

**Devil on the Moon  
Pirate of the Pacific**

**The Lost Oasis**

**The Cold Death**

**Haunted Ocean**

**By Kenneth Robeson**

I just don't see what some of you guys like about Doc Savage. The gang is on a super secret commando raid and they have to stop to lift a pig over a fence. Doc is supposed to be incredibly bright, yet he takes barnyard animals along when trying to infiltrate an enemy base.

The writing is also sloppy: in one the gang is strip searched by foes that know of Doc's habit of concealing weapons. They go so far as to scrub the team's fingernails

to make sure they don't have any chemicals coating them. Yet when the jailbreak is on, somehow Ham starts skewering bad guys with his sword cane. Just where did he have that thing hidden?

And Doc isn't the nice guy he appears to be. In *The Lost Oasis*, he seizes the ill-gotten gains of the bad guys. He's willing to give the plucky female character a share, but the rest is going into his "work-fund". Not a dime set aside for all those poor slaves who

were tortured and forced into hard manual labor at the end of a whip to get those gems. Nor is there any money for the widows and orphans left by the slaves that died digging the fortune out of the oasis.

I thought *Pirate of the Pacific* was the best of these, not good, but better than the others. The only real howler was seeing the ridiculous costumes that Doc and his crew used. Want to figure out who Doc Savage and his crew are? Just look for the weirdos that stand out like sore thumbs among all of the normal passengers.

Maybe I'm just getting all of the punk stories, but nothing I've read so far would lead me to think I'm wrong about this being a strictly second-rate series. Well above Secret Agent X or the Black Hood. But well below G-8, Operator #5, The Spider or The Shadow. Heck, I

like Captain Satan and Wu Fang much better than Doc.

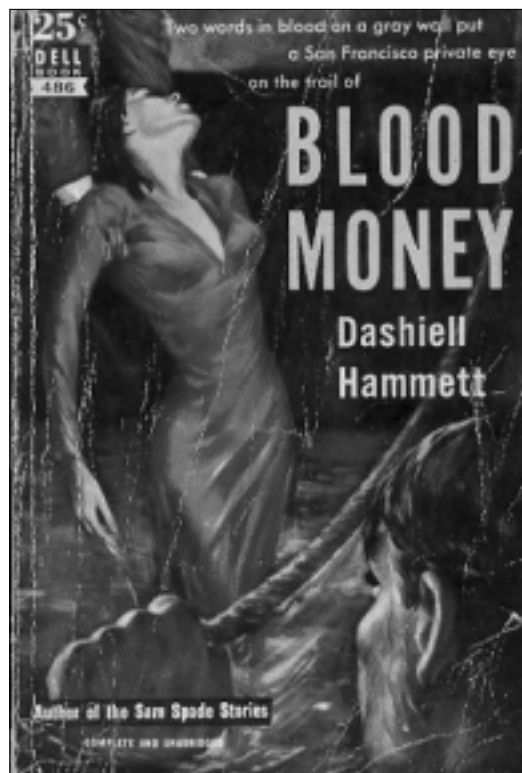
*The Cold Death* was a passable pulp novel. At least they left their livestock at home this time. There was quite a bit of action here, and I enjoyed reading it, but it seemed like there was a plot here driving the action that was never mentioned. There was something about deep sea research and little pills that exploded when hit by a cold death ray, but there was no explanation of what this was about or why the villain of the piece was doing what he was doing. I'm going to give this one a Norvell Page exemption.\*

**Blood Money**

**By Dashiell Hammett**

It is always a surprise to me that more people don't share my opinion of what books are valuable. I was at the Santa Rosa Library book sale last fall and ended up in the paperback mystery section following along behind

two guys who were obviously buyers for a bookstore. At first I thought that being behind them, I'd lose out on any good books. But they consistently skipped books that I wanted in favor of books

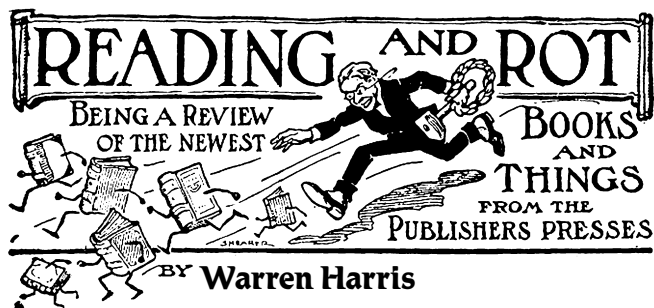


that you couldn't pay me to take. I guess my tastes do not coincide with what is salable at a book store.

Anyway, I was quite happy to find this later edition of *Blood Money* with a cover different from the edition I already own.

This is one of those odd Sonoma County sales where they stack the books up and sell them to you for 75 cents an inch. And no, I don't know why they do this. Seems silly to me too. So I don't know quite what I paid, but

\*The action is sufficiently entertaining to make the plot irrelevant and the unmasking of the villain of the piece a mere formality.



it was probably less than half a buck as it is a pretty thin book.

My point is, what kind of bookstore buyer isn't going to pick up an old Dell Hammett with cool cover art for less than 50 cents? I'm willing to pay that much just to have a copy of the variant cover in my collection. If I ran a bookstore, I'd make a point of trying to keep in stock at least one copy of every Hammett book. Of course, I'd probably be out of business within six months. Any book worth selling I'd put aside for my personal collection, and I could never adjust my view of which books are valuable and which are worthless to meet the tastes of the buying public.

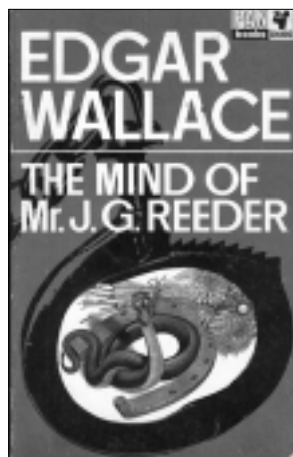
I'm not ready to re-read this yet. I'm planning on re-reading most of Hammett's work at some point and doing an article on what I think. So why am I running this here? John DeWalt wanted to know what the cover looked like.

### **The Mind of Mr. J.G. Reeder** **By Edgar Wallace**

I've enjoyed the Wallace books that I've read, such as *Saunders of the River*, *The Four Just Men* and *The Edgar Wallace Reader*. I'd read about the J.G. Reeder stories in reference works, so I was happy to pick up this British Pan Books copy of the paperback collection for a couple bucks.

I really liked the first several stories. These were an interesting variant on the classic detective. Reeder is the man with the criminal mind, he sees wrong in everything. This allows him to take a few clues that seemingly do not mean anything and reconstruct a crime, sometimes before it happens. He can take a few facts that seem strange, unconnected and innocent and see their criminal possibilities. As long as he's working this formula, the stories are great.

The plots soon become standard thriller plots though, without the benefit of the interesting premise Wallace



had set up for this character. It must have been too much to keep coming up with good variants on the formula each time, particularly when you think about the speed at which he wrote.

In fact, in one of them, Reeder escapes from the clutches of a kidnapper because he's left alone, untied, in a room with a telephone without even being relieved of the gun in his pocket. The criminals are surprised when he uses the telephone to summon the police. While Wallace did try to distract from this very poor plot by loading it down with exotic window dressing and characterization, it didn't fool me. I expected something better from a professional crook, and a little more of a challenge to the detective.

These are a little old-fashioned, and very British, but Wallace has a very readable style, unlike many of his contemporaries. I wonder why nobody at the time figured out that the reason why Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Wallace were so popular was that they wrote exciting stories in a very reader-friendly style. While a lot of authors from this period have a baroque style that is hard to read today, you can still enjoy a good Wallace thriller.

### **Bar 20** **Buck Peters, Ranchman** **The Bar 20 Three** **Hopalong Cassidy** **The Coming of Cassidy** **By Clarence E. Mulford**

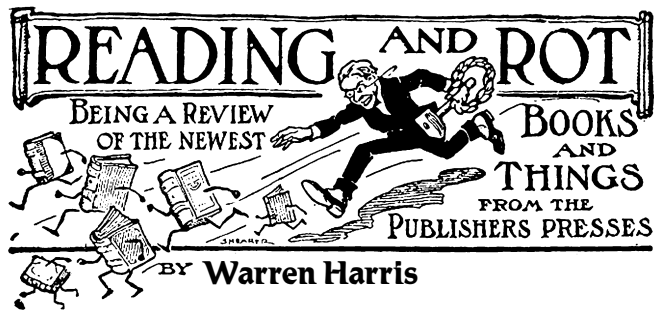
Much to my own amazement, I'm starting to read Westerns. I'm being pretty picky though.

When it comes to science fiction and fantasy, I'll read just about anything as long as it has a good swift plot and good characters. Rocket ships and ray guns are my meat. Give me a good dark overlord, a plucky kid with a sword and a dragon or two and I'm happy to read mindless sword and sorcery.

With mysteries, I'm much more choosy. I like 'em hard-boiled and you'd better not try to pawn off some stale private eye plot that I've seen too many times on TV. No cozies for me. Dashiell Hammett, Richard Stark, Joe Gores, Frederick Nebel and Paul Cain are who I'm looking for. If a book isn't up to that standard, forget it.

