

Todd Downing, '24as, '28M.A., at top, instructor in Spanish at the University, scored a third hit with his recent book, "Vultures in the Sky." Two of the three mystery novels he has written have been Crime Club selections. Walter S. Campbell, '31honorary, below, associate professor of English at the University, also has entered the ranks of mystery story writers. His tenth book, but his first murder-mystery, "The Wine Room Murder," was released late in March.

Belles Lettres and Bell Ringers

The Wine Room Murder, by Stanley Vestal (Walter S. Campbell, '31, honorary). Little-Brown and company. 1935. \$2.00.

THE Chateau Roet produces the finest wine in all France. Its vineyards for centuries have furnished a noble vintage for the tables of Cæsar, Charlemagne, Richard the Lion Hearted, Cardinal Richelieu and many other notables.

This is the setting into which Walter S. Campbell, University associate professor of English who writes under the name of Stanley Vestal, introduces a group of interesting characters.

The Chateau Roet is about to pass from the hands of its owner into the possession of persons who would never maintain its reputation for the most celebrated of wines.

A group of persons are visiting the Chateau to sample its vintages when a murder is committed. The body of a charming young French woman is found in a hogshead of wine in the Chateau *chai*. Quite apparently, it is murder.

George Congreve, a connoisseur of unusual ability, is asked to gather together the facts of the case to be presented to the owner of the Chateau when he returns in the morning.

Congreve expresses the belief that "with the aid of the right bottle, a man can solve any problem which human wit can solve, once he understands the nature of it."

With this as a thesis, Congreve fetches the right bottles from the Chateau wine cellar and starts his investigation.

The description of the wines, the technique of the true connoisseur and the methods of wine production are of timely interest and certainly give the volume an added interest few murder mysteries possess.

Vestal's characters are particularly interesting, especially a young Englishman whose expressions and dialogue are evidence of the author's knowledge of the

English, gained during his years as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University.

"*The Wine Room Murder* is Vestal's tenth book but his first murder mystery. His experience as a biographer has been of value to him in his mystery.

His characters are unusually well drawn and suggest the amount of thought and effort the author has given to describing persons in a manner that will leave a definite and lasting impression.

All of the persons who lurk through the pages of *The Wine Room Murder* produce lasting impressions. Their actions and their dialogue are consistent to the idea for which they stand.

Vestal's latest is a pleasing variation from the type of book he has been producing. It is to be hoped that he will continue his mystery series.



Vultures in the Sky, by Todd Downing ('24as, '28M.A.), Doubleday-Doran company, Crime Club selection for April, 1935. \$2.00.

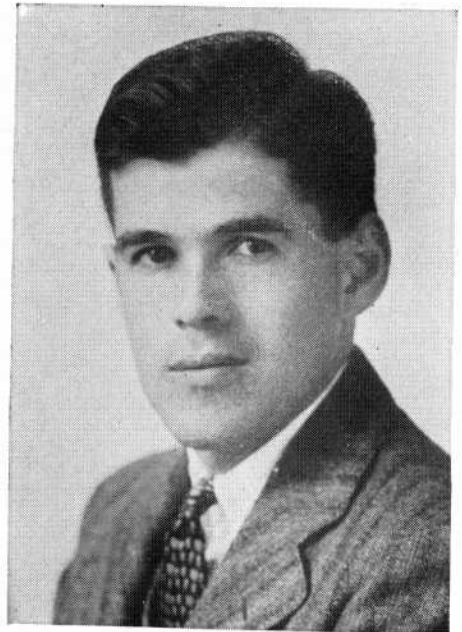
Five suspects—one of them a murderer—and Detective Rennert are stranded in a Mexican desert when their Pullman car is uncoupled from a railroad train headed for Mexico City.

It is past midnight. There are no lights in the car. Only a few matches are left. The body of one already murdered has been covered in the car's only private compartment. Vultures circle over the train.

Two of the suspects have blood on their clothing. Detective Rennert's coat is soaked with warm blood. Where is it coming from? When will the train return for the stranded observation car? Who will be murdered next? Who is the murderer?

Detective Rennert finds the case a tougher one than either of the two he solved before for Mr. Downing—*Murder on Tour* and *The Cat Screams*.

Vultures in the Sky, the third murder mystery written by the University graduate and instructor in Spanish, is a Crime



Club selection for the month of April. It is undoubtedly the best of his three.

It has movement and a closely knit plot. Each chapter is headed with the exact hour and minute the action takes place. The entire novel occurs during a period of twenty-four hours while the train is going from San Antonio to Mexico City.

The movement of the train toward the destination where the murders will be solved is suddenly halted by the uncoupling of the car from the rest of the train. It is a clever device to change the pace of the yarn.

Stranded in the desert, the suspects and Detective Rennert, have many fears as to the reason for their plight and as to what move the murdered will make next. With the group huddled in the darkened car, the suspects are cut off from the rest of the world and outside influences do not touch them.

Mr. Downing has shown interesting methods of isolating his suspects in all of his books. The stranded train in the desert is his most effective.