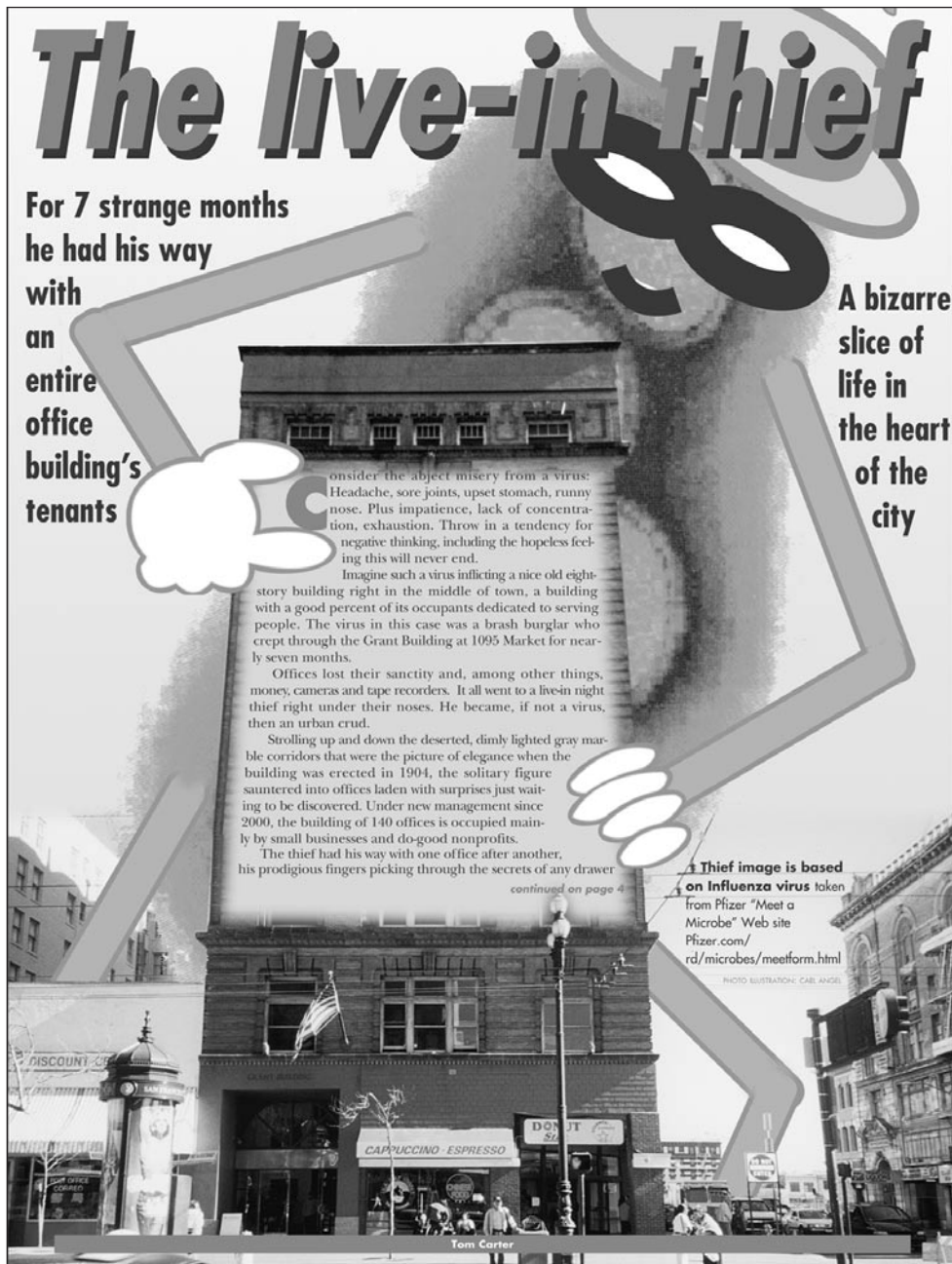


# Return of the 'live-in thief'

*Same guy who plagued Grant Building 3 years ago*



**This was the** cover of the Central City Extra's June 2002 issue, reporting how Ronald Salkin, the suspect in the latest rash of ripoffs at the Grant Building, lived in the building after hours for seven months, burglarizing office after office.

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phone bill he cranked up.

When Salkin tired of his games, he crashed on sofas, then fled in the morning before the work force arrived. People were nonplussed about how he could have gotten a master set of keys. Some offices changed their locks quickly and avoided further loss.

Management was slow to change the front door lock. But it did on Nov. 1, charging tenants \$25 per key. Even so, another wave of thefts started right away. It was later learned that Salkin had found an envelope left in plain sight for a daily deliveryman marked "new front door key." He swapped keys. When the deliveryman's key didn't work for him, he asked the news vendors in front of the building to let him in with their key. It was months before the mistake was found.

A vigilance team was formed finally. Roy Crew, director of The Office of Self Help that serves the mentally ill, was determined to catch the guy who now had a name. Salkin had stolen personal checks from the Agape Foundation on the third floor and wrote himself a \$160.56 check and cashed it. The foundation makes grants to organizations working for peace and justice.