With westerns, well, so far it's Mulford or bust. I've read some Edgar Rice Burroughs and some Robert E. Howard westerns, but that was because I was reading Burroughs and Howard.





Mulford's Hoppy isn't the William Boyd goodie-two-shoes version from the movies. He's a tough, hard riding, swift shooting, drinking, gambling, cursing cowboy. He and his buddies from the Bar 20 ranch will perforate any rustler or land-grabbin' coyote what tries to play a crooked hand against 'em.

In many of the stories, you get a sense of the good-humored exuberance of youth. The cow pokes may insult each other and play tricks on each other, but look out if any outsider thinks they can do one of the Bar 20 boys dirty.

My least favorite was *Buck Peters, Ranchman*, which the title page says was co-written by John Wood Clay. The

plot was average and cliché and the book had too many racist comments. The rest of the series isn't enlightened by 21st century standards, but Mulford usually avoids the worst of the racist slang, although his treatment of Mexican villains is a bit much at times.

*Bar 20, Hopalong Cassidy*, and *The Coming of Cassidy* are all fine books, mostly collections of short stories fixed up as one narrative, although

the longer novels are fine too.

*The Bar 20 Three* is a little stale. The early books are about the Bar 20 Ranch and the cowboys who tamed the wilderness and turned the ranch into a success, fighting nature, range jumpers and rustlers. There is a great camaraderie between the cowboys. Hoppy is just one of several interesting and competent cowboys, even if he is clearly the star. By *The Bar 20 Three* Mulford is writing a series about Hoppy, Red Connors and Johnny Nelson.

Mulford is also facing the problem of many series writers, he's saddled his heroes with inconvenient family ties. By *Bar 20 Three* Hoppy's wife and son have faced the fate of so many loved ones of series characters, they came down with a sudden case of death.

I'm trying to sample a few other western writers, I'll let ya'll know what I think.



## 77 Sunset Strip by Roy Huggins

This is not really a novel, but three short stories that are loosely linked by a framing device. (Bailey's attempts to go on a date with the daughter of the client from the first story are thwarted by new cases.)

About a year ago, one of the San Francisco rep theaters had a showing of one episode of 77 Sunset Strip paired with two episodes of Peter Gunn and four episodes of Johnny Staccato. I really enjoyed this. Although I thought the Peter Gunn episodes were better, I liked the 77 Sunset Strip episode enough that when I heard that the series was based on stories by Huggins I was interested in reading them.

Huggins was involved in many classic television detective shows and westerns, right up to *The Rockford Files*. He also tended to recycle his early plots from his 77 Sunset Strip stories in every series he did.

After looking for a while, I finally found a copy of this collection at Con Jose of all places. I've seen it several places since then, so it isn't a hard or expensive item to find. I won't bother paying very much for any of the other Huggins books. This one was a real disappointment. Reading these, and finding out how many different PI series Huggins was involved with over the decades, I now understand why they all seemed so cookie-cutter and clichéd.

Stewart Bailey is hired to protect his client who client ends up dead, he's the main suspect, he continues to investigate even though there's no money in it for him. I've seen this stuff too many times to be impressed by an early prototype of every bad private eye show on television.

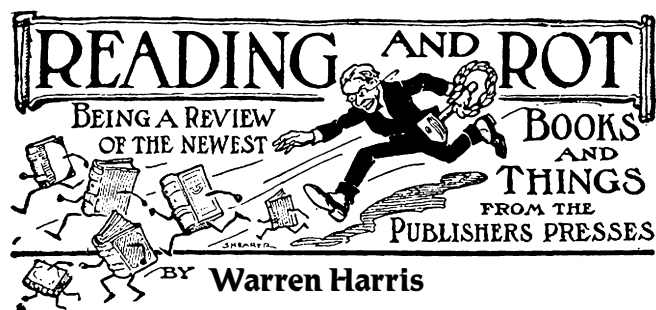


## Kill the Boss Good-by By Peter Rabe

Because of the similarity of the titles and the name of the author, I got this confused with *Kiss the Boss Goodbye* by British author Hugh C. Rae and so for a long time I thought I already had this.

While I'm a big fan of Rabe, I thought the novel described on the book jacket would have been more interesting than the novel contained within the book jacket.

"Pander wore dark glasses and fancy suspenders and he moved into the San Pietro rackets like a sandblaster gone



berserk. While Fell, the boss, is away, Pander seizes the opportunity to move in on the heavy money. Then Fell returns, accompanied by the malevolent Cripp, a human adding machine with a beautiful face and a twisted leg.”

Sounds like a good set up for a gang war novel, with the “malevolent” Cripp taking down a few rival gangsters in painful and unusual ways. Instead, Pander is



not much of a threat, and the novel is about the mental illness of Fell, who suffers from manic episodes, instead of a gang war. It’s just a little too intellectual and psychological for my idea of a Gold Medal Original.

Come to think of it, the back cover blurb for the Rae novel also sounds better than that book:

“The syndicate was muscling in on the London gambling scene. And the racketeers who controlled the rou-

lette wheels and blackjack decks of the capitol resented the American takeover bid. So they brought in the percentage men: Salisbury and Shearer, two mercenaries as vicious as the ruthless gangsters they were fighting.”

Sounds pretty good, but Salisbury and Shearer are not nearly as tough as the blurb makes them out to be.

## Yellowthread Street

Gelignite

Hatchet Man

Perfect End

War Machine

The Faraway Man

By William Marshall

I haven’t quite decided on whether these are worth reading yet. After reading several recommendations for this series, I found a few of them at a book sale and picked them up. The books are quick to read, although Marshall’s style seems a little odd at times. He tends to be more minimalist than he needs to be to tell his story.

I suppose the trouble I have with these is that Mar-

shall is trying to do screwball stories about quirky characters while the plots are about maniacs hacking up people with axes. He’s a little too much in the realistic police procedural school for the black humor to be funny.

In *War Machine* for example, the plot has the police chasing what appears to be a squad of holdouts from WWII determined to take back Hong Kong for the Imperial Japanese Navy. But there’s nothing quirky or funny about booby traps killing cops left and right. We have the old cliché of the tough cop on the street trying to get support from his bosses only to be denied because of politics. Somehow I don’t see any amount of politics causing a SWAT team to stand around and do nothing while a cop killer shoots up their colleagues.

In *Perfect End* the plot revolves around police corruption and the murder of an honest cop, and in it an entire police station of cops gets killed by an assassin. Yet the point-of-view character is running around pretending he’s “Pinecone Pin” the Asian Mountain Man.

The detectives seem to be willing to believe the most outlandish theories of the crimes they are investigating. In *War Machine*, they seriously believe they may be facing holdout Japanese soldiers, in *Perfect End*, they give credence to the idea that the cops in a neighboring station were killed by a giant cat.

I haven’t quite given up on the series. I am trying to find a copy of *SciFi*, the one that takes place at a science fiction convention.

## Jimmy the Kid

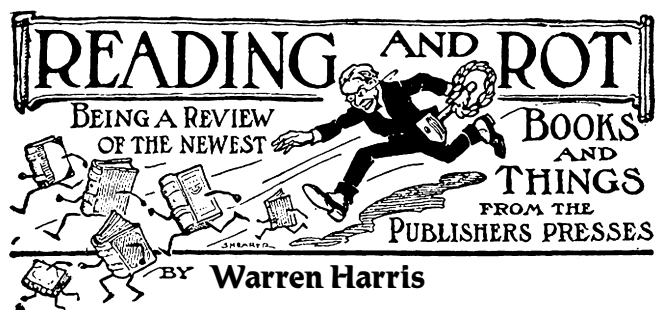
By Donald Westlake

This is an early Dortmunder story. It is mainly interesting for the insertion of chapters from a non-existent Parker novel by Westlake’s alter-ego Richard Stark.

In this book, Dortmunder is talked into another caper, after the last several have gone bad, by his friend who has found the perfect crime plan. The plan is a Parker novel called *Child Heist*. They figure that following the plot of the book, they will be able as successful as Parker is. Of course things go horribly, and amusingly wrong.

One of the writers on a Parker site on the internet thinks that this book shows how much luck Parker has to have his capers go right. I disagree, I think that it shows how Dortmunder’s crew fails because they are so inept and soft. It doesn’t help that Westlake has stacked the deck by having the kidnap turn out to be the most





competent and annoying child possible.

The ending chapter is great. “Richard Stark” is exchanging letters with his lawyers about how the makers



of movie based on the Dortmunder kidnapping can’t be sued by him for infringing on his Parker book because the movie was a non-fiction account. He could possibly sue the kidnappers for copyright infringement, but nobody knows who they are.

I didn’t think it was as funny as some of the other Dortmunder books. I really liked *The Bank Shot* which had me laughing out loud, and I thought *Nobody’s Perfect* was a better caper novel. I was disap-

pointed that only a few chapters of the book were from the Parker novel. I would love to see Westlake finish the Parker book and find a publisher who would reprint this like an Ace double, with the Parker novel on one side and the Westlake on the other. There’s really no chance of this happening, but it sure would be a cool idea.

