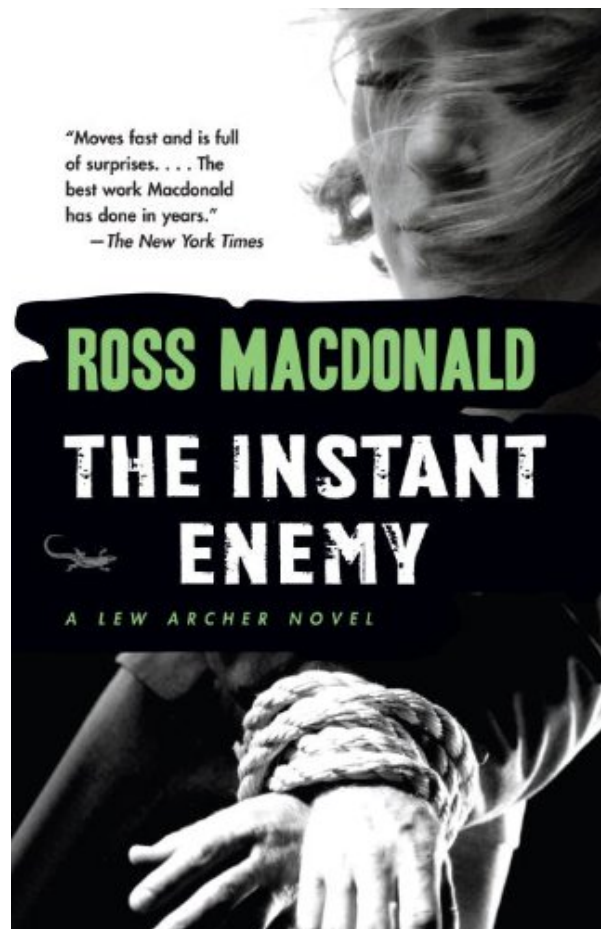


# THE INSTANT ENEMY (VINTAGE CRIME/BLACK LIZARD) BY ROSS MACDONALD



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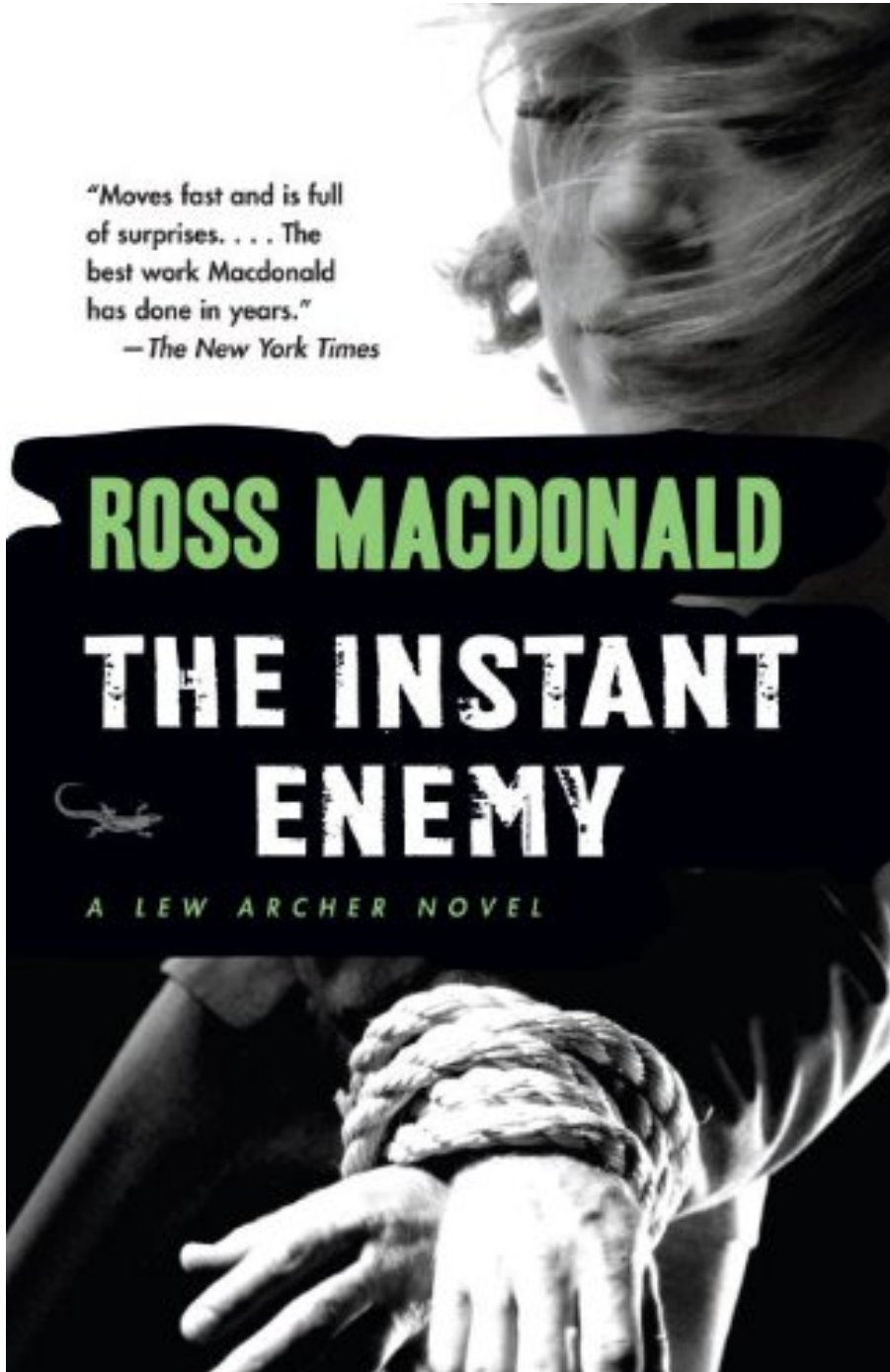
— *The New York Times*