The warning flyers with Salkin's name, though, disappeared as fast as they were posted.

Crew, whose office estimated to police losses of \$5,698, came early to the building several times with another employee, Kevin

Leach, a thin six-footer like Crew. On New Year's Day, Crew believed they missed him by 10 minutes. But he had a hunch about Martin Luther King Day, and that's when the two caught him.

Salkin, a 5-foot-8 Latino, was in the second floor community room of the Office of Self Help helping himself to a breakfast bowl of chili and pulling on his pants when Crew walked in. Salkin tried to talk his way out of it. Leach called the cops. Crew demanded Salkin's set of master keys. Salkin denied having them. But when he broke and ran, and Leach caught him and brought him down to the floor where the cops ran up and handcuffed him, there the keys to the front door and the second floor offices were in Salkin's right hand, according to the police report.

The Extra's story on the bizarre ordeal consumed the front page of the June 2002 edition. This writer equated the habitual thief to a virus infecting a building. The Extra's illustrator Carl Angel drew the thief as a giant, fuzzy flu virus with bandit's mask on, gripping the Grant Building like King Kong. Angel and Editor Geoff Link composed a six-panel cartoon showing Crew and Leach heroically nailing the thief. But with Salkin vanishing, the piece ends with Crew wondering, "Where is justice?"

On Tuesday, Jan. 11 at 3:35 a.m., cops ran a license and found a stolen 1991 Saab was being driven down Minna near Sixth. They stopped the car and arrested Ronald Salkin at the wheel. He was placed in custody. The next day, Henry Haeberle, 28, a UCSF graduate student, claimed his car, which had been missing since Saturday night. He opened the trunk to find a small television set, two flat-screen computer monitors, antennas and other presumably stolen items, which he reported.

At work later the morning of Jan. 11, Angel discovered his office door's glass had been smashed and the Study Center's two flat screen monitors, bought for \$3,775, were missing. The week before, a thief had entered the center's adjacent office with a key and swiped two digital cameras worth \$1,300 out of a closed closet. The center changed its office door locks at once. Cost: \$588.

That same morning, Crew found his office had been burglarized. Missing were two color television sets, a VCR, a stereo CD player, a vertical scanner, a three-shelf plastic cart, a laminator, Tupperware, a case of canned tuna and two cases of ravioli, a

package of new sheets and two electric drills. New, the items cost about \$2,000.

Police contacted Angel the next day to identify the monitors over the phone. Then Angel went to the Hall of Justice to pick them up. They had been missing a day and a half. Crew came to identify his property, too, but only 10% of it was there.

Lt. Tom Buckley of the burglary detail said Salkin nearly slid through the cracks.

"The DA's office was going to release him, they couldn't prove he stole the car, he was just driving it," Buckley said in an interview with The Extra. "They are prioritizing (cases)," he added. "I understand that and you can't blame them. They're understaffed and underfunded. But Inspector (Joe) Curtain traced the stolen items to the burglary and convinced the DA to file charges."

Buckley didn't know anything about the Grant Building's misfortune three years ago. Pretrial diversion becomes a sealed record. Court records show many arrests for Salkin but only one felony conviction. He got 90 days for possession of a dangerous weapon in 1998. Buckley didn't know whether the sentence was served.

If Salkin had been convicted three years ago, he'd now be facing strike three. Last June, records show he was busted for possessing a controlled substance. He didn't show up in court and a warrant was issued.

Angel, Crew and Haeberle were subpoenaed to testify as witnesses. They were in court on Feb. 17 at 9 a.m.

"When I got the order to appear I thought the name (Salkin) sounded familiar," Crew said as he waited for the case to be called. He recalled that his office never received the \$1,000 in restitution. "I went to look in the file I had on him (in the office where he caught Salkin in his underwear three years ago), and it was gone."

He paused.

"Petty cash keeps disappearing. It's under \$20. We keep it for sodas for the clients. The last few months people (in the building) have been putting flyers under doors about missing laptops and other items. He's slick. He just takes a little bit from each of our rooms so it's hard to see right away what has happened."

Stephen Rosen, the deputy public defender representing Salkin, had his hands full working for more than a dozen clients that morning. Sheriff's deputies escorted some into court from jail, others came forward in street clothes from the audience. Rosen plied the room like a rebounding pinball, conferring with clients, the deputies, assistant DA Mario Jose Jovel and the judge.

It was 12:30 p.m. when Salkin appeared in handcuffs and orange prison jammies. It took only minutes to have his charges delayed six weeks. Then he was led back to jail, Angel and Crew returned to work, and Haeberle left saying he'd have to "work late tonight" to make up the lost study time.

Back at the Grant Building, the tenants were restless.

Bicycle Coalition Executive Director Leah Shahum later that day said that after 10 years the nonprofit was moving to Market and Sixth. Three years ago, her office, down the hall from the Office of Self Help's Oasis Community Center on the second floor, lost \$400 in petty cash, a \$500 digital camera and was regularly offended by the live-in thief's trashy droppings. Though nothing had been stolen recently, Shahum said, "a big part of why we're moving is security."

The building for several years has had a security guard at the front door Mon.-Fri., 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., after which time the

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