



# Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star

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## **Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star** Tab Hunter

Welcome to Hollywood, circa 1950, the end of the Golden Age. A remarkably handsome young boy, still a teenager, gets "discovered by a big-time movie agent. Because when he takes his shirt off young hearts beat faster, because he is the picture of innocence and trust and need, he will become a star. It seems almost preordained. The open smile says, "You will love me," and soon the whole world does.

The young boy's name was Tab Hunter—a made-up name, of course, a Hollywood name—and it was his time. Stardom didn't come overnight, although it seemed that way. In fact, the fame came first, when his face adorned hundreds of magazine covers; the movies, the studio contract, the name in lights—all that came later. For Tab Hunter was a true product of Hollywood, a movie star created from a stable boy, a shy kid made even more so by the way his schoolmates—both girls and boys—reacted to his beauty, by a mother who provided for him in every way except emotionally, and by a secret that both tormented him and propelled him forward.

In *Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star*, Hunter speaks out for the first time about what it was like to be a movie star at the end of the big studio era, to be treated like a commodity, to be told what to do, how to behave, whom to be seen with, what to wear. He speaks also about what it was like to be gay, at first confused by his own fears and misgivings, then as an actor trapped by an image of boy-next-door innocence. And when he dared to be difficult, to complain to the studio about the string of mostly mediocre movies that were assigned to him, he learned that just like any manufactured product, he was disposable—*disposable and replaceable*.

Hunter's career as a bona fide movie star lasted a decade. But he persevered as an actor, working continuously at a profession he had come to love, seeking—and earning—the respect of his peers, and of the Hollywood community.

And so, *Tab Hunter Confidential* is at heart a story of survival—of the giddy highs of stardom, and the soul-destroying lows when phone calls begin to go unreturned; of the need to be loved, and the fear of being consumed; of the hope of an innocent boy, and the rueful summation of a man who did it all, and who lived to tell it all.

## **Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star Details**

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# From Reader Review Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star for online ebook

## Jon says

It's true Tab couldn't sustain much of a career past the early 60s, but he managed to turn over a leaf and poke fun at himself by the 70s and 80s, not bothering to come out even though he was making love onscreen to Divine twice and even donning cheerleader drag in one film. His auto-bio is interesting and easy to get through, but he stops short of really laying his full emotions and feelings out there when it comes to his sexuality and his position in H-Town as a closeted homosexual. There's a detached quality to it all for him. Still, he doesn't really try to deny that he "got around" and gives surface renderings of some of his most notable relationships. One surprising thing is his revelation of extreme lack of confidence and self worth as a result of a rocky childhood and youth. One would expect someone so handsome to be fully vested of confidence. Shy of people, most of the time Tab was content to be with a horse and frequently did movies in order to further that goal! I'm never as appalled by his acting as most people are and I've seen many, many of his films. Perhaps it's because, by today's standards, his clean-scrubbed manly looks and polite demeanor are so refreshing to me.

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## Joe says

An interesting, if slightly polarizing read. I'm used to biographies, whereas there's a lot more personal observations in an autobiography. Tab Hunter comes across as many things in his account of his life: an animal lover, a workaholic, a man with a difficult relationship with his mother and religion. He also seems to be a mediocre actor who wants to live the high life and act on his schedule, but complain when things don't work out as he'd like. With biographies I rarely dislike the person, whereas at several points here I actively disliked Tab, which proves to be an interesting read. Or perhaps that's just a sign that he's a real person and not simply a Hollywood research project. Either way, getting a first hand pov of the rise and fall of the star system is interesting, even if the twilight years prove to be a bit of a slog when times are tougher.

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## Richard Derus says

Rating: 3\* of five

\*\*\*R.I.P. TAB HUNTER\*\*\* He died today at 86. He was married to Allan Glaser for 35 years.

**The Publisher Says:** Welcome to Hollywood, circa 1950, the end of the Golden Age. A remarkably handsome young boy, still a teenager, gets "discovered by a big-time movie agent. Because when he takes his shirt off young hearts beat faster, because he is the picture of innocence and trust and need, he will become a star. It seems almost preordained. The open smile says, "You will love me," and soon the whole world does.

