



THE BLOODY PULPS

nostalgia By CHARLES BEAUMONT

in the days of our youth they were not deemed good reading and to us at the time they weren't good, they were great

THERE WAS A RITUAL.

It was dark and mysterious, as rituals ought to be, and—for those who enacted it—a holy and enchanted thing.

If you were a prepubescent American male in the Twenties, the Thirties or the Forties, chances are you performed the ritual. If you were a little too tall, a little too short, a little too fat, skinny, pimply, an only child, painfully shy, awkward, scared of girls, terrified of bullies, poor at your schoolwork (not because you weren't bright but because you wouldn't apply yourself), uncomfortable in large crowds, given to brooding, and totally and overwhelmingly convinced of your personal inadequacy in any situation, then you *certainly* performed it.

Which is to say, you worshiped at the shrine of the pulps.

What were the pulps?

Cheaply printed, luridly illustrated, sensationally written magazines of fiction aimed at the lower and lower-middle classes.

Were they any good? No. They were great.

Doc Savage, The Shadow, The Spider, G-8 and His Battle Aces, The Phantom, Adventure, Argosy, Blue Book, Black Mask, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Marvel Tales—and all the hundred-and-one other titles that bedizened the newsstands of America in the halcyon days—provided ecstasy and euphoria of a type unknown to this gloomy generation. They made to crawl deliciously young scalps. They inspired, excited, captivated, hypnotized—and, unexpectedly, instructed—the reckless young who have become responsible adults. Of course, they were *infra dig*. In line with the imperishable American concept that anything that is purely enjoyable must be a sin, the pulps were considered sinful. Although they were, at their worst (or best), fractionally as “objectionable” as the immoral, amoral, violent, perverted product available nowadays to any tennis-shoe-shod sub-teen who has the price of admission to a movie theater or access to a television set, they were proscribed by most parents and all educators. Thus we indulged in them in much the same way that we indulged in the other purely enjoyable facts of life. Which was an altogether agreeable state of affairs. Fortunately, the psychologists of the day did not understand the special sweetness of the stolen watermelon. So they denounced the pulps, wrote tracts on the fearful consequences certain to befall those whose minds were polluted by “the newsstand trash” and otherwise did their best to create a nation of addicts.

Addicts we certainly were. We gave ourselves over wholly to the habit and pursuit of the most

potent literary drug known to boy, and all of us suffer withdrawal symptoms to this day. No one ever kicked the pulps cold turkey. They were too powerful an influence. Instead, most of us tried to ease off. Having dreamed of owning complete sets, in mint condition, of all the pulp titles ever published, and having realized perhaps a tenth part of the dream—say, 1500 magazines, or a bedroomful—we suffered that vague disenchantment that is the first sign of approaching maturity (16, going on 17, was usually when it happened) and decided to be sensible. Accordingly, we stopped buying all the new mags as fast as they could appear, and concentrated instead upon a few indispensable items. Gradually we cut down until we were keeping up the files on only three or four, or possibly five or six, publications. After a few years, when we had left high school, we got the number down to two. Which is where most of us stand today. We don't read the magazines, of course. But we go on buying them. Not regularly, and not in any sense because we want to, but because we must. It is an obligation, a duty, to the bright untroubled selves we were. To plunge any further into adulthood would be an act of betrayal.

But the times have betrayed us, anyway. The pulps, as we knew and loved them, are gone. The gaudy, gory covers, the dramatic interior illustrations, the machine-gun prose, the rough, rich-smelling, wood-chip-speckled paper—all gone. The so-called “pulp” of 1962 are nothing of the kind. They are slickly printed, slickly written echoes of their own great past. Look at *Argosy* now, and then think of the magazine as it was when H. Bedford-Jones and A. Hyatt Verrill and Arthur Leo Zagat were waging their bloody Mongol wars; pick up the diminutive, pocket-size, lightweight *Amazing Stories* and try to imagine it 20 years ago when its special quarterly edition was the size of a dictionary (unabridged) and more exciting than a ride in a roller coaster. Buy one of these emasculated ghosts and display it on a subway. Wait for the frowns, and go on waiting forever—there won't be any. The “pulp” are now socially acceptable, and I can think of no greater damnation of them.

Only the well-remembered “eight-pagers” (*Toots and Casper, Dick Tracy*, etc.) carried a greater stigma than the old-time adventure magazines.