## Butcher’s Moon

By Richard Stark (Donald Westlake)

After 16 novels starring Parker and a few starring Grofield, Westlake hung up his Stark pen name, not intending to use it again. This is the last Stark novel until Westlake took him out of hiatus in *Comeback*.

To me, this is clearly an author’s intended farewell to a series character. Many of the plots and situations consciously echo earlier entries in the series. There are frequent references to previous capers.

In the first book in the series, *The Hunter*, Parker demands the mob give him the money it owes him or face retribution. In *Slayground* he has to leave behind the loot from an armored car robbery to make his getaway. In *Butcher’s Moon* he returns to the town from *Slayground*, finds the money is gone, and insists that the local mob give him the money back.

Just as in *The Hunter* the mob refuses and learns that it would have been cheaper to pay him off than deal

with a determined Parker. He gathers a team, and in a reprise of *The Score* hits the town hard. He uses the same M.O. as in *The Outfit*, by having his crew hit every mob operation he can. In addition to Grofield, 11 professional criminals, all characters that took part in scores from previous Parker novels, join in. Even the east coast mobster that Parker has dealt with on two prior occasions makes a cameo appearance. The only major Parker figure who doesn’t play a significant role is his long-time girlfriend, Clare, who only makes a brief appearance.

The plot starts out pretty simple, Parker and Grofield come to town to unearth the loot Parker had stashed earlier. But Westlake throws in plenty of curves, changing the direction of the novel multiple times. Parker adapts to each change, always the catalyst for more mayhem. His presence causes the local mob leader to realize that there is a plot out to unseat him. This involves Parker in the power struggle. When the “good” mobster loses, Parker has to take out the entire local mob to get his revenge. Similar to *The Mourner*, Parker has to change his plans to help his partner Grofield, who is being held hostage by the mob.



I thought this was a great book to end the series, although I’m very glad that Westlake changed his mind and has since written five more. It’s original and unpredictable, while revisiting the high points of the previous 15 books. Parker is in fine form, implacable, hard, ruthless, obsessive about getting what he feels is his from those who would take it from him. He’s a killer, he’s a master heist-planner, and he’s a force that throws everybody’s well-laid plans into disarray.

## Eldorado Red

Crime Partners

Death List

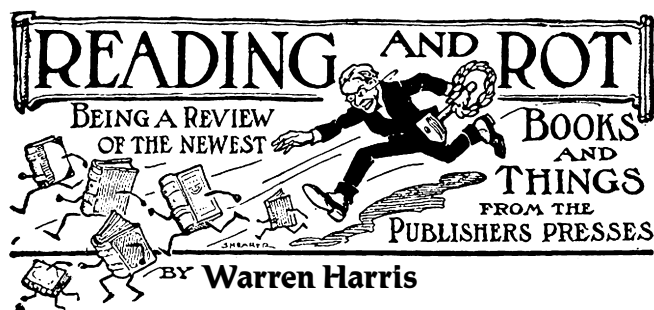
Daddy Cool

By Donald Goines

I found a bunch of Goines novels at a local bookstore cheap, and picked up *Daddy Cool* to see if he was any good. I went back two days later and bought out the set. Goines was a writer who had lived much of the sort of life he wrote about. Part of *Eldorado Red* is based on a holdup that he took part in. Goines ended up dying young, gunned down at the end of his story, sharing the fate of many of his main characters.

*Daddy Cool* is the story of a tough black hitman who can take on the world, but can’t keep his own daughter from being seduced by a pimp. I really liked the idea of





a black hitman and the parts of the book where he is in action are very nice. Goines explores the difficult path of trying to be a man in a violent world, while trying to be a good parent too.

*Eldorado Red* has a similar theme. Red is a local hood who has made good, but who can't pass on his hard earned lessons to the next generation and is betrayed by his son.

Both of these end in tragedy and bloodshed. Goines certainly presents an authentic slice of the violence and despair of the ghetto, but he doesn't seem to provide any ideas for a solution. Lessons are learned too late, and those of different generations can't seem to communicate across the gap. Just about everybody dies in the final chapter.

*Crime Partners* and *Death List* are the first half of the Kenyatta saga. Writing as Al C. Clark, Goines tells the story of charismatic black revolutionary Kenyatta. Goines wants to make a hero of Kenyatta, a tough, educated black man who is determined to take back the ghetto for the people. But he has no other way to do it but

by bloodshed and revolution. Black militancy is presented as the only solution for the problems facing the ghetto, but Goines is too honest to let Kenyatta win against the massed forces of both law and order and organized crime. The militants' hopes are cut down in blood and fire.

I liked *Crime Partners* but I disliked the ending. This was obviously part of a larger story, and the individual volumes suffered from this. I also thought that much more attention should have been paid to

the Kenyatta end of things. Clearly Kenyatta was the driving force of the series, but this book focused on two characters, Billy and Jackie, who didn't survive past this book. These "crime partners" are fully fleshed out, sympathetic characters who the reader roots for during the book. It's quite disappointing to have them die at the end. It's as if main characters of the series die in the first book, to have

the series continue with the supporting characters.

I thought there was a lot of missed opportunity for making some serious points about the nature of crime and criminal behavior, black militancy, black-on-black crime, racism and police brutality. The subtext is there. Well, it's more than a subtext, Goines is clearly using these books as a platform. But I think he fails to give any answers to the questions he raises.

Here Goines is trapped by the conventions of the crime novel. His heroes are robbers and killers, so they must die on the last page. (Donald Westlake almost lost out on his best series because of this convention. When he wrote *The Hunter* he had Parker die at the end because that's what happened to those on the wrong side of the law in the Gold Medal books that inspired him. It was only because an editor asked him for more books in the series that Parker lived to commit many more acts of mayhem.) Goines can't break free of this convention, which diminishes the impact of his message.

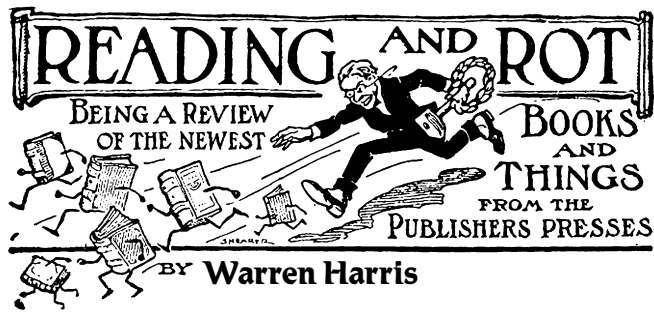
The crime partners of the title start out as nothing more than robbers who have no socially redeeming characteristics, other than their friendship for each other. One is clearly on the path to a bad end through drug addiction. Both rob for no reason other than for personal gain. They encounter Kenyatta, the charismatic leader of a black militant terrorist group, determined to wipe out both drug dealers who victimize the ghetto and the racist cops that patrol it.

As they become involved with Kenyatta, his purpose and cause, along with the good influence of some of the women members of the group, turn them from the path of self-destruction to the path of righteous black anger. But their redemption comes in the form of slaughter. They kill both cops and pushers in the name of black pride and saving their people. Their personal redemption, in the form of an end to their drug habits, a purpose in life and the love of pistol-packing black mama revolutionaries puts them at violent odds with both the racist white and criminal black society.

Goines seems to be saying that if one is black, one can either die in degradation as the victim of drugs, racism and the self-serving greed of race traitors, or die in flames and gunfire as a revolutionary. Neither course seems to lead to salvation for the ghetto.

Greed is not rewarded, but neither is generosity. Showing mercy (by not killing a potential witness) leads to death, but the merciless also die. Perhaps the answer





that Goines seeks to convey is that there is no answer. But if that is the case, then why are the black militant actions to better the ghetto shown in a heroic light?

The novels also feature Benson and Ryan, a black and white team of detectives who are determined to solve the killings in the ghetto. The white detective is the only sympathetic white character in the books.

If Goines had made these two his main characters, caught between the black militancy of Kenyatta and the drug lords who are ruling the ghetto, it would have been a better series.

Even though the white detective is loyal to his partner, it seems it came about because the black detective saved his life. Goines seems to be saying that nothing short of saving a white man's life is enough to earn a white man's respect. Certainly there is no end to racist white cops.

The followers of Kenyatta, who are presented as dedicated and intelligent, come to a bad end at the end of *Death List* as the cops close in and even Benson and Ryan can't stop the white cops from slaughtering them with tanks and rocket launchers.

Kenyatta and a small band escape, by sacrificing his followers for his master plan. I can't help but think that a leader as smart and dedicated as Kenyatta should have a better plan than "everybody on my side dies horribly to cover my escape."

I still have two more books in the Kenyatta series to read. We'll see if the whole series has a point. It clearly is one story, the last chapter of a book becomes the first chapter in the subsequent book, and the action is continuous from one book to the next.

## Plan B

By Chester Himes

As a Chester Himes fan I was thrilled to find that the last, unfinished book in his Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones series had been published. Then I read the book. It should have stayed unpublished.

These aren't the same Coffin Ed and 'digger that inhabit the other books in the series. In fact one of them shoots and kills the other one before the book is over. Far less than half of the book is about the pair.