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**My Review:** Memoir of 1950s movie heartthrob Tab Hunter, his Southern California sun-kissed boyhood, his coming of gay age, and the effects of being part of the star-maker machinery of Hollywood as it existed at that time on a modestly talented, very very pretty boy. It's obvious that Mr. Hunter paid attention to the business of Hollywood...he gives a real and thorough account of the whys and wherefores of the last gasp of the studio era's decisions.

Not as salacious as some, and a whole lot sweeter than most. Mr. Hunter says very few unpleasant things about others in his memoir, and is in fact so generous to his exes that I wonder how large a role the Algonquin legal department played in the setting of the tone. Either that or this is one of the NICEST old stars ever born. The photos are all nicely chosen to illustrate Mr. Hunter's textual points. I liked this book, but I don't think anyone not interested in Hollywood, gay Hollywood, or the Fifties would do anything more than yawn through a Pearl-Rule 50pp.

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## Greg says

Tab Hunter is a pretty boy, starting a movie career late 40's that the big studios of old Hollywood had all of the teen girls (and I'm sure some teenage boys) drooling over every bit of gossip, photo and movie that he was in. Labeled as the "Sigh Guy," Tab definitely had the looks to match his following. Compared to today's standards, his looks are equivalent to an Abercrombie model. Included in the book are several photos of Tab, both from his personal collection and from the various films and shows that he has worked on. Outside of the pretty boy image and pleasant photos, however, I'm afraid the book falls somewhat flat.

This book was advertised as a story about Tab's realization of being gay in old Hollywood and how the studios tended to manipulate his career. Over all, the autobiography focuses primarily on who Tab knew and what movies he starred in. There was definitely time spent on how the studios manipulated almost all young stars' careers in the 40's and 50's, but I thought that it sort of missed out on telling the story of a *gay man of the 40's and 50's who was also a movie star. It would have been great if there would have been far more of a focus on his personal life and how constantly being thrust into the spotlight as a teen idol, while actually being a closeted gay man, effected him.*

*Tab does mention that he was never one for labels, be it a teen idol or a gay man. He tries to emphasis that he is simply a person. Well, I'm sorry to break it to him but whether he likes it or not, he was a teen idol and is still a gay man. It would have been nice to see a more well rounded story.*

*An interesting read about an old Hollywood movie star and the effects that big studios had on their up and coming teen idols, but really seemed to miss the mark when it came to what it was actually like for a gay man.*

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## **LibraryCin says**

3.5 stars

Tab Hunter was a 1950s movie star and heartthrob; he was also gay. This is his autobiography that tells of a fatherless, good-looking, but extremely shy boy who was approached at 14-years old as he was working in a stable to ask if he was interested in being a movie star.

I don't often read celebrity bios. I wasn't born till the 70s, and to be honest, I hadn't heard of Tab Hunter until this book. I realized as I read the book that I have seen him in one movie – he had a small part as one of the teachers in Grease 2. However, his story interested me, so that's why I wanted to read it.

I really liked the first half of the book, but I didn't enjoy the second half quite as much. In the second half, he talks a lot about the movies and his work. I actually found his life more interesting than his work – his love for horses and dogs, his relationships, and he was also a figure skater. All the talk of the movies and the acting got a little boring, to be honest. But overall, I still liked it enough to rate it good.

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## **Shannon says**

Fun autobiography of a Hollywood star when glamour, style, and a little mystique still ruled. Tab Hunter is very candid and seems very sincere and honest in his recounting of his life.

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## **Gigi Ann says**

My Thoughts...

I always kinda enjoy reading these autobiographies of the old time movie stars that were famous when I was

a teen-ager, Tab was one of those stars. I am from the 50s era so when I was 14-15-16 years old was when Tab was at his most famous. (I am 74 at this writing.)

As a youngster I always enjoyed reading the movie magazines to see what the stars were doing and what movies I could look forward to seeing. As a naive teen-ager I believed everything I read about my favorite stars. In the 50s things weren't out there in your face the way the famous peoples private lives are now. It was a much more innocent time growing up in the 50s. Always new movies to see each week and on the week-ends. I loved my simple (naive) life way back then when movies were fun, not the blood, guts and beer movies that are so famous today...enough said!