Happily, no sober, critical evaluation of pulps is possible. Like any other narcotic, they defy rational analysis. One can speak of their effects, even of their ingredients, but not—without wearisome and unconvincing pomposity—of their causes. Something in them froze the addict's critical faculties. He might entertain a difference of opinion

on the relative merits of Putnam's translation of Don Quixote as opposed to Shelton's, but on the subject of *Weird Tales* he was, and is, adamant.

Reacting with typically honest fury to criticism of one of his favorite pulp writers, the eminent regional novelist and historian August Derleth wrote not too long ago: "With that sublime, egocentric stupidity which characterizes a certain subspecies of frustrate which goes in for book reviewing in order to find some compensation for its own singular lack of creative ability by deprecating the work of those who are creative, a reviewer recently brushed aside a book of supernatural tales as being, after all, 'only pulp-fiction.' The reviewer offered no evidence of being able to say just what stigma attached to writing for the so-called 'pulp' magazines."

Of course the reviewer who enraged Derleth could not have been an addict, so he ought to be forgiven; particularly in that, no matter what he said, he was probably right. To the hooked, those wild and wonderful stories were all great; to the unhooked (a state of being difficult for the hooked to imagine), they were no doubt dreadful, hardly to be classed as literature.

It is true that they were unlike any other literature to which we had been exposed. Before our encounters with *Black Mask* and similar periodicals, we tended to think of adventures as belonging to a previous age. Buccaneers. Indians, Frontier Fighters, Soldiers of Fortune—all were in the past, we thought. Then we read the pulps and learned that adventure surrounded us, that danger was omnipresent, evil a threat to be countered at all odds, and science not a laboratory curiosity but, instead, an active tool. We learned a lot of other things, too, including the quaint but useful lesson that it is more rewarding to be a good guy than a bad guy.

Take Doc Savage (as we did, in large uncut doses). Here truly was a worthwhile idol, a man among men. His admirers called him "The Mental Marvel," "The Scientific Genius," "The Muscular Midas." His enemies called him "The Yankee Menace." He fought on the side of Right, inspiring fear and respect in those who would threaten the U.S. of A., instantaneous passion in all women who ever caught a glimpse of him, and joy in the hearts of his many fans. We loved him. For his indefatigable attacks on the fortress of Evil, surely; and for his incredible feats of derring-do; but mostly we loved him because of his willingness to share with us the secrets of his self-development exercises. Doc was a model of fitness. The wisdom of the old fox shone from his "strange, flake-gold eyes," but his bronzed body was that of a young

god: lithe, sinewy, powerful. Nor was this a happy accident of nature, but, rather, the result of rigid discipline. The Doc Savage Plan of Living was eventually made available to the general readership, "in answer to innumerable requests." However, the editor warned us that: "Important as these exercises may be, and as much as they may accomplish in building you up physically, mentally and morally, they should be only the basis for bigger things in life." What bigger things the editor had in mind, we did not know. If through the Plan of Living we attained the abilities of Doc Savage (and the implication was that we would), then we must be equal to anything, for the Man of Bronze was even more accomplished than any of his five assistants—and *they* were the best in the world:

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, "Ham" for short, Harvard Law School's most distinguished graduate and America's best-dressed man, who carried a natty black cane within which nestled a slender sword tipped with a mysterious sleep-inducing drug developed by:

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett "Monk" Mayfair, one of the world's greatest chemists, a shy, gentle, squeaky-voiced man with the build of a gorilla and the tenacity of a scorpion;

Colonel John Renwick, engineer extraordinary, whose gallon-pail fists came in handy whenever a thick door panel needed smashing in;

Major Thomas J. "Long Tom" Roberts, an electrical wizard, sturdy of mind, frail of physique;

And, far from least, the archeologist and geologist, William Harper Littlejohn, whose specialty was the English language. He would have sent us all scurrying to our dictionaries had not author Kenneth Robeson thoughtfully translated his transcendental philological peregrinations. (As it was, "Johnny" did contribute importantly to our vocabularies. For a time we all used his colorful substitute for profanity: "I'll be super-amalgamated!")

With this fabulous confederacy of adventurers, headed always by Clark Savage, Jr., M.D. (specializing in brain surgery when he was not fighting the International Cartels of Evil), we traveled under the earth's surface, beneath the sea, into palaces of ice at the North Pole, through the jungles of Southeast Asia, into vast caverns on the Equator, and down the reeky slums of the world's biggest and most mysterious cities. We were introduced by Robeson (a *nom de plume* for pulpster Lester Dent) to Kant and Lombroso. We were imbued with a healthy respect for scientists in particular and education in general. How else save through education could Doc have invented such marvels as his machine pistol, which fired "mercy

bullets,” gas pellets or explosive shells at so fantastic a rate of speed that it sounded like an extended low note played on a bull fiddle; or his capacity detector, which like an old regenerative radio emitted a squeal whenever its field was interrupted; or the candy bar that kept you awake and supplied vitamins at the same time; or the wrist radios, the automatic door openers, the self-contained underwater breathing apparatus, etc.?

