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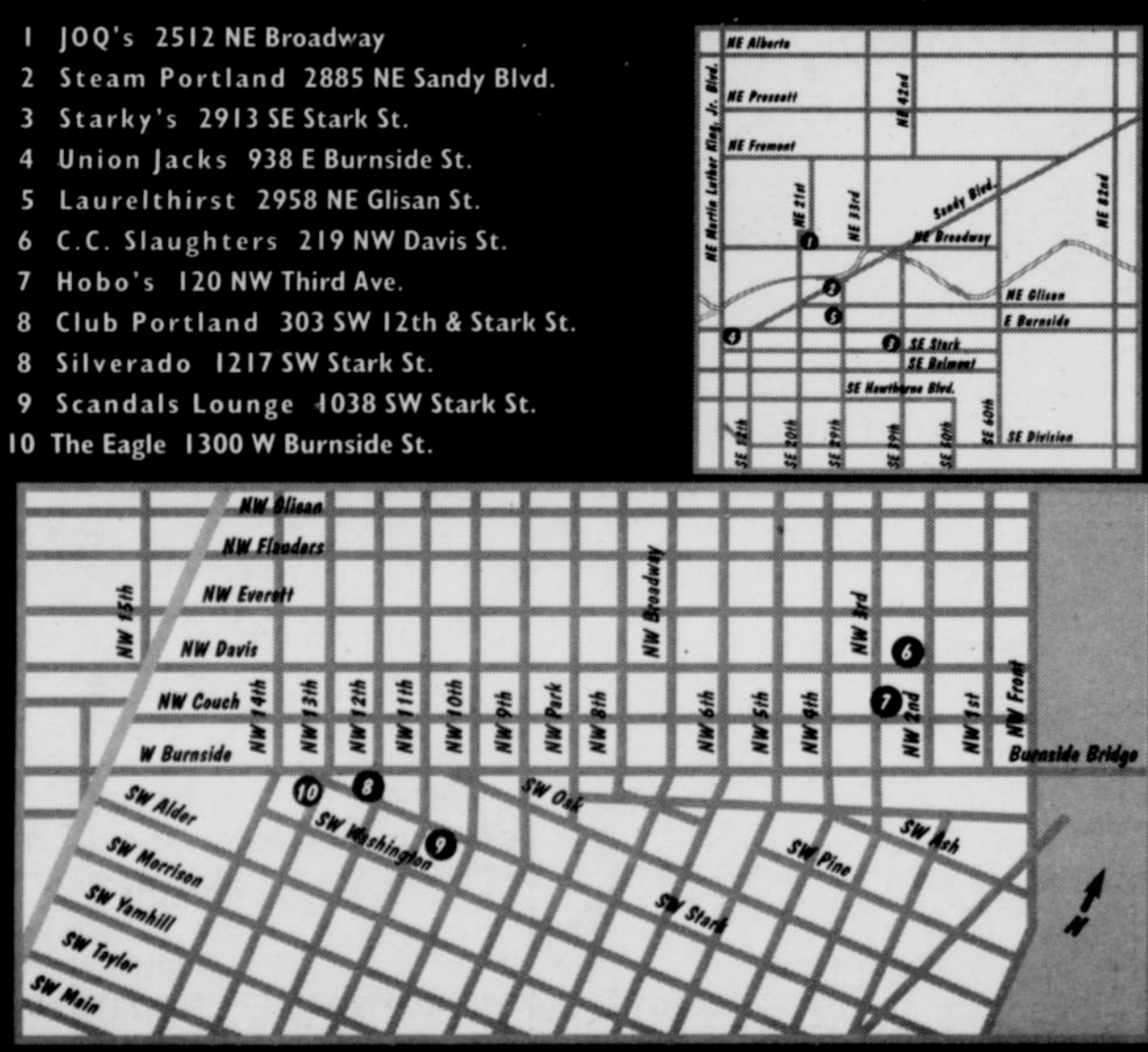
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California dreaming

His mother may write about denizens of the dark, but gay author Christopher Rice has seen the *Light*

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

In *Light Before Day*, the third novel by *Advocate* columnist Christopher Rice, a jaded twentysomething tries to transform his life of drinking, drugging, casual sex, family tragedy and chronically dissatisfying reportage for a fluffy gay magazine into something more stable and meaningful.