Long stretches of the book don't seem to have to do with much of anything other than perverted sex and

strange social commentary on race relations. The "plot" (in the parts of the book where there is one) has a black revolutionary sending guns to black men to encourage them to kill whitey. The book deteriorates into a full-on race war—a war that Himes seems to say blacks can't win. Yet he seems to be saying that racial suicide, taking as many white folks with them as they can, is better than living within the white system.

It's too bad he didn't write more Coffin Ed and Gravedigger books, but I can clearly see why he gave up without finishing this one.

## Modesty Blaise

By Peter O'Donnell

For a long time the legendary Modesty Blaise movie was unavailable, and few fans had ever seen it. Sadly, some idiot has seen fit to release it on video in an attempt to cash in on the Austin Powers franchise.

I rented this the other day, and at first I couldn't believe that they had even made an attempt to follow the plot of the first novel. It was so bad, that I had to re-read the book to compare.

I was amazed that the very plot I dismissed as silly in the film, worked in the book.

I think the directors and actors tried too hard, with their limited talent (extremely limited) to recreate exactly what was described in the book.

On the other hand, the book takes the material seriously, while the movie clearly is camping it up. It's as if they took all of the superficial traits of the book's characters and played them up for laughs. In the books, Mrs. Fothergill comes off as menacing. In the movie, she's an over the top

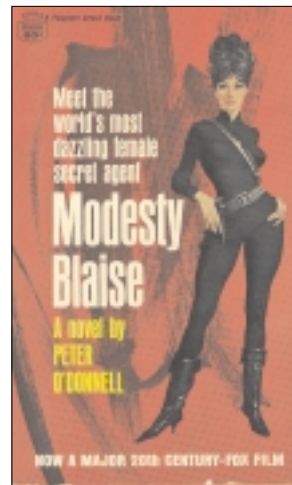
killer Shirley McLain clone. In the books, Gabriel is a psychopath, in the movie, a preening weirdo. Not that deep psychological insights were a strong point of the book.

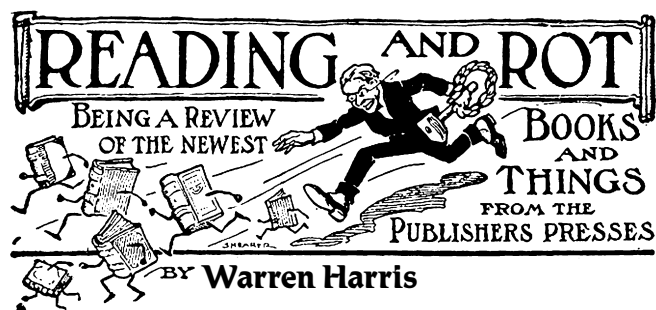
The silliness reaches a high point when Modesty is at dinner and is told that she looks better in a different outfit. There's a jump cut and suddenly Modesty has changed wigs and dresses. Completely incomprehensible to me.

And the theme song, what an atrocious theme song. It's the Modesty Blaise theme, complete with lyrics about Modesty Blaise. They then recycle this song through the whole movie, including the gang at Gabriel's lair disco dancing to an instrumental version.

This movie makes *The Smashers* look like good.

I did enjoy re-reading the book though.





## Necklace of Skulls

By Ivor Drummond

(psud. of Roger Erskine Longrigg)

At first glance, this looked like it could be a pretty good modern pulpy novel. This is part of a series featuring a trio of world-traveling adventurers. There is the thrill-seeking American who plays the part of a bored playboy, A British adventuress who is the match for any man, and the Italian who may or may not possess psychic ability. In this adventure, a quick trip to India to put a stop to a black market drug operation gets them involved in a revival of the ancient Thuggee cult of assassins.

It sounds great until you actually read this piece of garbage.

The heroes are Lady Jennifer Norrington, Count Alessandro Di Ganzareelo and Coleridge Tucker III. How aristocratic of them: the Europeans are both titled, and the American has the III at the end of his name just so we know he's the scion of a wealthy, snobbish, old-money family.

As adventurers, they make good tourists. When Norrington is kidnapped, the remaining two "adventurers" call the police and patiently wait by the phone for the kidnappers to call. Yup, they just sit around and act like normal folks, relying on the police to take care of the kidnappers. Worse still, when they finally decide to go into action, Tucker witnesses a gang of assassins kill everyone on board a train car and cart off the bodies. What does he do? File a police report. I guess he gets points for good citizenship. Of course his account is not believed.

I may have given Doc Savage a poor review, but at least he never wasted time going to the police every time Monk, Ham or one of his other sidekicks got kidnapped. It is the clear responsibility of the hero to save the sidekick, if the sidekick cannot save him- or herself. No hero should ever go to the police, he or she is responsible for doing what needs to be done.

In the hands of the Thuggees, the lovely and strong-willed Norrington gets brainwashed into thinking she is Indian. A little mumbo-jumbo and a little incense and she's powerless. Some heroine.

When it becomes obvious that their plans have been betrayed, they still trust the old babu/former secret service agent because he comes with good references. Tucker

even lets him choose the disguise he's going to use to try to infiltrate the cult.

I gave up on this book about half way through when Tucker, trying again to infiltrate the cult, is sitting in a roadhouse where he knows the Thuggs have killed men before. He is approached by strangers and thinks to himself that if he were a Thugg, he'd be acting just like these guys are acting. And if he were a Thugg, he'd try to drug his victim with something like, oh, puff, puff, a cigarette, just like the, puff, puff, one they, puff, puff, offered to me, that, puff, puff, I'm smoking right... Hey, why is the room spinning?

I don't think I'll be trying any more books by Drummond ever again.

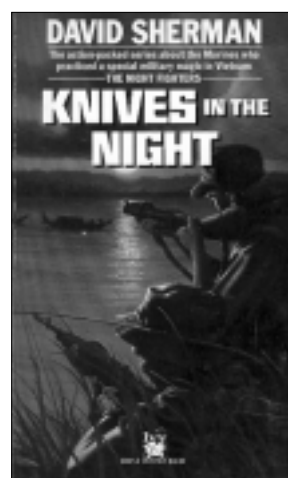
## Knives in the Night

By David Sherman

Now here's a book I never thought I'd find. It was on my want list just as one of those shot in the dark kinds of things.

While I pride myself on being widely read, Vietnam war novels featuring an elite team of Marines in furious combat against the VC forces is not something I would normally look at. But the author of this one, David Sherman, co-writes what started out as a pretty entertaining series of military SF books. One of the in-jokes of that series is the marines of the "Star Fist" battalion like to read classic military novels while waiting for deployment. Their favorite? *Knives in the Night*.

*Knives in the Night* (1987) is the first book in the "Night Fighters" Vietnam action series. Other books in the series are: *Main Force Assault* (1987), *Out of the Fire* (1988), *A Rock and A Hard Place* (1988), *A Nghu Night Falls* (1988) and *Charlie Don't Live Here Anymore* (1989). (Isn't the internet wonderful?)



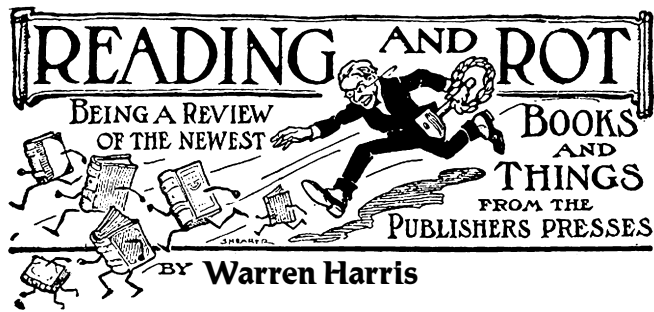
So while I didn't think I'd ever turn this up, I've been keeping an eye out for it at library book sales and such. I was quite surprised when I found it at Kayo Books. It wasn't that expensive. A few dollars at most. I'm probably the only person looking for this book and I just happen to be the one who got a first look at the box it was in. The bookstore owner looked at me like

I was crazy when he saw how excited I was to find it. Although another one of the regulars mentioned that he was looking for the series for the same reason.

So while I'm waiting to find a copy of the eighth book in the Star Fist series, I read this one.

While it didn't convert me into a Vietnam military





series fan, it was an entertaining story, and I'll have to be on the lookout for more in this particular series.

He is pretty good at building suspense. He sets up his heroes as competent warriors and shows them in action against the local VC and then presents us with the menace of a special North Viet Cong team brought in just to stalk and kill them. He is particularly good at conveying the paranoia of the men as they feel the NVC stalk them.

There were a few downsides. Sherman spent too much time setting up the basic situation and introducing his characters. He even gives little mini biographies where he spends a chapter telling about the character's background back in the "real world," why they enlisted and how they ended up in the special action team.

While he does a good job of building tension when the troops are out in the field on patrol, I didn't think he conveyed the overall environment very well. He describes some of what Vietnam looks like, but I didn't get the full sensory experience. I couldn't smell the jungle, I couldn't hear the jungle. He mentions that the local food is bad and strongly flavored, but I didn't get an impression of exactly how it tasted. I also had a hard time finding one particular character to identify with. Sherman shifts his point of view around to too many different characters to get into the skin of any one marine.