Within two or three issues after its introduction, the *Doc Savage* magazine was selling 200,000 copies per month. Robeson/Dent cranked out over a hundred novel-length adventures, turning his Man of Bronze into the most popular fictional character of the period.

Then there was The Shadow. He didn't exactly eclipse Doc, but he cast a hell of a dark pall over our hero. We thought it was because he was more believable. After all, didn't each story begin with the disclaimer that it was “from the private annals of The Shadow, as told to Maxwell Grant”? Of course. It was no problem to believe that Lamont Cranston existed and that the man known as The Shadow assumed his identity whenever it was necessary for him to emerge from the blackness of the city night to accomplish some high-level mission. Unlike Doc, who operated in a realm where law-enforcement officers were seldom present, Cranston carried on a regular fox-and-hounds with the police, and in particular with Inspector Cardona. The milieu, if not the situations, was recognizable.

Fans who knew this master crime fighter only through his radio adventures knew him not at all. For the real lowdown, you had to go to the magazines. There, in the pulpy pages, he existed in all his weird and inexplicable glory.

From his sanctum in an unidentified warehouse (lit only by a blue lamp), The Shadow communicated through his contact man, Burbank, with a small army of operatives: Hawkeye, a small-time crook; Cliff Marsland, a free-lance mobster; Harry Vincent, sometime reporter; and the indispensable hackie, Moe Shrevnitz. Upon receiving news of impending, or recently committed, crime, The Shadow would blend into the dimness of the evening and appear—with or without his confederates—to challenge the worst of evils. A master of disguises, he did not rely entirely on concealment: a bit of wax in the cheeks, a touch of makeup here and there, an affected slouch, limp or drooped shoulder, and he might become a Bowery bum, a cripple or even a scrubwoman. He was also a master psychologist, as demonstrated in Maxwell Grant's straightforward prose (which was the actual cause of The Shadow's ascendancy over Doc Savage):

“There Badger saw The Shadow.

“Had he faced an armed policeman, the mobster would have fired. But sight of The Shadow overwhelmed him. Blazing eyes made the wounded crook falter. His gun hand wavered; sagged.

“A product of the underworld, Badger was one who had bragged often that he would like the chance to gain a pot shot at The Shadow. But in this crisis, Badger failed.

“The Shadow had expected it.”

To those of us who lived with The Shadow through twoscore pulp-paper perils, the radio episodes were a considerable letdown. Aside from the blood-curdling laugh and the sibilant assurances (delivered by Orson Welles) that “The weed of crime bears bitter fruit” and “What evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows,” we felt that there was too little resemblance between the radio show and the “real” adventures. The half-hour dramatizations were interesting enough, but really, The Shadow did not have to depend upon hypnosis (“... the power to cloud men's minds”) in order to make his way unseen across rooftops and through dim hallways. And, there was entirely too much hanky-panky with Margo Lane, a sex interest who drifted into the magazine's previously chaste pages and did much to confirm our suspicion that women ought to leave important matters to men.

The scripts for the radio dramas were written by Harry Charlton, who died in a poisoning mystery as intriguing as any *Shadow* novel; but each of the 178 book-lengthers—7,500,000 words of print—was turned out by Maxwell Grant.

Looking back on those two great heroes, Doc and The Shadow, one wonders what ever prompted the disapproving attitude held by adults. Search as they might through the corpus of English literature, they could not have found two such spotless, virtuous, moral and right-thinking characters.

Perhaps it was this: that at the time, we were receiving the dregs of a prejudice that had been developed in a previous generation against “yellow journalism”; and that our pulps were the descendants of a long line of lower-class literature, much of it salacious, all of it beneath the attention of the better element.

For our pulps were no instant phenomenon of the period but, instead, the outgrowth of a fiction form now 130 years old.

