at least now I know that all our work all these years definitely has not been in vain."

Zodiac's latest reference to a movie of his exploits is in keeping with his apparent affinity for show business, particularly films and theater.

In his previous messages, he often quoted from Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta, "The Mikado," and, in addition to his harsh review of "The Exorcist," he panned other movies as well.

A movie about him, titled "Zodiac," was, in fact, produced

and shown here at the Golden Gate Theater in 1970.

The low-budget film, starring two unknown actors in the title role, ended without clearly identifying either one as the killer but a narrator hinted to the audience that he "may be the man behind you in the theater."

Zodiac first came to public attention in October 1969, when he mailed a note and a piece of cab driver Paul Stine's bloody shirttail to The Chronicle a few days after Stine was murdered in his cab at Washington and Cherry streets.

In the letter, Zodiac heckled police for not catching him at the scene of the killing and also said he was "the same man who did in the people in the North Bay Area," referring to four other murders in Vallejo and Lake Berryessa during the previous year.

At the time, witnesses to and survivors of Zodiac attacks described their assailant as a husky white man wearing glasses and a crewcut. The descriptions served as the basis for a composite drawing circulated widely at the peak of the hunt for him.

The case drew worldwide attention — and thousands of tips from persons believing either that they knew the killer or had broken the code of the peculiar cryptograms in his messages.

But the elusive Zodiac remained free and unidentified other than by his self-chosen astrological nickname.

He continued to write letters and bizarre messages to this newspaper and others until 1971, when he abruptly stopped all communication and kept silent for three years until the so-called "Exorcist" letter of 1974.