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He had seen the stunt done once when he was a child. Someone surrounded by dynamite would be in a safe vacuum, was the reasoning, as if in the eye of a hurricane. If as many as three sticks did not explode, however, it would be fatal. Hopper had heard the stunt was used after the Russian Revolution by Bolsheviks who wanted to ceremoniously "execute" noblemen whom they really wanted to save.

In Houston that night, before an audience of students and race-car fans, not to mention all his friends who flew in for the party expecting to see him finally kill himself, Hopper did not die. But he did deliver a symbolic assessment of his life at the time.

"People," he concurs now, "were worried about my sanity."

WHEN DENNIS Hopper was growing up in Dodge City, Kansas, he came across a book that would change his life: Gene Fowler's *Minutes of the Last Meeting*, a recounting of Hollywood's mad bohemia of the '30s and '40s. Providing potent images for the youth were gaudy drunks like John Barrymore and W.C. Fields. But brightest of all was a man called Sadakichi Hartmann, an art critic, poet and "fuming savant," who, Fowler says, "pranced like an accelerated zombie among the easels and the inkpots of the elite, entering the ateliers without knocking, drinking on the cuff, mumbling his own weird rondels over the briskets of dowagers slumming in Greenwich Village . . ."

It was a hell of a blueprint for living the life of the self-destructive artist. Hopper, now 50, still recalls the book with warm fervor. "This was not sentimental," he cackles.

But what does it tell us?

"You knew what an artist was. A drinker. A drinker-drugger."

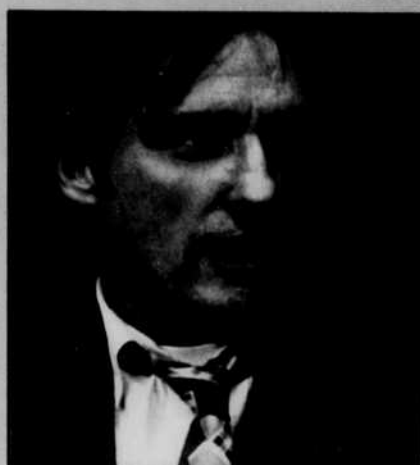
THERE IS THE LIVING legend, the noticeable presence on the set. He is short and not physically imposing, but his head is large and striking, and, through the indefinable alchemy, he's always worth watching. He has that legend.

If all you know is the legend, you just assume Dennis Hopper goes to sleep at night with a gun under his pillow. A remarkable number of people in Hollywood do not know that he is *not* necessarily living up to his legend anymore, that for three years he has been a model citizen. Director David Lynch, for instance, did not know that the actor was clean, sober and good-looking when Hopper was suggested for the role of

A HOPPER FILM FESTIVAL



August 1986: *Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Part 2*



December 1986: *Hoosiers*



September 1986: *Blue Velvet*



March 1987: *Straight to Hell*