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When titles for paperbacked books hawked by chapmen who peddled shoelaces and pincushions still ran to such intriguing lengths as: “*The Affecting History of Sally Williams; afterwards Tippling Sally. Shewing how she left her father's*

house to follow an officer, who seduced her; and how she took to drinking, and at last became a vile prostitute, died in a hospital and was dissected by the surgeons. Tending to shew the pernicious effects of dram drinking," there was an experiment begun in a more flexible medium for popular reading than the books—the newspaper. When all the available news was quick and easily disposed of in a page or two, it was natural that other attractions should be used to fill space. Accordingly, fictional narratives were tried with instantaneous success.

The outgrowth of this was the family story paper, an institution that persisted until the turn of this century. The story papers secured and kept readership by offering "plenty of sensation and no philosophy," as Robert Bonner—publisher of one of the most famous and long-lived of the publications—described their approach. In the guise of uplifting and edifying the public about conditions at large, these prepulsters gleefully exploited the seamy and vice-ridden side of life.

It was but a step from fictionalizing the lives of actual people to the creation of fictional beings who would be passed off as real. The Old Sleuth, who first appeared in *The Fireside Companion* in 1872, was the direct sire of all the thousand private eyes whose legal depredations have flourished in print, on the air and on the screen, ever since. He was thought for many years to be a genuine living person, but when his creators began running as many as three different installment adventures in each weekly paper, the public caught on. No mere human could possibly accomplish in one lifetime the deeds attributed to The Old Sleuth.

However, no one doubted the existence of the next pulp hero: Buffalo Bill. With his appearance, the younger generation of boys—untempted by aged detectives and love-stuff—began to devour the story papers; and a tradition was born. General disapproval was followed by pulpit blasts, confiscation, hide-tannings and stern talkings-to. But the kids had found an idol.

Buffalo Bill is inextricably entwined with the legend of his creator, Ned Buntline, otherwise known as Edward Zane Carroll Judson, whose real life was far more fraught with peril and adventure than William Cody's ever was.

Judson: ran away to sea at the age of 11; served in the Seminole War in Florida; was lynched by an incensed mob in Nashville, Tennessee, after he'd killed a jealous husband in a duel; escaped the lynching when the rope broke; organized a riot in New York City and was jailed for a year; fought with the Union Army in the Civil War, emerging as a colonel with 20 bullets in his body; then went West to roam the untamed land with Wild Bill

Hickok, Texas Jack and a youngster named William Frederick Cody.

Cody wore his golden hair at shoulder length, sported a goatee, fringed jacket and wide-brimmed cowboy hat, and was altogether the living prototype of the fictional Western hero "Ned Buntline" had in mind. Assisted by Cody's grandiloquent tales of hunting expeditions and Indian battles, plus a recounting of his ceaseless efforts to avenge the death of his father in the Bloody Kansas struggle, Buntline started the most popular series of stories America had ever read. Not that E. Z. C. Judson was a tyro seeking inspiration. He was, at the time of his "Know Nothing" Party riot in New York, one of the best paid writers in the world. But his own experiences were, so he thought, commonplace. He was certain that realistic yarns of the new frontier would eclipse any personal reminiscences he could get into print. So he decided to "immortalize" Buffalo Bill.

The great cowboy's saga began irresistibly, setting a style which seldom varied:

Ned Buntline's Great Story !!

Buffalo Bill

*The King of the Border Men!
The wildest and truest story
I ever wrote.*

**By NED BUNTLINE
(E. Z. C. Judson)**

CHAPTER I

"An oasis of green wood on a Kansas prairie—a bright stream shining like liquid silver in the moonlight—a log house built under the limbs of great trees—within this home, a happy group. This is my first picture.

"Look well on the leading figure in that group. You will see him but once, yet on his sad fate hinges all the wild and fearful realities which are to follow, drawn to a very great extent, not from imagination but from life itself . . ."

Buntline goes on to describe the family at its evening devotions. Then, suddenly, there is the sound of hoof-beats. A cry: "Hallo—the house!" Father Cody opens the door. He is greeted by the jeers of Southern sympathizers and the taunts of "Colonel M'Kandlas"—who levels his pistol and fires! Father Cody, good husband and outstanding Christian, clutches at his chest and falls dead before his horrified family. Then:

"If them gals was a little older—but never mind, boys, this will be a lesson for the sneaks that come upon the border—let's be off, for there's

plenty more work to do before daylight!’ continued the wretch, turning the head of his horse to ride away.

“‘Stop!’

“It was but a single word—spoken, too, by a boy whose blue eyes shone wildly in a face as white as new-fallen snow and full as cold—spoken as he stood erect over the body of his dead father, weaponless and alone.