I found this an interesting book to read. I think to enjoy it you probably should be familiar with the movie stars of the 40s, & 50s, when life was easy, fun and innocent. It was nice seeing Tab through Tabs eyes, and not the false stories that the tabloids are so famous for publishing....I no longer read the Movie Magazines of today, I've grown-up in my thinking, knowing that almost everything written in them is probably not true anyway.

This book is a part of my Nook library and I enjoyed it enough to award it 3 "Confidential" stars.

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### **Lee Miller says**

I knew little about Tab Hunter before reading this book and couldn't name one Tab Hunter movie, but I thoroughly enjoyed this engaging, informative, and fascinating story. Every page has insights into the movie business, movie history, and Hollywood society. Hunter's professional history spans the full range of a working actor's career, from struggling between parts to becoming a movie superstar during the last days of the studio contract system, to being a huge pop star, to working in television, Broadway, stock, dinner theater, and even producing.

Hunter's personal story is equally compelling, from his difficult childhood to becoming an internationally known horseman, his European jetsetting period (Visconti, Nureyev, Prince Michael of Greece, the Queen of Belgium, etc., etc.), and the legendary people in his circle of friends. This book is an important historical record, a fascinating inside look at show business, and a great read. You'll thoroughly enjoy it.

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### **JOSEPH OLIVER says**

I had never heard of Tab Hunter prior to reading this autobiography. I had only stumbled over images of him on Tumblr blogs of old Hollywood stars. The more I looked into his life the more interesting it became. I had just finished 'The Lion of Hollywood' – the life of Louis B Mayer and the MGM studio system. It was this system, albeit at Warner Brothers in this case, of which Tab Hunter was a part. Surprisingly the studio system can mean something abstract to a reader unless you read about someone on the other side of it – and that was where this autobiography came in useful.

It is worth remembering that Tab Hunter (his screen name over which he had no control) or Art Gelien celebrated his 82nd birthday this year. He has suffered heart attacks and strokes but still battles on forever the optimist. This book was his testament and his attempt to get his side of the story out before a tabloid journalist decided to write a version based only on old newspaper reports and magazine 'interviews'. The

reader should bear in mind that a fair few of his contemporaries are still alive and if they aren't their beneficiaries are and even the dead can make money for them. A lot of what he could have written would be unverifiable because it would be his word against theirs – who else would have been part of the encounter? I suspect the passage of time dims a lot of his memories of how a late teenager made his way in Hollywood in the 50s. The casting couch had men on it as well as women.

Although an avid film lover, and his distant, cold, ever working German mother made sure he had every reason to flee to the cinema for a break from reality, Tab Hunter had no burning ambition to be an actor. He never attended acting school and found the whole thing off putting. His first sexual encounter was in a cinema when he was fourteen and it wasn't his last. If you look at the photographs of him you can see why he was the object of so much interest even at so young an age. He was very, very attractive and the camera loved him. Acting was an extra. Louis B Mayer never worried if someone with that X factor could act – as long as they could perform they would find a slot for him. Tab Hunter fell into this box at Warners. They knew they had a product – now they just needed to package it. He was to be sold to the emerging teenage market.

They didn't do a very good job of it though. He peaked very young and although he wanted to learn the craft the studio wasn't too concerned and loaned him out for quite hefty fees to other studios where he was contractually obliged to go. Whether he wanted to be in the film or what he thought of it were irrelevant. He was a successful product. With the studio system he was only paid a weekly salary which was peanuts compared to what the studio was earning from him.

Likewise his singing career. He never wanted to be a singer – only ever sang in the shower according to himself. However a small record company felt they could cash in on his teenage girl popularity and run off a few records that were bound to sell. His voice is passable enough. Anyone who has had to endure Rod Stewart will find it a relief. He made a small fortune from a few songs which shocked him. The shock was the fact that the studio had first call on all income derived from the product 'Tab Hunter' so they took most of it. He was terribly unlucky.