**ROSS MACDONALD**

**THE INSTANT  
ENEMY**



A LEW ARCHER NOVEL



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Narcotics?"She was still trying to be sardonic, but the questions came through literally to me. I'd found stranger things than those in young people's rooms.Sandy's room was full of sunlight and fresh sweet odors. I found pretty much what you'd expect to find in the bedroom of an innocent, serious high-school senior. A lot of sweaters and skirts and books, both high-school books and a few good novels like A High Wind in Jamaica. A menagerie of cloth animals. College pennants, mostly Ivy League. A pink-frilled vanity with cosmetics laid out on the top of it in geometrical patterns. The photograph of another young girl smiling from a silver frame on the wall."Who's that?"Sandy's best friend, Heidi Gensler."I'd like to talk to her."Mrs. Sebastian hesitated. These hesitations of hers were brief but tense and somber, as if she was planning her moves far ahead in a high-stakes game."The Genslers don't know about this," she said."You can't look for your daughter and keep it a secret both at the same time. Are the Genslers friends of yours?"They're neighbors. The two girls are the real friends." She made her decision suddenly. "I'll ask Heidi to drop over before she goes to school."Why not right away?"She left the room. I made a quick search of possible hiding places, under the pink oval lamb's-wool rug, between the mattress and springs, on the high dark shelf in the closet, behind and under the clothes in the chest of drawers. I shook out some of the books. From the center of Sonnets from the Portuguese a scrap of paper fluttered.I picked it up from the rug. It was part of a lined notebook page on which someone had written in precise black script:Listen, bird, you give me a painIn my blood swinging about.I think I better open a veinAnd let you bloody well out.

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Generations of murder, greed and deception come home to roost in time for the most shocking conclusion ever in a Lew Archer novel. At first glance, it's an open-and-shut missing persons case: a headstrong daughter has run off to be with her hothead juvenile delinquent boyfriend. That is until this bush-league Bonnie & Clyde kidnap Stephen Hackett, a local millionaire industrialist. Now, Archer is offered a cool 100 Gs for his safe return by his coquettish heiress mother who has her own mysterious ties to this disturbed duo. But the deeper Archer digs, the more he realizes that nothing is as it seems and everything is questionable. Is the boyfriend a psycho ex-con with murder on the brain or a damaged youngster trying to straighten out his twisted family tree? And is the daughter simply his nympho sex-kitten companion in crime or really a fragile kid, trying to block out horrific memories of bad acid and an unspeakable sex crime?

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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14 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Fast paced, superbly constructed.

By Michael G.

The *Instant Enemy* is the quintessential Ross Macdonald novel. Why? Because it incorporates so many of the elements Macdonald held near and dear to his heart. These include:

- Family tragedies that repeat themselves over the generations.
- Unexpected familial relationships between characters.
- A young person's journey to claim a birthright unfairly denied.
- The notion that one's destiny is largely determined at birth, if not before.