“Yet that ruffian, aye, and all of his mad wreckless crew, stopped as if a mighty spell was laid upon them.

“‘You, Jake M’Kandlas, have murdered my father! You, base cowards, who saw him do this dark deed, spoke no word to restrain him. I am only Little Bill, his son, but as God in Heaven hears me now, I will kill every father’s son of you before the beard grows on my face!’”

“Little Bill” soon became big Bill, and in weekly installments held the nation captive as he sought vengeance, killed buffalo, scouted the plains, led the Cavalry to victory after victory, and dueled with the fiercest Indian chiefs. He was the bravest man on earth and the most exciting figure in all of literature—to small-fry, anyway.

His popularity continued for many years, carried on after Judson’s death by an equally improbable writer named Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, who had fought with Lee and Juárez. But after a while Street & Smith—then, as now, the leading pulp publishers—decided that Westerns were on the wane. So they began to think of other ways to tap the pockets of youngsters.

Although entertainments were not omnipresent, as they are today, loose coin was in correspondingly short supply. Accordingly, it took a solid jolt on the cover of a magazine (the natural development of the story papers) and a substantial dose of interior escape to effect the transfer of a week’s spending money from knickers to newsstand vendors.

Nick Carter was the answer.

He first appeared as the protégé of “Seth Parker, the old detective” (a not-too-subtle revival of *The Old Sleuth*) in a story written by John Russell Coryell. Ormond Smith, at that time head of the Street & Smith firm, liked the idea of a young detective, and assigned Frederick van Rensselaer Dey to do a series featuring Nick Carter. It was an immediate sensation.

The masthead of *The Nick Carter Weekly* portrayed a clean-cut collar-ad youth in the center of the page, surrounded by sketches of “Nick Carter in various disguises”: a queued Chinese laborer; a monocled fop; a gray-haired grandmother; a straw-

chewing, bearded rube; a top-hatted industrialist puffing a cigar; and a toothy Negro. It was plain that Carter was a master of the art of changing appearance. He carried paints, droopy mustaches and wigs at all times, and could become another person faster than Clark Kent turns into Superman. Unlike the shamus we know in current literature, Nick disdained alcohol, tobacco and sex. Yet, in the true traditions of his craft, he encouraged the perpetration of mayhem upon his person, suffering as many head-cloutings, jaw-smashings, waylayings and maimings as his descendant, Mike Hammer.

When we consider that the writers who filled the pages of our favorite crime-laden paperbacks were brought up, most of them, on Nick Carter, we can understand the near inflexibility of the *stalwart, high-principled hero enmeshed in violent situations* formula. It carried the first recognizable private eye to peaks of popularity even higher than those attained by Buffalo Bill.

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Most of the out-and-out sensationalism to which educators and clergymen objected in the 19th Century was contained not in the Street & Smith pulps but in the physically similar dime novels. Beadle & Adams, publishers, clothed their little publications in orange covers, but the content was usually “yellow.”

Within this form one of America’s best-known, least-talented and most fondly remembered authors made his mark. Horatio Alger, Jr., wrote 119 books (or, as a critic commented, “one book, rewritten 118 times”) about poor boys who persevered throughout adversity and gained wealth and fame as their reward. There was nothing in these morality tales to shock the mildest country minister (indeed, Alger was a sometime Unitarian minister himself), yet they were frowned upon and, probably as a result, sold an almost unbelievable 250,000,000 copies.

In his college days, Alger was known as “Holy Horatio,” generally because of his starchy, abstemious nature and specifically because one night he refused to cooperate with his landlady, who had walked into his room stark naked and asked him to join her in a tango. A subsequent trip to Paris, however, fired him with worldly ideas and experiences—he wrote in his diary: “I was a fool to have waited so long. It is not nearly so vile as I had thought”—and he returned to the United States willing, if not downright eager, to sample earthly joys. Of course, as everyone knows who has ever brushed with his literary corpus, no trace of this moral liberation ever found its way into the Horatio

Alger, Jr., books, except as illustrations of the evils young men must struggle to avoid. These illustrations gobbled up dimes from the nation's youth and were passed along in secret delight like so many pornographic pictures.

With the appearance of Frank Merriwell, the Street & Smith company assumed unchallenged leadership of the adventure-fiction market. Merriwell—a Yale student, as everyone knows; or, more properly, the Yale student—was created by Burt L. Standish, in the late 1890s. Standish's experience with the university he was to immortalize consisted of his attendance at a half-dozen football games and a single stroll around the campus; yet he made Yale so real and Merriwell so believable that enrollment at the college increased by hundreds.

