

Secret agent FIRST CITY unravels the mystery of the sleuth and the city...

# I SPY

"Playing detective is like being a gravedigger. There's always dirt to be dug up, people willing to pay to have it dug up. But what kind of a man wants to spend his life scrounging for human rot six feet underground?" reflects Michael Brennan, in Fred Zackel's *Cocaine and Blue Eyes*. It's a tough profession (Sherlock took the 'seven per cent solution' of cocaine and morphine to ease the pain, remember?), and even authors who wrote about it were prone to melancholy and strange disappearances. Some, like Arthur Conan Doyle, couldn't wait to kill off their own creations; he had to restrain himself, owing to massive protests by fans and die-hard believers (Despite his character's impeccable logical deductions, he himself was not a good example of rational personality; he believed that fairies actually existed and was interested in occultism). One wonders whether the fictional detective's angst plagues his real life counterpart too, and whether the profession in India is but a fable, shrouded in fictitious metaphors of the cigar-smoking, tipped hat and overcoat-clad investigator, who straightens out the devious layers of whodunnit plots with natural ease. Or is it a euphemism for spying on prospective brides and bridegrooms, errant husbands and wanton wives? ('A woman who always knows where her husband is: widow', an SMS joke doing the rounds these days, begs for further musing).

Our market research revealed that the good ol' adventure is lost to this profession, now it's more a matter of resourceful surveillance. Criminal cases constitute a marginal section of the total cases handled; they now include services like handwriting analysis/ fingerprints analysis, debugging and examination of anonymous threatening letters, wills, agreements and receipts. The majority of cases are concerned with bank frauds, pilferage, and theft. Most agencies survive on income from 'corporate intelligence' services (verifying prospective clients'/ partner's assets) demanded by certain firms on a monthly basis. 'Spouse fidelity' and pre/post-matrimonial inquiries constitute a nominal fraction of the total cases; these include spying on spouses suspected for adultery (some use the evidence in divorce cases proceedings later) and surveillance of prospective brides and grooms, to confirm details about love affairs, if any, and 'bad habits' like drinking and smoking et cetera. The fee for these ranges from Rs. 1,000 to 7,000 per day for surveillance (depending on the number of detectives on the job, and the use of sophisticated equipment like spy cameras, video and audio footage) to Rs. 12,000 onwards for a 'package' deal, suited to the nature of the case.

FIRST CITY meets three private detectives, only to realise

that Sherlock's remark, 'Life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent', holds true till date...

## RC MADAN, 68, GOLIATH DETECTIVES PRIVATE LIMITED, VASANT VIHAR

A friendly, bespectacled, pencil moustachiod man stands beside an open door as we approach RC Madan's house. "Hello, I knew you had arrived. I saw you on the spy camera." Incredulous, you walk in cautiously, expecting to meet the super sleuth in character, only to figure out that the pleasant, full-cheeked man who ushered you in (gun holstered around his waist, you now notice), is the legend that RC Madan is. Legend, I insist, for everything about him is quasi-fictional, in an almost mythical sort of way. And if someone told me that through the sheer art of storytelling, he seduced all his suspects into revealing the truth, I wouldn't be too surprised. His stories are prone to dramatic acrobatics ("Abruptly, *jaise table turn hoti hai na, aise hi kuch ho gaya zindagi mein*"), in truly *filmi* style (he has survived three murder attempts, saved 26 men from being convicted for murders they didn't commit, and was dispossessed of his father's property by his stepmother); an emotional, truth-and-fantasy alloy of an irresistible, yet unbelievable flavour. He talks of his life like a chapter out of a morbid novel, "I went through 22 professions before I became a detective... It's a typical story of riches to rags, rags to riches; not that I belong to a poor family. My mother and father were both doctors (MD, London), and we had our own hospital. My mother died in 1946 in a car accident, my father died in the Hindu-Muslim riots. When I came to India with three younger brothers and one elder sister, I was 10 years old. *To kya karte?* There was no other alternative for me, but to start doing anything that gave us our bread and butter." So, Madan went through a string of

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