He is sometimes criticised for not 'dishing the dirt' on other closeted celebrities but he doesn't seem the type of person to want to cause others discomfort. The gay liberation movement passed him by living as he did in Hollywood and spending years on the move where he could find any work. And even if he was aware of it he hadn't the temperament or interest in marching. He was never open because making a living for him was very touch and go and he was robbed of his money by some very untrustworthy men that he had to start again on a regular basis. Basically he was just too trusting. If it hadn't been for his manager he would have been left penniless. His repressed childhood with his overbearing mother didn't lead to a grown man with healthy self esteem. He didn't know what he was for most of his life and explains this. If he didn't talk about it he didn't have to confront it. When he was at his peak homosexuality was defined as a mental illness and a criminal offence. Even the Hollywood elite lived in fear of being exposed at a party.

What I found fascinating in the book was the whole public persona that was fabricated by the studio for their product 'Tab Hunter'. He recounts standing at a news stand in Hollywood with his unemployment cheque for \$55 reading all about the wonderful life he was living and how the glamorous life of a Hollywood star was playing out for him. He'd never been interviewed but he was reading about his romantic interests, his family and where he was going to go next. As if he had any say in the matter. He spends a lot of time quoting articles from the enormously popular teen magazines of the time and how none of it bore any resemblance to reality. Makes you wonder how true anything you read about today is.

Art Gelien is a nice man basically. He was much used and when of no more use as a cash cow he was disposed of. He never felt he became the actor he could have become because his looks always got in the way and no one could see beyond the face. He writes extensively about his love of horses from his youth and they figure quite a lot. The horses grounded him but they cost him a lot of money too. Without that



grounding he may have gone off the rails. He finally had the courage to out himself by starring with Divine in Polyester but even at that late stage he was castigated for kissing a man (albeit one in drag). After this he became much more settled in himself as a gay man but it was a very long journey.

This is not a salacious book but it is a very interesting one. You will never read an interview with a Hollywood 'star' in the same light again.

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## **Jean Marie Angelo says**

This autobiography is far better written and funnier than I expected it to be. I belong to a book group that sometimes reads serious fiction that is good for us. And sometimes we go Hollywood. I knew nothing about Tab Hunter when I downloaded this title. But I thank my gay guy friend who wanted to read this. It is a wonderful story of an actor caught between the old studio system and the emerging movie and indie markets of the 1970s and later. I'll be looking for the new documentary of the same name.

Arthur Gelien was renamed Tab Hunter by his first agent. He was sold as a classically handsome beefcake persona. In this book he reveals all that was under the surface — his homosexuality, his spiritual beliefs, his drive to be a serious actor, his money troubles, and his hard scrabble family life. He never knew his father and supported his mother through physical and psychiatric challenges.

He came of age at a time when it was unthinkable to imagine being "proud" to be gay. He captures the glamour and the stifling atmosphere of the 1950s.

"Back then, the average woman wouldn't have considered men like Tony [Perkins] or me gay—only proper and well mannered."

He doesn't shy away from the brutal realities of Hollywood stardom.

"Although I got good reviews, it was hard to be taken seriously by producers and casting agents when the only feature write-ups I'd get were titled 'Whatever Happened to Tab Hunter?' or 'Remembering Tab Hunter.' Some enterprising guy even came out with a button: 'What's a Tab Hunter?'"

"I had become aware of the three stages of stardom. First is 'Get me Tab Hunter,' followed by, 'Get me a Tab Hunter type,' followed by, 'Who the hell is Tab Hunter?'"

Tab Hunter has emerged as a movie producer and writer. More importantly he has love and acceptance in his life. Could there be a better measure of success?

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## **Matt says**

Mr. Hunter is a homophobe with no capacity for self-reflection.

His autobiography was so dissapointing. His life story has some interesting contradictions. Like the fact that he's a gay man and a devout Catholic. Or that he was a closeted teen heartthrob. But he doesn't really touch

on any of this.

I read this book hoping to get some insight into gay life before queer liberation. I mean, this guy was on the gay scene pre-Stonewall. He was even arrested by the police just because he was at a house party with a bunch of other gay guys! But decades later he doesn't seem to mind too much. He does turn up his nose at gay activism, though. And he managed to get in some veiled homophobic slurs against other gay men he's dealt with in his life.