The literary quality of these stories was regrettably low, though not so low as in the Alger epics. The late George Jean Nathan actually claimed to enjoy them and often beat the drum for a return to those simple values. He regarded the absence of a Standish biography as the most glaring and insupportable omission in American literary history. "His readers numbered millions," Nathan complained. "For one who read Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* or *Tom Sawyer*, there were 10,000 who read Standish's *Frank Merriwell's Dilemma* or *The Rescue of Inza* and *Frank Merriwell at Yale* or *The Winning Last Quarter-Mile*. The little candy and cigar stores of that day, the chief distributing centers of the Standish opera, had longer lines of small boys with nickels in their hands every Friday than Barnum's or Forepaugh's circus could ever boast . . ."

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Pawnee Bill, John L., Jr., Clif Faraday of Annapolis, Mark Mallory of West Point and Diamond Dick were the heroes who followed Merriwell. They were uniformly antiseptic types, but they assumed a degree of importance to America's mass readership that no literary creation of recent times has been able to duplicate. For years they rode tall, shrugging off the bullets of Wrongdoers and the slings and arrows of critics; but they could not defend themselves against their greatest enemy: Growing Sophistication. One by one they bit the dust. *Buffalo Bill* was the last to fall, and a sad day it was. He was laid to rest in 1919 and mourned on the masthead of the zippy, modern magazine that did him in.

It is that magazine—*Western Story Magazine*—*Formerly New Buffalo Bill Weekly*—which forms our direct link with the past.

For more than 30 years, *Western Story Magazine* (the Buffalo Bill subtitle was soon dropped) appeared twice a month. Most of us cut our teeth on it. While *Soldiers of Fortune*, *Scientific Detectives* and *Yellow Menaces* provided aperitif, appetizer and dessert, the changeless saga of the American West was our main course. Every kid on every block dreamed of being a sheriff, and "Cowboys" was the national game.

Thanks in large part to a moody, tortured genius called Frederick Schiller Faust. We didn't know him by that name. We knew Max Brand, George Owen Baxter, Martin Dexter, Evin Evans, David Manning, Peter Dawson, John Frederick, Pete Morland. But they were all Faust, the most incredibly prolific—and unquestionably the best—pulp writer in the business.

His almost innumerable stories were usually variations of the primitive Vengeance theme, yet they had—and have—an unaccountable freshness and vitality. Unaccountable, that is, until one recalls that Brand/Faust had the instincts, if not the skill, of a serious author. For pulp fiction in general, and his own in particular, he had supreme contempt. He never read over his first drafts. He never saw the magazines in which his work appeared; indeed, the first rule of his house was that no adventure magazine of any description would be tolerated on the premises. He genuinely hated "Max Brand" and the rest of the pseudonymous stable. Yet he was the absolute master of the craft, and of every other form of writing except that which he most respected. At serious prose and poetry he was, fortunately for us and tragically for him, a failure. His occasional slim volumes, published under his real name, were mostly attic-scented, bloodless, pedestrian, worthless. And he knew it, and it broke his heart.

Tiring of the pulps' low pay, Brand moved on to the slicks where he was equally successful. Warner Brothers paid him \$3000 a week. MGM gave him a fortune for creating *Dr. Kildare* (currently a television series). He made more money than any other writer of that period, yet he was consistently broke. "It costs me \$70,000 a year just to survive," he commented at a time when \$4000 was considered a good annual wage.

Seeking refuge from his disappointment, Faust became an alcoholic and, in 1938, was sent to Italy to die. Instead of dying, he fell in love with the country and developed into one of its champion tennis players. He took up horseback riding. He bought an Isotta-Fraschini and earned the sobriquet "The Fast American." But all the while, he continued to crank out his pulp fiction. He had to. Compelled to find an excuse for the failure that, he

knew, would eventually crush him, he bought a palatial villa in Florence, staffed it with servants and tutors, and kept his standard of living stratospherically high. He was still the King of the Pulps when the war broke out. Deeply affected, and yearning for some real adventure, Faust—aged 51—managed to talk the American Army into giving him a set of war correspondent credentials. His first assignment, on the front lines, was his last. Fifth man over the top, he was cut down by enemy fire; and so he died, clutching an olive branch, in the Italian hills he loved.

By a mysterious coincidence, the pulps themselves began to cough out their life at about this time, as though the passing of their king had left them blind and weak and unable to survive.