Sherman and his Star Fist co-writer Dan Cragg are both ex-marines with Vietnam experience. Sherman saw combat with a unit similar to the one depicted in the series, so there is an authenticity to the books, but that works against him. I think he's too close to the reality of Vietnam to write a straight adventure series. I think the distance from the real that science fiction allows makes for a better series.

### **Devlin's Luck** **Patricia Bray**

There was a free item table at Con José and that's where I picked this up. It looked like the most interesting book on the table, and had the best cover. I can't resist a free book, and I thought that if it turned out to be another one of those drippy, chick fantasy novels, I could always trade it in at a bookstore.

It turns out that it's a surprisingly good novel. In fact, it's an excellent novel. I intend to buy the sequel new

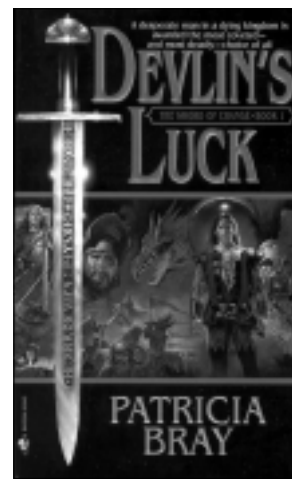
when it comes out this spring. And I'm not buying anything new these days.

I had an hour or so before bedtime one night and thought I'd read the first few chapters just to confirm it belonged on the reject pile and I ended up staying up all night to finish it. It was literally so good that I didn't want to put it down.

This is Bray's first fantasy novel, but she has published romances. I'm pleased to say that her style is polished and there is no hint of anything close to romance here. The princess? She's a little girl. The female captain of the guard? Just a platonic friendship thank you.

The main character is interesting. He has a past, he's got reasonable motivation and does intelligent things. His flaws and strengths serve to move the plot forward.

Bray can tell a good story and can write a pretty good fight scene. Fights are tough, Devlin gets hurt badly several times and the violence seems real without going over the top.



The main character, Devlin, is a down-on-his-luck, although competent man at the start of the novel. He has lost his family, and after avenging their deaths (sadly this is done before the start of the novel) he travels to the capital to become the "Chosen One". This is a post that nobody wants, and anyone

dumb enough to take it usually ends up dead in a short time. Whoever becomes protector must act as the protector of the realm, facing all enemies, even if it means their own death. Devlin, bereft after the death of those he loves and a voluntary exile from his homeland, is seeking nothing more than the reward that will allow him to discharge his final obligation and earn his death.

It turns out that he's a pretty good Chosen One, though. Much to everyone's surprise, he succeeds in his new role, but he does it his way, making friends and enemies as he does so.

Bray puts him through a couple of warm-up quests to get him into the role of Chosen One and then we have an extended quest where he uncovers the main threat facing the kingdom.

This first book is about how a tough, competent, likeable man becomes a hero to those around him as he starts to redeem himself in his own eyes.

This is the first book in a trilogy, so we don't get everything wrapped up, but Bray does provide a good solid ending point so we don't feel cheated that there isn't an end to the book. The immediate threat is ended and Devlin is now in a position to make a real impact in

the next book. Yet it's clear that the real threat is still to come.

For a fantasy novel, there isn't much fantasy. Other than a few very limited spells and a few magically-created creatures, this is a pretty unmagical world. Devlin sometimes seems to get too lucky, or unlucky, at the right time to cause the plot to progress, but there are hints that Devlin is being used as a pawn by the gods, even if they don't every do more than make coincidence work to Devlin's benefit.

There are a few parts where the coincidence would be too much to be believed, except that when Devlin became the Chosen One, he picked the god of capricious luck as his patron.

I thought we should either see a little more evidence of the gods pulling strings, or a little more planning on Devlin's part to get to the same place.

Overall it's a good solid story and an entertaining read. There are a lot of ways that this book could have gone seriously wrong and Bray deftly sidestepped them. I know it's damning with faint praise to say an author merely didn't screw up, but Devlin easily could have been annoying instead of interesting as a character, the conflict could have been watered down, the court intrigue could have been tedious, and the whole thing could have been one of those sappy romance fantasies where the author is clearly in love with her main character.

### Missouri Mama/Free Press Filly Dirk Fletcher

Yeah, I believe that there's really a guy named Dirk Fletcher who wrote all of these "Spur" adult westerns. I did a search on the internet and found a photographer named Dirk Fletcher, but somehow I doubt it's the same guy. Some folks named Chet Cunningham and Scott Cunningham seem connected here somewhere to this series, but they're (he's?) not to responsible for this pair.

I first off, want to say that I didn't pay anything for this book. I know earlier that I said I was restricting my Western reading to quality authors, so I'm a little embarrassed to be caught reading this.

See, I picked up a whole bunch of books, probably more than 2,000, for next to nothing, and some of these Spur double novels were part of the lot. I just picked this one up to see if it really was as bad as I thought it would be.

I ended up reading the whole thing. The first one, *Missouri Mama* wasn't that bad if you skipped over the sex scenes. Spur McCoy is a Secret Service agent assigned to the Western U.S. It's a pretty fair action story. McCoy tracks down a counterfeiter and investigates illegal bank notes, both crimes the Secret Service would have actually been responsible for at the time. I believed the author really knew something about Western history and the Secret Service of the time. There were lots of little details

that would be missing from a true "gun dummy" Western, but it wasn't a history lesson either.

This was actually a pretty good novel if you skipped the "adult" parts. It was entertaining and kept me reading, which was all I asked of it. McCoy seems to use real police work to track down the criminal. In other words, he uses good old fashioned leg work. The plot is plausible, the bad guy intelligent, but with character failings that allow McCoy to catch him.

I can't say the second novel, *Free Press Filly* is as good though. For one thing, I can't understand why a Secret Service agent would have been assigned to this case in the first place. The story starts with the firebombing of a newspaper, and the murder of the publisher. The publisher's daughter writes the President. An attractive girl

in trouble? Freedom of the Press in jeopardy? The mighty machine of the U.S. Government swings into action. This looks like a job for the Secret Service. For goodness sakes, the right to a free press is being imperiled!

Ah, sorry, no. Not in the old west. Not today. Somebody here didn't pay attention in civics class. The First Amendment only provides that "Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of the press." It doesn't say squat

about the government protecting the press from outside forces. As A.J. Liebling said: "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."

The case clearly is out of the jurisdiction of the Secret Service. Arson and murder are both state, or in this case, territorial crimes. It's the local sheriff, who in this story is one of the crooks, who would be responsible.

Now in 1867, the Secret Service's authority was expanded to include those who perpetrated a fraud against the U.S. Government. There is some theft and destruction of the mails going on, but there is no evidence of this until the end of the book. There is simply no reason why a Secret Service agent would be dispatched to investigate some piddling little local affair.

The basic plot involves a land grab. McCoy figures it out and puts a stop to it when he finds a piece of evidence in the ringleader's office. The ringleader had made sure to destroy all of the evidence, but conveniently left one piece behind for McCoy to find. The detective work here was minimal.

I think these two novels were written by different people. The first seems to have a grasp of federal law and history, the second is woefully lacking. On the whole, the women in the first, while randy as heck are a bit



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higher class than the ones in the second. Frankly I can't understand why McCoy's privates haven't fallen off. He screws every woman in every place he goes. If there is a female who gets more than two lines, McCoy will have her at least once. He's got to be a walking typhoid Mary for VD.

But there is at least one point of similarity between the two novels. Both novels have characters who are obsessed over lunch. Not the meal, the word. Folk for no reason drop a discussion of that newfangled word "lunch" and how it's replacing "dinner" into every conversation.

In pulpmags recently, James Reasoner talked a little about writing series adult Westerns. He said some authors, having to put in sex scenes at the behest of the publishers, try to reveal important plot points during such scenes so that they aren't a total waste of time. I'm against this. I'd much rather skip the sex and get back to the book, instead of having to skim the scene looking for important details.

I'll say some more about the big paperback score next issue, I'm still wading through the mess.

### The Diablo Grant

**James M. Reasoner**

Since I've reviewed a few Westerns here, I thought it would be a good idea to pick up one written by one of our new members and see what I thought.

This is an entertaining Western that is part of a series featuring Federal Circuit Court Judge Earl Stark. Stark is called in to decide if a recently discovered Spanish land grant is valid, thus enriching the town drunk while threatening to take the property of the local ranchers and townsfolk. This turns into a nice murder mystery that the Judge has to solve before he's done.

Stark is a good hero, he's a complex man trying to do what is right. He feels for the ranchers who have built up their property from nothing, yet he is determined to do the right thing according to the law. He works hard trying to find a just solution to the problem. He's also quite competent. He's only surprised when he should be, that is when for good reasons he doesn't have all the information he needs. He's a fair detective and a smart and tough

gunslinger when he needs to be.

Reasoner avoids stereotypes and easy solutions. Many of the characters aren't good or evil, but have more realistic motivations. The story isn't about the "good guy"

getting a just reward or the "bad guy" getting punished. It's about how an unexpected situation effects the people involved.

