

JULY

edited by Ted Allen

Frontlines

MAX ALLAN COLLINS HAD BEEN WRITING THE

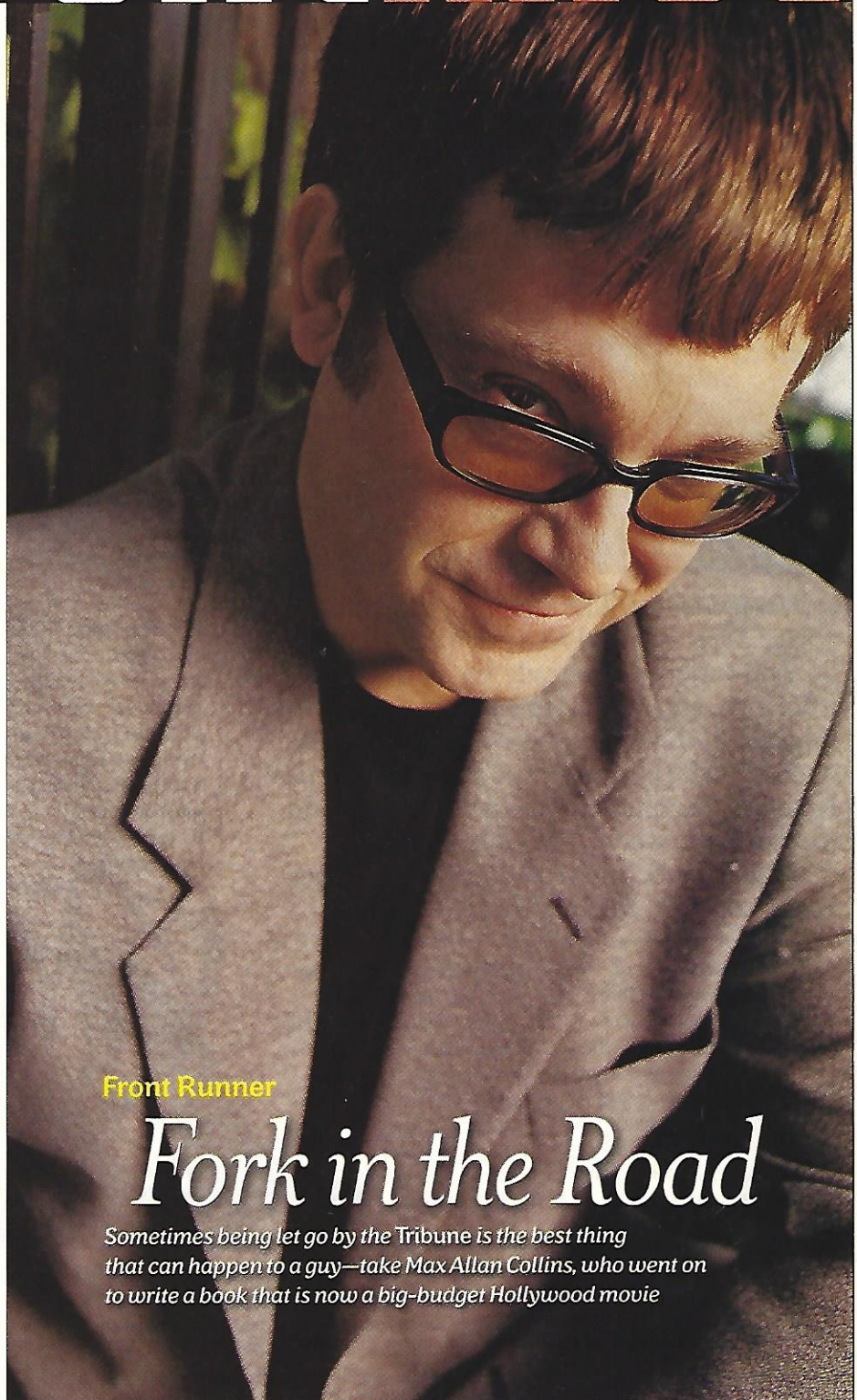
Tribune's comic strip "Dick Tracy" for 15 years when the paper decided in 1993 not to renew his contract. He was the successor to Chester Gould, who created the strip in 1931, and although Collins had already earned acclaim as a novelist, he was stunned at the loss. "It was my childhood dream," says Collins, 53, whose Muscatine, Iowa, home is decorated with covers of comic books and pulp novels. "When I was eight, I wrote to Chester Gould, offering to take over when he retired!"

But the *Trib* may have done Collins the favor of his career. A few weeks after he lost the "Tracy" job, Collins pitched DC Comics an idea he had been mulling over: a Prohibition-era gangster tale he called *Road to Perdition*. The book, a graphic novel illustrated by Richard Piers Rayner, was published in 1998 by Paradox Press.

Collins has had near misses with Hollywood over the years, so even when he heard that Steven Spielberg was interested he didn't allow himself to get excited. Instead, he started *Chicago Confidential*, the 12th in his series of crime novels. Then the *Hollywood Reporter* ran a front-page story on the film version of *Perdition*, saying Tom Hanks was set to star.

With Paul Newman and Jennifer Jason Leigh appearing with Hanks, and Academy Award winner Sam Mendes directing, *Perdition* is the most expensive movie ever made in Chicago. Coinciding with the film's release in July is the publication of both the original graphic novel (again) and a "novelization" of the movie written by Collins—which puts him in the novel situation of being the author of a novel based on a movie based on his novel. Meanwhile, *Chicago Confidential* is scheduled to come out in June.

Does the movie provide vindication for losing "Tracy"? "Nah," says Collins. "When the *Tribune* got rid of me, it made me work my butt off." —PAUL ENGLEMAN



Front Runner

Fork in the Road

Sometimes being let go by the *Tribune* is the best thing that can happen to a guy—take Max Allan Collins, who went on to write a book that is now a big-budget Hollywood movie