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We heard no death knell. As we stretched out on the lawn swing with a copy of *Spicy Detective Stories*, we heard only the *whisssk-whisssk-whisssk* of the rotating sprinklers, the distant rumble of streetcars and a voice crying “*Ole ole ocean freeeee!*” And, of course, Dan Turner’s gun, sneezing *kachow-kachow!* The world was a small, quiet place for most of us then, and it was for that reason, as much as for any other, that we escaped into the vast, noisy world of the pulps.

They were at the crest of their popularity just before and during the war years. Hundreds of titles offered an almost unbelievable variety of reading experiences to the American teenager, and most were well within the boundaries of good taste—the same boundaries over which our television networks leap casually every hour of every day in this age.

It must be admitted, however, that only those who actually bothered to read the magazines could be expected to understand this. Their physical appearance suggested nothing short of mortal sin. Something about the quality of the paper—so exciting to kids—summoned up, for adults, visions of brothels, public toilets, French postcards and petty crime. The illustrations, generally of a low order of craftsmanship, depicted scenes of extreme violence. But it was the covers, more than anything else, that turned the grownup world against the pulps. To say that they were lurid is to say that the Atlantic Ocean is wet. They were fantastic. In a way unknown to me, and unduplicated by artists in any other field, those masters of the brush managed to work sex, action, horror, terror, beauty, ugliness, virtue, sin, and a dozen other elements, into every picture they painted. Their goal was to tempt the newsstand browser into parting with cash, and this goal they achieved with complete success. But they

achieved a great deal more. Most pulp addicts were foxy enough to know that the cover of a magazine seldom bore the slightest connection to the fiction it was supposed to illustrate, that, indeed, the “backs” were simply come-ons for saps and suckers; yet we revered those pulp artists and regarded their contribution, and their position, as being equal to those of the writers.

Consider a typical *Spicy Detective Stories* cover. This rich *oeuvre* portrayed a leggy blonde whose pink-and-white skin was so dewy fresh as to be palpable. Clad only in ripped black-lace panties, she clutched another garment to her meticulously rendered, melon-heavy breasts, concealing little of either. Her face was a mask of fear, and with good reason: a blue-black automatic thrust toward her like a finger of doom.

Needless to say, no such scene was to be encountered in the lead story (titillatingly titled *Murder in the Harem*). In this classic “dirty magazine,” confiscated on sight by all parents and custodians, sex was treated with the slightly leering but profound innocence of the neighborhood know-all. The authors, chief among them Robert Leslie Bellem, larded their narratives with suggestive dialog and took care to describe “her silk-clad, lissome body,” “a flash of white thigh,” “breasts straining at their silken prison,” etc., but the truth is that a diet of reading restricted to *Spicy Detective Stories* would do nothing to dissuade one from belief in the theory of the stork. The same holds for such other “legendary” pulps as *Spicy Western*, *Spicy-Adventure* and *Breezy Stories*. They were not so much read as examined, or searched, for “hot parts”; and if the editors had been thoughtful enough to print the mildly erotic sections in a different color, they would have saved us all a lot of time.

There were three genuinely erotic pulp magazines, but their disguises were so excellent that the authorities didn’t catch on for months. *Horror Stories*, *Terror Tales* and *Marvel Tales* would all curl your hair, even today. Ostensibly science fiction-supernatural publications, they packed more honest perversion into one page than one could find in Tijuana’s most notorious den of iniquity. Plain, ordinary, garden-variety sex was eschewed. In its place, we were given flagellation, sadism, orgies, homosexuality, pederasty, and a host of diversions that popped the eyes from the sweaty heads of teenagers throughout the country. A typical story concerned the evil mistress of a castle who, out of ennui, staged impressive parties, during which she would drug her guests, take them to a dungeon, clap them in irons and torture them to death. Lush young girls were stripped naked, after

which operation their hostess would approach with a branding iron and burn the nipples from their breasts.

Our attention to these magazines could fairly be described as rapt; however, they perished in due course, and I believe we were all just a bit relieved.

Relief did not attend the passing, though, of our legitimate friends. *Argosy*—the *Argosy* of the six-part serials, of Zagat and Verrill and Brand, of Mongol hordes and incredible sea voyages—staggered on awhile, then turned into a slick; and we mourned. *Doc Savage* left us. *The Shadow*, too. One by one, the great magazines ceased publication.