I do wonder at the inclusion of the Mexican Consul and his daughter. I had expected them to play a bigger role. Instead the daughter is just there as a romantic interest for a subordinate character who doesn't really need a romantic interest. I would have liked to see a bigger role for this couple, and a bigger part for her father. I didn't get a sense of why the pretty senorita would decide that the young newspaperman was the one true love of her life. Much of their sparkin' takes place off-stage.

This was a pretty quick read and moved right along. I'm going to make a point of finding the rest of the books in the series.

### Nightmare in Pink

**John D. MacDonald**

Until I read this book, I liked John D. MacDonald. After reading it, I never want to read another Travis McGee book again.

I really liked *Darker Than Amber* and I was buying up McGee books cheap when I found them at library booksales. I started reading them in order. I was willing to forgive *The Deep Blue Goodbye* its shortcomings as it is the first in the series, but after reading *Nightmare in Pink*, I can see that I'm wasting my time.

I kept waiting for McGee to do something intelligent, but he never did. He acted like an ordinary guy trying to do extra-ordinary things. It reminded me of Bertha Cool trying to solve crimes when Donald Lam is out of town in the Erle Stanley Gardner series. He just isn't up to it as a character.

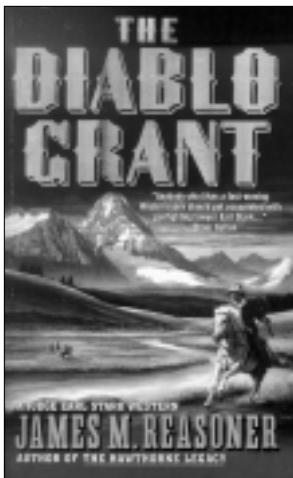
And then there is the attitude toward women. All a distraught woman needs is a little lovin' from super-stud McGee and she sees the light, finds the way, and becomes his love-bunny. McGee's only real power is that he's a world-class gigolo.

I kept reading this book thinking that sooner or later he'd quit making love or running around like an amateur and start doing something constructive. More than half way through he does, and promptly gets slipped a mickey. It turns out that the bad guys are competent, not a good sign for an incompetent hero.

Then it's time for professor MacDonald to give us a lecture on brain surgery. Yech, if I wanted this, I'd subscribe to the Discovery Channel and watch a documentary.

Somehow, McGee gets out of it, even though he really deserves to have his brains scrambled and then takes the girl of the moment down to Florida for a boat ride and some more sexual healing.

A complete waste of time, other than now I can dump those MacDonald books off of my to-read list and free up some space for more worthy books.



# Our Featured Issue:



This time our featured issue is the Black Mask for April 1933. I was certain that when I moved to California, I had brought all of my pulps with me. I didn't want to leave them up in the storage unit to endure the blistering heat of the Nevada summers and the cold and wet of the northern Nevada winters. Somehow, though, I managed to miss a small stack packed in a box that I thought didn't have anything in it but junk.

Among these pulps is my one issue of Black Mask. For the last five years, whenever I opened up one box of detective pulps, I always figured that it must be in the other box of detective pulps. Imagine my surprise at unpacking to find this treasure.

I bought this at the second Pulpcon I attended, in 1997 at Bowling Green. I came there determined to buy one issue of Black Mask, no matter what the cost. I was lucky to find a dealer who was selling this British edition. The contents are the same as the American edition for the same month, but because it was British, it was selling for much less than other Black Masks at the show. I still have a penciled price on the backing board, so I think I paid \$30 for the issue.

I chose this one mainly because it was in my price

range. But I lucked out in getting a terrific issue. I don't think I realized it at the time just what a great lineup of authors and series characters is in this issue. If I had known, I would have read this long ago. I guess my only excuse is that I moved before I got around to it and haven't seen this issue since.

Spider author Norvell Page only had three stories in Black Mask, the last of them in this issue.

There is also an H.H. Stinson story featuring a newspaper reporter detective—I love reading stories with newspaper reporters as the hero.

There's an Erle Stanley Gardner story in the Ed Jenkins series.

This one hasn't been reprinted to my knowledge.

Black Mask regular Roger Torrey, author of *42 Days to Murder*, is represented by a story in the Dal Prentice series.

Yet another newspaper detective, Kennedy, teams up with tough Captain Steve McBride in a story by Frederick Nebel.

This issue certainly has a lot of my favorite Black Mask regulars.

According to the note on the backer board, the cover is by J.W. Schlaikjer and the interior illustrations are by Arthur Rodman Bowker. How anyone ever could see Arthur Rodman Bowker in the signature, I'll never

## Black Harvest

By NORVELL PAGE



*Jules Tremaine sings in the streets of Little Italy and sees an old Italian game*

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know, but he seems to be a regular interior artist for *Black Mask*. The interiors printed in *The Jo Gar Case-book* are by the same person. Ah, *Black Mask* is kind enough to give both cover and interior art credit on the contents page. That explains that.

The first story in the issue is "A Hunch That Went Wrong" about an escaped convict who makes a mistake that leads to his capture. The five page story by Pettersen Marzoni is nothing memorable, just the sort of ironic twist ending crime story that was often used for filler in crime pulps.

Next is a one-page editorial called "Here's Looking at You!" which supposedly profiles the average *Black Mask* reader. It's just BS used to fill the page.

The next story is "Give the Man Rope" by H. H. Stinson.

Tough newspaper reporter Ken O'Mara, with more than a little help from his reporter girlfriend, solves a case of murder. O'Mara is offered \$15,000 if he holds back a murder alibi, until some election heat is off. He refuses and sets out to solve the murder before the crooks can get their man elected.

"One of those honest reporters, huhn? You can't be bought. Paper first and all that hooey."

"You've been seeing movies, I'll bet."

"Listen to reason, O'Mara. You barged in on something Monday night that stands to make you a lot of dough—or a lot of grief. We're decent enough to give you a choice."

"I'll write what I please—when I please. And you'll like it."

Early on he's taken for a ride, but his quick thinking girlfriend, newspaperwoman Tony Ames, is there to save his bacon.



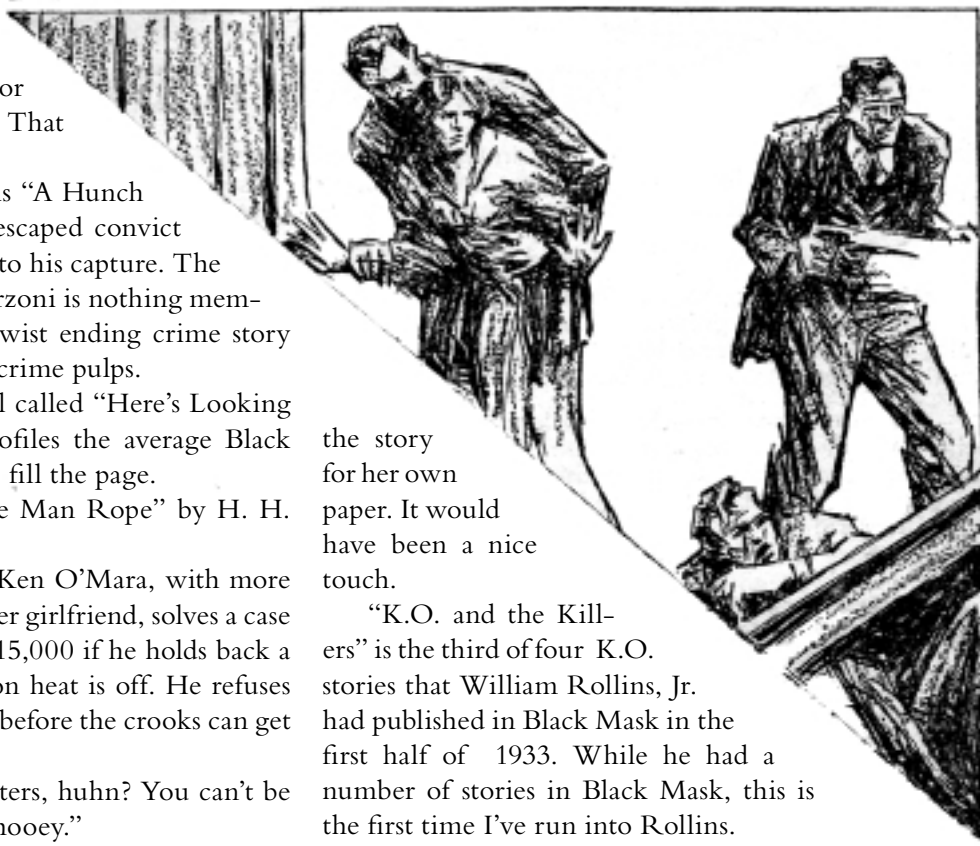
he remarks that most reporters are unreformed burglars, and in the best 1930s newspaper tradition, O'Mara proves her right.

The villains have enough political pull to get O'Mara assigned to an out of town job, but he quits and has a job at a rival paper in minutes. I like seeing the newspaper politics angle being played here. Like all of the stories here, corruption is everywhere as is expected in a hard-boiled view of the world.