The protagonist, Adam Murphy, is drawn into a labyrinthine mystery involving kidnaping, murder and suicide—crimes emanating from the intersecting underworlds of underage sexual exploitation and crystal meth manufacture and distribution. With the aid of a curmudgeonly true-crime novelist, he becomes a world-weary sleuth of the Philip Marlowe variety, following a twisted path that leads him from the cruisy streets, clubs and bathhouses of West Hollywood to the ostentatious mansion of a failed dot-commer's kept boy to the ragged rural environs that provide an isolation ideal for covert, explosively dangerous meth labs.

After 2001's *A Density of Souls* and 2003's *The Snow Garden*—which focused on the rivalries, jealousies and insecurities of, respectively, high school and college milieus—*Light Before Day* marks a coming of age in Rice's work. As in a good film noir or detective novel, all the characters have mixed motives and checkered pasts, and the juicy, hard-boiled tone likely will satisfy fans of the dark, existential Jim Thompson/James M. Cain strain of L.A. crime fiction.

On the eve of *Light Before Day*'s publication, Rice (son of *Interview with the Vampire* author Anne Rice) spoke to *Just Out* about the process of writing the novel, his newly domesticated life and how California gets under one's skin.

Christopher McQuain: To what extent was *Light Before Day* inspired by real events?

Christopher Rice: It was initially inspired by a number of missing persons posters I saw around, and a friend's offhand comment that young gay guys go missing all the time from West Hollywood. As for the meth lab explosions, I knew that I was going to end up writing

about gay men and crystal meth, and once I began to research the drug in depth, I learned of the horrors meth had brought to rural California. I wanted to concoct a story that bridged the two. And sexual exploitation of minors, or more specifically the stereotype of the gay man as child molester, is something I have wanted to explore since my first novel—the damaging effects this stereotype has on all gay men.

CM: How autobiographical is the Adam Murphy character? Have you personally dealt with any of his issues?

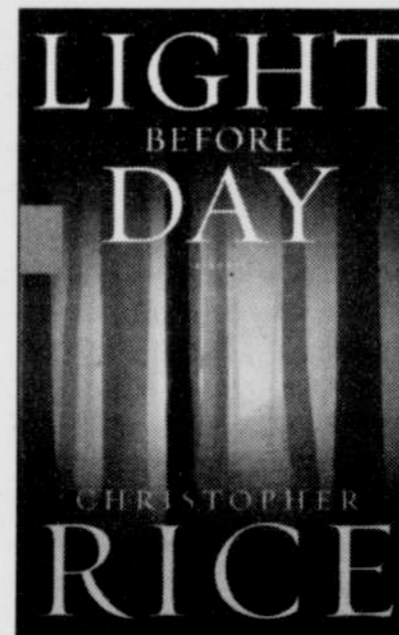
CR: I had destructive and painful experiences with alcohol and drugs, but I didn't feel they were interesting or unique enough to make a good book.... Adam Murphy [is] my alter ego, with a heavy emphasis on alter. There's a lot of my pain in him, but he's fun to write because he and I are not exactly the same.

CM: Is your own life more domesticated than the hedonistic, partygoing lives of these characters?

CR: It's considerably more domesticated than it used to be. I found the perfect Jewish husband—actually, he found me—and he's about to make me buy a dog. He climbs on ladders to fix things while I wring my hands below and beg him to be careful. The truth is I was never very good at the hedonistic, partygoing lifestyle even when I was trying to be. It was always quite loud, which rarely gave me an opportunity to talk endlessly about myself. Today, Brian has to work hard to get me to leave the house.

CM: With the plot hinging on methamphetamine production, child abduction, molestation and pornography, did your research ever lead to in-too-deep, Pete Townshend-like situations?

CR: It never even occurred to me to research child pornography to the extent that I would actually look at it; I don't think I could ever do it. The horror for me was in trying to imagine it, and even then, I left most of those details off the page so the reader can imagine it



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