

Gadaffi opens up literary offensive

IT PROMISES to be an unusual tome. Colonel Muammar Gadaffi, the Libyan dictator associated with ruthless oppression and international terrorism, is considering writing a book of memoirs to be marketed in the West in an effort to improve his unsavoury image.

Not content with inflicting on America a volume of his "short stories" which appeared for the first time in English this month, Gadaffi, renowned for his exotic costumes and female bodyguards, has been negotiating with a Canadian publisher about producing a book of "memories" of his life and times.

"Gadaffi is a writer, a man of letters," said Donald Smith, spokesman for publisher Alain Stanké, presenting a portrait of the Libyan leader at odds with the more usual depiction of a crazed despot suspected of ordering the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988. "He has a lot of interesting stories to tell. He reads Rousseau and great writers from across the world."

Smith said Stanké, a former Canadian television personality and sculptor, met Gadaffi a month ago to discuss the mem-

by Matthew Campbell
Washington

oirs. The idea was for Stanké to spend three weeks in Libya in June to help extract the book from Gadaffi in a series of interviews. "Then it would be ready for the Frankfurt book fair in October," said Smith.

To help him in his literary career, a Gadaffi promoting industry appears to have sprung up in Canada, where Stanké has already published the first English edition of Gadaffi's oeuvre under the title *Escape to Hell*. Stanké evidently believes he is on to a winner. "My task is to bring out literary talents," he said. "I sincerely think we have an original thinker here."

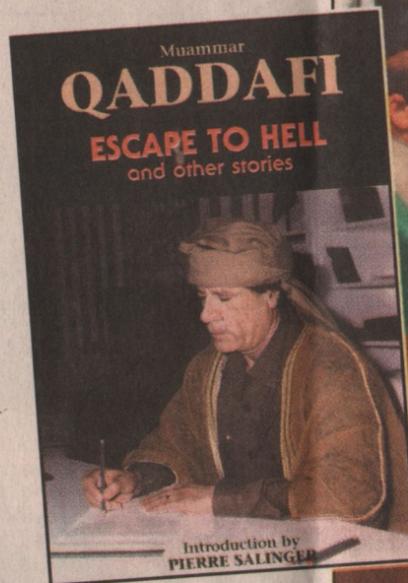
Cast in the role of Gadaffi cheerleader-in-chief, however, is Pierre Salinger, the eccentric journalist and former press secretary to John F Kennedy, the American president. Salinger, whose penchant for conspiracy theories extends to the claim that a missile was responsible for the crash of TWA flight 800 off the coast of Long Island in 1996, has written a fawning preface to Gadaffi's collection of short stories, jeopardising

whatever credibility he has left. Salinger recalls how he personally "interrogated" the two suspects in the Lockerbie bombing and concluded that they were not involved. "I know that at a certain point Gadaffi stopped terrorism," Salinger said last week. "He stopped chemical weapons and everything else."

Instead, Salinger enthuses, Gadaffi has selflessly served his country: "He effected huge changes in restructuring the nation to make sure there were no homeless people or unemployed or badly paid citizens." Amnesty International takes a different view, focusing instead on the "arbitrary arrest, torture, extrajudicial executions, and 'disappearances'" of hundreds of Libyans.

Gadaffi is unlikely to make it into the bestseller lists. His book is more of a jumbled rant about politics, religion, death and damage to the environment than a collection of short stories in the conventional sense.

He sounds particularly depressed in one passage, in which he describes life in the city as "merely a worm-like biological existence where man lives and dies meaninglessly".



Man of letters: Gadaffi, suspected of ordering the Lockerbie bombing, is considering a book of memoirs to improve his image in the West

In another section, entitled *The Astronaut*, the central figure returns to Earth and, after a conversation with a peasant about its size relative to other planets, commits suicide.

Smith, a professor of literature at Carleton University in Ottawa, was impressed. "I was asked to read through his short stories to give an opinion

and I was surprised," he recalled. "I didn't know that Gadaffi wrote and I found them to be interesting allegorical tales about nature."

Gadaffi's legendary obsession with all things green first surfaced in his *Green Book*, a three-volume treatise encapsulating his views on politics and economics. It manifested

itself again when he issued a decree ordering all the window shutters in Tripoli to be painted green.

More recently he has shown an eccentric streak by claiming that Dodi Fayed, companion to Diana, Princess of Wales and who died in the car crash that killed her, was a Libyan citizen.

While Libya tries to develop

a tourist industry as a way of compensating for American trade sanctions, it is unclear how Gadaffi expects his writings to do anything other than confirm his reputation as an unbalanced egomaniac. The publisher said Gadaffi would be donating any royalties from the book to Unicef, the United Nations Children's Fund.

Part of his public relations offensive was a satellite interview, to be broadcast around the globe next month. The world can look forward to more of Gadaffi's inimitable ravings if Stanké gets his way. If Gadaffi agrees to write his memoirs, said Smith, "we would want distribution in several languages".



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Dutroux police blame cash cuts

AS recriminations intensified over the brief escape of Marc Dutroux, the suspected child killer, from a Belgian courthouse last week, the authorities were asked why he had been guarded by only two gendarmes. "Spending cuts," came the reply, writes Peter Conradi in Brussels.