O'Mara is plenty tough, he gets the story but not until he's gotten in a few gunfights and returned the favor by rescuing his girlfriend.

I would however, liked to have seen Tony Ames, who still works for the paper O'Mara quit, try to get

# Give the Man Rope



the story for her own paper. It would have been a nice touch.

"K.O. and the Killers" is the third of four K.O. stories that William Rollins, Jr. had published in *Black Mask* in the first half of 1933. While he had a number of stories in *Black Mask*, this is the first time I've run into Rollins.

I wasn't too impressed. I can't figure out what K.O.'s about. He seems to be a sort of slow ex-boxer from North Carolina, but ends up solving the case with his brains. The plot is contrived, with K.O.'s motivation being based on his feelings for a poor, sick young woman. He seems to be some kind of private avenger, but his back story is not explained.

The Kennedy and McBride story is "Farewell to Crime." As usual, Nebel is terrific here.

The first part of the story is great, with the usual bantering between the always drunk and unconventional, but brilliant newshawk Kennedy and the tough, but sentimental Captain McBride. The scenes with Kennedy sparkle with the Nebel wit, but Kennedy disappears about half way through, he's not even in at the end to get the story for his paper.

Kennedy is great, he's always tagging along, never serious, always getting into things. Eating the murdered victim's grapes, discussing the history of the house where the murder takes place, finding clues while appearing to be nothing more than a congenial lush. It's too bad he gets left behind, probably because Nebel needs to free McBride to ignore the criminal acts of a good man who is blackmailed into supplying dope for the drug ring.

The second half is good, with McBride solving a murder connected with a heroin ring, but it didn't have the



trunks.

I like the Chinatown action, but I thought some of the earlier Phantom Crook stories where he is actively the Phantom Crook were better. Still, it was a great story.

I particularly liked the character of Ngat T'oy, also known as "Little Sun." She's competent and treated as an equal, and doesn't have to be saved even once during the story. Gardner's fondness and knowledge of the Chinese shows here, as they are treated better than in most pulp stories. Chinatown is still honeycombed with secret passages though there are no hatchet men or opium dens observed.

I also like the San Francisco setting of the story. He gets at least some of the street names right, although it really could have been set in any city with a Chinatown and a waterfront.

Roger Torrey has "The Case Hardened Samaritan" next in the issue.

I've never read a Dal Prentice story before, but I liked this one well enough that I'm going to move *42 Days to Murder* up higher on my to-read list.

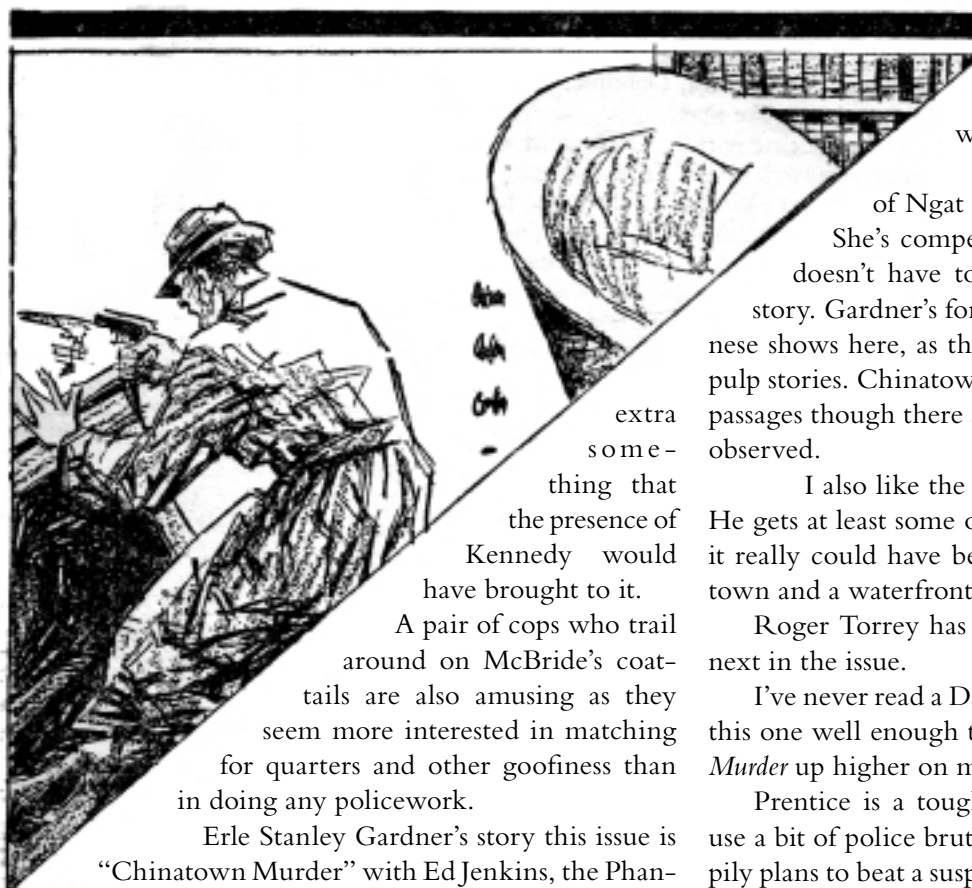
Prentice is a tough cop who is not at all afraid to use a bit of police brutality to get the bad guys. He happily plans to beat a suspect for information on the whereabouts of a kidnapped kid if it's necessary. He blithely ignores such niceties as the need for a search warrant to enter a house. While questionable behavior in a hero, I can't say that it's not a reflection of some police behavior and attitudes, particularly during the period.

"That's the way it is with you guys." Solly's voice was thin whine. "If a guy's getting along all right you try and frame him"

"Whad'ya mean—try and frame him? If I try—he's framed. And you look like a picture to me now, baby."

Prentice is mean as hell, he gives some trapped hoods a chance—the same chance they gave a cop shot-gunned down during the raid. He hits them with a tommy gun and gives no quarter. In some ways he reminds me of Satan Hall, but Torrey is a better plotter and stylist than Carrol John Daly. And I'm saying that as a Satan Hall fan.

The story hinges on the kidnapping of the son of Prentice's enemy. While determined to get revenge on the well-placed man who he knows killed his partner, Prentice has a soft spot for kids. He'll get his revenge in due time, but first



extra something that the presence of Kennedy would have brought to it.

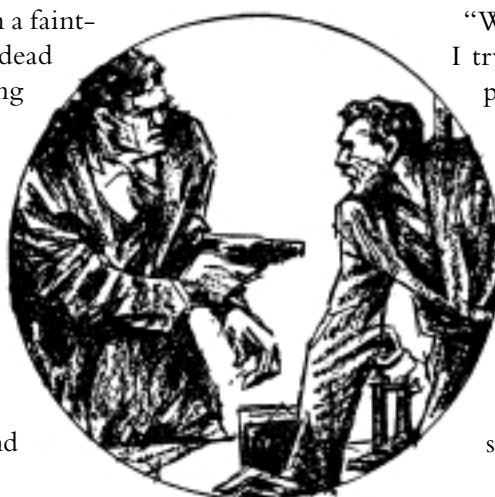
A pair of cops who trail around on McBride's coat-tails are also amusing as they seem more interested in matching for quarters and other goofiness than in doing any policework.

Erle Stanley Gardner's story this issue is "Chinatown Murder" with Ed Jenkins, the Phantom Crook. I love these Phantom Crook stories. This is later in the series and Jenkins has retired his Phantom Crook persona for an identity as private investigator Bob Sabin. Still, if the cops ever pull him in and look at his fingerprints, it's all up for him. Gardner of course takes advantage of this and has Jenkins dodging the police by the second page.

He starts the story with a bang, Jenkins is in a room trying to get information from a fainting blonde wren over the body of a dead drug smuggler as the cops are racing up the stairs.

It turns out that along with dope, *The Sinister One* has smuggled in papers and documents that would destroy Jenkin's Chinese associate Soo Hoo Duck. Jenkins has to find the dope, destroy the evidence and provide the police with the real killer before he is caught or the evidence is found and used against Soo Hoo Duck.

Jenkins, aided by Duck's daughter, the lovely Ngat T'oy chases down the drug ring as he dodges the police. There is a bit of the old Phantom Crook as he engages in a shell game involving identical



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he'll rescue the kid, even if that means helping his enemy indirectly.

"Now listen, Angelo. I'm not helping him. He killed the man I worked with—that's right. His little boy has been kidnaped and I'm helping *him*, not his old man. Get that! I hate his guts but I like kids. See!

But somehow, the story just doesn't add up. Why did the father report his son's kidnapping, but not that his wife had been kidnapped too? Why were the kidnap victims treated so well? Why was there a shotgun reception waiting for the raid? Prentice smells and rat and quickly figures the whole thing as a frame by his old enemy—willing to use his own son as bait.

I did think that the ending was a let-down after the excellent start, but it does have its moments.

Prentice turns the tables, kidnapping the kid himself, tricking the head hood into killing

his own fall guy and extorting money from the hood for the family of the officer slain in the raid. He's not a nice guy, but her's certainly efficient.