The book starts out with Lew Archer being summoned to the Woodland Hills home of Keith Sebastian and his wife Bernice. Their 17 year old daughter has run away and they want Archer to find her without involving the police. Archer soon learns that the girl is traveling in the company of a 19 year old delinquent named Davy Spanner. What's more, it appears that they are planning to commit a very serious crime against Sebastian's boss, the fabulously wealthy oilman Stephen Hackett.

Archer wends his way up and down much of the California coast steadfastly seeking to unravel the truth behind the shocking series of events that rapidly ensue. The fast paced narrative unfolds quite smoothly as one unexpected complication after another is brought to light.

And Macdonald's prose is first rate. Whether depicting the scenic landscapes of the California coastline or the changing face of American society as it reflects the turbulence of the 1960s, the writing is remarkably deft and descriptive.

Thoroughly engaging, suspenseful and rich with surprise, *The Instant Enemy* ranks among the finest novels written by Ross Macdonald. Do yourself a favor and read it.

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Heart-breaking tragedy told in who-dun-it format

By Neal Reynolds

It seems that the cases Lew Archer takes on are rather straight forward looking at the outset and startlingly complex as he gets into them. This one ranks among the best of the series because of the characters involved. This time, he's hired first by a runaway daughter's father and runs into a plot against the father's employer. A subsequent kidnapping and threat of murder gets him also "hired" by the intended victim's mother. The alert reader will figure out aspects of the whole picture before the revelation, but chances are that reader will run into a few surprises.

The puzzle is definitely an important part of the total story, but it's the depth of character and the implicit tragic developments that make a Ross MacDonald story the rewarding experience that it is.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

My favorite Ross Macdonald so far.

By frumiousb

...and that is actually saying quite a bit, considering that he is one of my favorite detective fiction writers.

Written in 1968, this is Macdonald at the height of his skills. It features all the classic elements of inherited guilt, needless loss, corrupt manipulation and class barriers. Instead of stumbling over 1960s culture (as so many lesser writers seem to do), it makes free love and drug culture just two more things to be misused by the wrong sort of people.

Tough, smoothly written, well plotted. A must read for fans of Lew Archer and a good place to begin with Macdonald if you have not yet discovered his work.

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# THE INSTANT ENEMY (VINTAGE CRIME/BLACK LIZARD) BY ROSS MACDONALD PDF

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## Review

"Moves fast and is full of surprises. . . . The best work Macdonald has done in years." —The New York Times  
"A more serious and complex writer than Chandler and Hammett ever were."—Eudora Welty  
"Archer has seldom been in better form, and neither has his estimable creator." —The New Yorker

From the Trade Paperback edition.

## About the Author

Ross Macdonald's real name was Kenneth Millar. Born near San Francisco in 1915 and raised in Ontario, Millar returned to the U.S. as a young man and published his first novel in 1944. He served as the president of the Mystery Writers of America and was awarded their Grand Master Award as well as the Mystery Writers of Great Britain's Gold Dagger Award. He died in 1983.

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chapter 1  
THERE WAS LIGHT early morning traffic on Sepulveda. As I drove over the low pass, the sun came up glaring behind the blue crags on the far side of the valley. For a minute or two, before regular day set in, everything looked fresh and new and awesome as creation. I left the freeway at Canoga Park and stopped at a drive-in for a ninety-nine-cent breakfast. Then I went on up to the Sebastians' place in Woodland Hills. Keith Sebastian had given me detailed instructions on how to find his house. It was an angular contemporary house cantilevered out over a slope. The slope ran steeply down to the edge of a golf course, green from the first of the winter rains. Keith Sebastian came out of the house in shirt sleeves. He was a handsome man of forty or so, with thick curly brown hair frosted at the sides. He hadn't shaved yet, and his growth of beard looked like fibrous dirt that his lower face had been rubbed in. "It's good of you to come right out," he said when I had introduced myself. "I realize it's an ungodly hour—" "You didn't pick it, and I don't mind. I gather she hasn't come home yet." "No, she hasn't. Since I called you I've found out something else is missing. My shotgun, and a box of shells." "You think your daughter took them?" "I'm afraid she must have. The gun cabinet wasn't broken, and nobody else knew where the key to it was. Except my wife, of course." Mrs. Sebastian had appeared as if on cue at the open front door. She was thin and dark and rather beautiful in a haggard sort of way, and she was wearing fresh lipstick and a fresh yellow linen dress. "Come in," she said to both of us. "It's cold out." She made a shivery self-hugging gesture which didn't end when it should have. She went on shivering. "This is Mr. Lew Archer," Sebastian was saying. "The private detective I called." He spoke as if he was presenting me to her as a kind of peace offering. She answered him