The ease with which Dutroux, accused of raping and murdering four young girls, was able to overpower his guards and slip out of the Palais de Justice in the southern town of Neufchateau last Thursday has astonished even Belgians, long inured to the incompetence of their police.

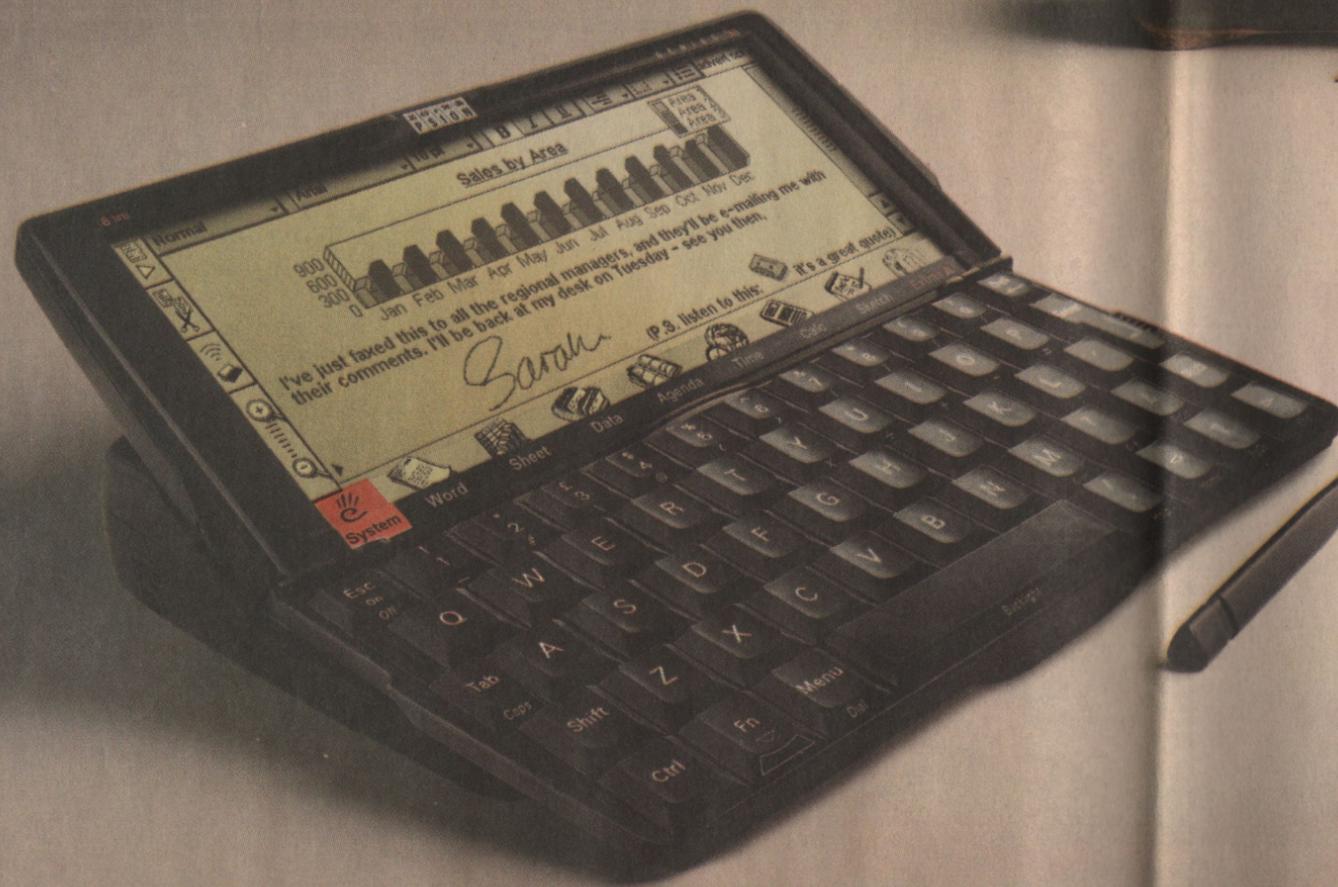
The guns the two gendarmes carried were without bullets.

Belgians want Jean-Luc Dehaene, the prime minister, to resign after last week's events.

They also revived suggestions of official complicity which have dogged Dutroux's case since he was arrested after a bungled investigation in August 1996.

There was speculation yesterday that the convicted paedophile, who drove just seven miles after hijacking a car, had planned to meet accomplices in the forest near the French border, where he was eventually arrested after a huge police operation.

Dehaene, who secured the resignation of his justice and interior ministers within hours of Dutroux's flight, looks likely to



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standard practice, apparently, after too many officers shot themselves in the leg. Rules on suspects' rights prevented Dutroux from being chained up during visits to the courthouse to consult his case files.

A poll published yesterday by La Dernière Heure newspaper showed that 55.5% of

survive a vote of confidence on Tuesday, but more heads seem certain to roll.

The "white committees", groups formed in support of Dutroux's alleged victims after his initial arrest, are planning demonstrations to increase pressure for a wider purge of the police and judiciary.

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