All three of the Norvell W. Page stories in *Black Mask* featured Jules Tremaine, a well-to-do musician who on a bet, strolls through the Little Italy section of New York playing his guitar and singing. He learns to like the locals, who treat him well, and he acts as an avenger, fighting the crime family, the Catrini, who oppress the honest residents.

In his index to *Black Mask*, E.R. Haggeman called the Tremaine stories "a projected and important series that never developed." The first of the three stories,

"Those Catrini" was on Joseph Shaw's short list for inclusion in *The Hardboiled Omnibus*, although it didn't make the cut.

This is clearly part of a continuing series. In fact, there needed to be more background, the story seems to take for granted that the reader knows who Tremaine is and why he's out to fight the Catrinis. His brother is mentioned as if the reader should know the back story, and a major character, who rescues Tremaine, is never introduced. He seems to be a side kick,

but why he is following Tremaine's orders is never made clear.

As can be expected from Page, he jumps right into the action. This is a short, punchy, fast-paced story. We don't get a lot of investigating, or any at all. Tremaine witnesses a thug shaking down the poor people of Little Italy. He makes friends with a little girl who has been tortured to make her

parents pay up. He roughs up the thug and then roughs up a crooked cop who tries to arrest him for assault.

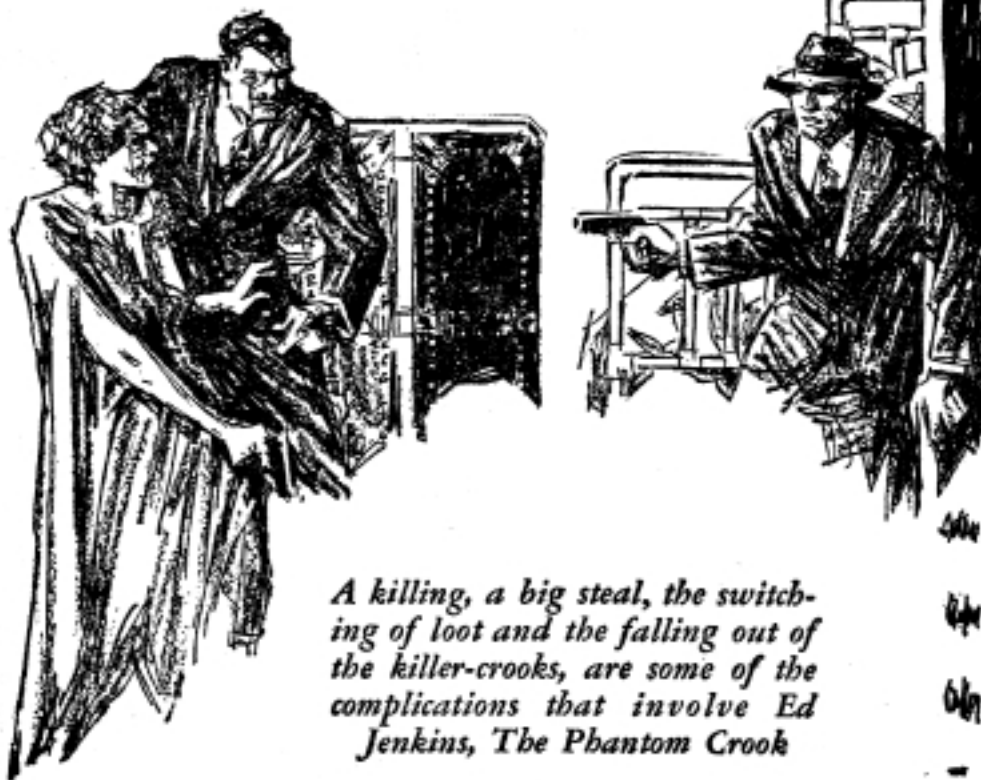
Somehow he becomes convinced that the Catrini are responsible for this, even though it later turns out that the cop and the thug are working the Black Hand racket on their own.

The rest of the story has Tremaine arranging for one of the Catrini and his bodyguard on the one side and the cop and the thug on the other to rub each other out. His friend is on the scene to provide an escape for Tremaine and kill the bodyguard before he can plug Tremaine.

Since this is the last of the Tremaine stories, we'll never know how his crusade against the crime family

# Chinatown Murder

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER



went.

It's puzzling to me why the series ended here. Clearly Shaw, who was editor of Black Mask at the time, liked the stories, he bought and ran three in three consecutive issues. He thought the first one to be good enough to consider for reprinting in his anthology of the best of Black Mask from his era as editor. Was the quality going downhill from the first one? Is there a fourth story in the series that was rejected by Shaw?

If it wasn't an editorial decision, why did Page stop writing for Black Mask? BM was considered by most writers to be the top of the detective fiction market. He was writing detective stories for Clues, Detective Fiction Weekly, Crime Busters and others well after this date, including later the same year.

He did start to write the Spider novels starting with the December 1933 issue, but he should have had plenty of time between writing a story in the April issue of Black Mask and the December issue of the Spider to finish at least one or two more short stories in the series.

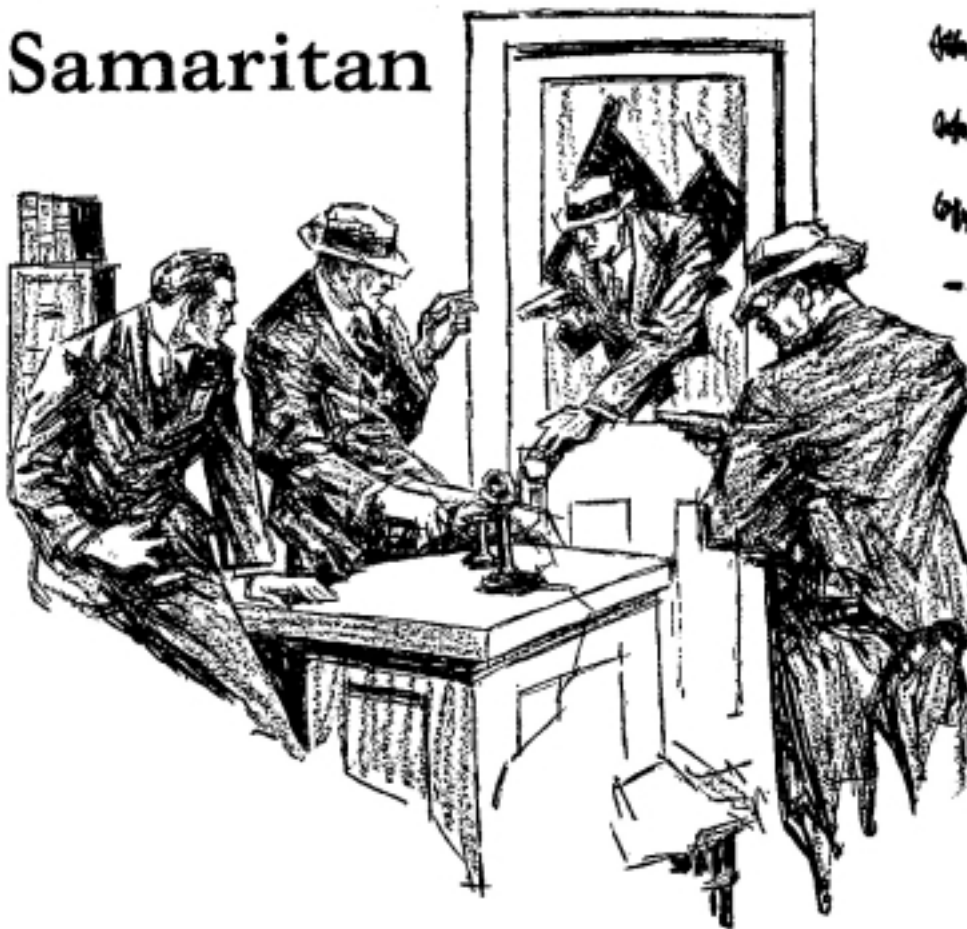
So, what happened to Jules Tremaine? And what happened to Page's writing notebooks? At one point Bob Sampson had looked at them or at least had access to the data, and Robert Weinberg, who originally worked out

lot of questions.

The issue ends with two non-fiction items. There's a supposedly true story about a man treed by a bear by Dewey Pendry as told to Charles K. Parks. Also in this issue is a clunky story called "He Said It With

**Back Numbers**  
the authorship of the Spider stories, thinks they were in the hands of an unknown collector. A look at those notebooks might answer a

## The Case-Hardened Samaritan



a Bullet." This is the second prize winning story in the "Narrowest Escape" contest, complete with a "sworn statement" that this is a true story.

There are some unusual advertisements, since this is a British edition. The British distributor has an ad for the British version of Astounding and on the back is a full-page ad for a series of health books by our old friend Bernarr MacFadden. Dig that crazy

hair. I sometimes forget that he's a famous, if not more, as a health guru as he is as a pulp publisher.

So this was a great issue, with only a couple of stories that weren't excellent. If this issue is average for the period, I can see why Black Mask has gained its reputation as one of the great pulps.

Hopefully I'll find another issue of Black Mask just as good as this one at this year's Pulpcon. One Black Mask in my collection just isn't enough.