He talks a lot about resenting his audience for not appreciating him for more than his looks. Well, after reading this book I don't know if Mr. Hunter has much depth to appreciate.

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### **Barry Hammond says**

I've got to admit I wasn't much of a Tab Hunter fan when going to the movies growing up. The idea of manufacturing clean-cut, All-American stars for teenager's consumption (like Tab, Troy Donahue, Pat Boone, Ed "Kookie" Burns and Fabian) was against any ideas I had of reality, talent in acting and the epitome of false, plastic, money-hungry Eisenhower America. However, what I failed to take into account as a young man was that there were actually live, breathing human beings behind these images, who had all the trials and tribulations, weaknesses, hopes, dreams, loves, disappointments, and problems that anyone has - all subjected to the pressure cooker that is Hollywood. I picked this up thinking it might contain a few morsels of mouth-watering Hollywood gossip. What I wasn't prepared for was an intelligent, engaging, insightful, thoughtful, and honest memoir by a shrewd observer, whose career spanned both "old" and "new" Hollywood.

I've read lots of film memoirs but this one rates right up there with the best. It's as complex and full of contradictions as its subject and one which opens its subject out as not just a shallow face and an image but a genuine human being with depths and profound layers. While it's written with a co-writer (Eddie Muller, the Film Noir expert and enthusiast, who many are seeing on TCM's Summer Of Darkness Film Noir series the past several weeks), it comes across very well as the intimate voice of its subject. I learned a lot reading this memoir (and not just about Hollywood) and came away with a great respect for the human being it was about. Definitely a lot more than just a pretty face. Great read! - BH.

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### **Larry Benjamin says**

Arthur Gelien's rise from stable boy to Hollywood Heartthrob and Matinee Idol is no less fantastic than his made up name: Tab Hunter. Yet "Tab Hunter Confidential" packs all the emotional resonance of a Wikipedia entry. Hunter recounts his life story from a distance and with dispassion. When he suffers a stroke he writes:

"I'd actually suffered a stroke. I'd done a shitty job of learning to live with less stress...life hit me over the head with a sledgehammer—shutting me down completely...I needed a walker just to put one foot in front of the other..."

And when at 52 he meets his future life partner, the twenty-three year old "Baby Mogul," Allan Glaser, he never speaks of the nearly thirty year age difference and its impact on their relationship.

Whether the failure to connect emotion to the action on the page was a flaw of his co-writer or reflective of Tab's personality, I can't say. The writing itself is rather pedestrian, at times relying on hackneyed and trite expressions. The one exception is the passage where Tab talks about Rudolf Nureyev with whom he shares a passionate flirtation:

"Some mornings he'd materialize on the quay, his bone white body with blue veins clad only in a silver lamé swimsuit. Rudy looked like a finely chiseled corpse freshly risen from an ancient crypt..."

Despite its shortcomings, the book paints a great picture of old Hollywood and details what it takes to stay in the business. The photos alone are worth the price of the book. And Tab reveals himself to be more than a pretty face, more than a former heartthrob. He talks about dedication to acting and his determination to keep working. He speaks to the importance of resiliency, of adaptability, of not giving up.

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### **Ellen says**

What a whirlwind of a life Tab Hunter has led! I thoroughly enjoyed this memoir of his long, complex, rich, and sometimes riotous life. A life lived just before, during, and now well past the Golden Age of Hollywood. Mr. Hunter is surely a survivor! A strong, determined, multi-talented man, who has come safely through the tests of inner conflict, societal ignorance and discrimination, and the punishing vicissitudes of Hollywood and emerged remarkably grounded and grateful for all the blessings along the way, especially for the loving people whom he now recognizes as family, including Allan Glaser, his "partner for life."

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### **Carol Storm says**

So much fun to read! Tab Hunter never takes himself too seriously, yet he has something interesting to say on every page. Loved his wry commentary on *RIDE THE WILD SURF*, one of my all time favorite beach movies!

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