impatiently: "I guessed that. Come in, I've made some coffee." I sat between them at the kitchen counter and drank the bitter brew from a thin cup. The place seemed very clean and very empty. The light pouring in through the window had a cruel clarity. "Can Alexandria fire a shotgun?" I asked them. "Anybody can," Sebastian said glumly. "All you have to do is pull the trigger." His wife cut in. "Actually Sandy's a fair shot. The Hacketts took her quail hunting earlier this year. Much against my wishes, I might add." "You might and did," Sebastian said. "I'm sure the experience was good for her." "She hated it. She said so in her diary. She hates to kill things." "She'll get over it. And I know it gave pleasure to Mr. and Mrs. Hackett." "Here we go again." But before they did, I said: "Who in hell are Mr. and Mrs. Hackett?" Sebastian gave me a self-revealing look, partly offended, partly patronizing. "Mr. Stephen Hackett is my boss. That is, he controls the holding company that controls the savings and loan company I work for. He owns quite a few other things, too." "Including you," his wife said. "But not my daughter." "That's unfair, Bernice. I never said--" "It's what you do that counts." I got up and walked around to the other side of the counter and stood facing them. They both looked a little startled and ashamed. "All this is very interesting," I said. "But I didn't get out of bed at five o'clock in the morning to referee a family argument. Let's concentrate on your daughter Sandy. How old is she, Mrs. Sebastian?" "Seventeen. She's in her senior year." "Doing well?" "She was until the last few months. Then her grades started slipping, quite badly." "Why?" She looked down into her coffee cup. "I don't really know why." She sounded evasive, unwilling even to give herself an answer. "Of course you know why," her husband said. "All this has happened since she took up with that wild man. Davy what's-his-name." "He isn't a man. He's a nineteen-year-old boy and we handled the whole thing abominably." "What whole thing, Mrs. Sebastian?" She held out her arms as if she was trying to encompass the situation, then dropped them in despair. "The business of the boy. We mishandled it." "She means I did, as usual," Sebastian said. "But I only did what I had to do. Sandy was starting to run wild. Skipping school to have afternoon dates with this fellow. Spending her nights on the Strip and God knows where else. Last night I went out and hunted them down—" His wife interrupted him. "It wasn't last night. It was the night before last." "Whenever it was." His voice seemed to be weakening under the steady cold force of her disapproval. It shifted gears, to a kind of chanting shout. "I hunted them down in a weird joint in West Hollywood. They were sitting there in public with their arms around each other. I told him if he didn't stay away from my daughter I'd take my shotgun and blow his bloody head off." "My husband watches a good deal of television," Mrs. Sebastian said dryly. "Make fun of me if you want to, Bernice. Somebody had to do what I did. My daughter was running wild with a criminal. I brought her home and locked her in her room. What else could a man do?" His wife was silent for once. She moved her fine dark head slowly from side to side. I said: "Do you know the young man is a criminal?" "He served time in the county jail for auto theft." "Joy riding," she said. "Call it what you like. It wasn't a first offense, either." "How do you know?" "Bernice read it in her diary." "I'd like to see this famous diary." "No," Mrs. Sebastian said. "It was bad enough for me to have read it. I shouldn't have." She took a deep breath. "We haven't been very good parents, I'm afraid. I'm just as much to blame as my husband is, in subtler ways. But you don't want to go into that." "Not now." I was weary of the war of the generations, the charges and countercharges, the escalations and negotiations, the endless talk across the bargaining table. "How long has your daughter been gone?" Sebastian looked at his wrist watch. "Nearly twenty-three hours. I let her out of her room yesterday morning. She seemed to have calmed down—" "She was furious," her mother said. "But I never thought when she started out for school that she had no intention of going there. We didn't really catch on until about six o'clock last night when she didn't come home for dinner. Then I got in touch with her homeroom teacher and found out she'd been playing hooky all day. By that time it was dark already." She looked at the window as if it was still dark, now and forever. I followed her glance. Two people were striding along the fairway, a man and a woman, both white-haired, as if they'd grown old in the quest for their small white ball. "One thing I don't understand," I said. 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