The last survivors were the best and the favorites: the science-fiction and fantasy magazines. They had everything the other pulps had, and more. The grand old advertisements were there. Sherwin Cody counseled us to speak better English from the pages of *Amazing Stories*. We continued to read of the near-tragedies averted by the use of Eveready flashlight batteries. The kindly, gray-haired man who proclaimed: “I talked with God! Yes, I did—actually and literally!” was with us; we could still Find Out Today how we could train at home to become radio technicians; we could buy Beautiful Lifelike Photo Rings; Learn Music as Easy as A-B-C; grace our faces with good-looking glasses for \$2.95; insure our whole family for \$1 a month; cure our piles with Page’s Pile Tablets; or learn the Mysteries of Life by joining the Rosicrucians.

Most important, we could still thrill to high adventure—in a day when high adventure was becoming suspect—with the wonderful space operas offered by most of the publications. For the junior Scientists and Astronauts among us, there was *Astounding Science Fiction*, a no-nonsense magazine featuring the extrapolations of such sober and serious men as A. E. Van Vogt, Robert Heinlein, John W. Campbell, Lester del Rey and George O. Smith. For the rest of us, either too young or too unsophisticated—or perhaps insufficiently bright—to enjoy *Astounding*, there were *Fantastic Adventures*, *Startling Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Super Science*, *Captain Future*, *Unknown Worlds*, *Weird Tales* and—for the real, dyed-in-the-wool pulp hounds—*Planet Stories*, which featured Westerns, pirate sagas and Viking tales, all set on planets other than Earth. The heavies in *Planet* were invariably BEMs, or Bug Eyed Monsters, the heroines invariably “lush” or “generously proportioned,” the heroes invariably “bronzed and muscular,” the prose invariably atrocious and exciting.

Amazing and its sister publication *Fantastic Adventures* led the field, with *Startling* and *Thrilling Wonder* close behind. Such was the appeal of their product that thousands of kids formed fan clubs, issued mimeographed and hectographed magazines, and developed into a vast but highly insular phenomenon known as *Sf-fandom*. To belong, one had merely to be something of a nut, so membership was all but unlimited. The object of *Sf-fandom* was avowedly the dissemination of inside information about and the glorification of science fiction, but in actuality it was a correspondence club for social misfits, most of whom devoted more time to the reading of letters from fellow fans, or *fen* (as their own plural had it), than to the professional magazines. It gave teenagers a rare and exciting sense of *belonging* and from its ragtag ranks have come many of today’s most successful authors and scientists, so it may be judged to have been one of the happier outgrowths of the pulp craze.

The authors we venerated, when we were not corresponding with new friends, were of a vanished breed: the loving hacks. They wrote for money (averaging two cents per word in the s-f heyday), but it was not their only goad. Pulpsters like Edmond Hamilton, Leigh Brackett, Don Wilcox, David Wright O’Brian, William P. McGivern, Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, August Derleth, William Lawrence Hamling, Ray Palmer and Manley Wade Wellman wrote pulp fiction primarily because they had a hell of a good time doing it; and however the quality of their stories might have varied, the enthusiasm with which they set those stories down remained consistently high. Whether they wrote of X-ray spectacles or time travel or beast kings of Jupiter, they wrote with genuine gusto.

Until 1950.

1950 may be taken, loosely, as the year the pulps gave their last kick. A few lingered on, twitching, then they, too, expired, and the pulps became another odd part of our heritage—fondly remembered by millions of ex-kids who never asked to grow out of those summer twilights.

It is easy to sneer at the crumbling yellow magazines, and at the people responsible for them; but we should salute instead, for we owe the pulps an incalculable debt, of gratitude. They stimulated, prodded and jostled our young minds; they broadened our narrow horizons; they gave us a splendid outlet for our natural pent-up violence. Though attacked as propagators of delinquency, it is doubtful that the pulps ever led so much as one youngster astray; indeed, a glance at the criminal records of the day will reveal that the true

delinquents seldom read anything but the fine print on cigarette packages. Parents' forebodings notwithstanding, the pulps helped us in many ways, strengthened and comforted us, led us to an appreciation of literature and prepared us, if not for life, then at least for dreams.

Now they are gone, echoed dimly in the novels of Ian Fleming, their corpses dancing grotesquely in the flickering light of the television tube, but,

truly, gone, and forever. Nor can they be brought back.

Still . . . if you listen very hard, very late at night, perhaps you will hear, distantly, the clang of swords, the drum of hoofs, the rat-tat-tat of tommy guns and the spine-chilling laugh of a man they called The Shadow. I know I do.



PLAYBILL

...
The words "Horror!" "Terror!" and "Thrilling!" are as much a part of the ad game as the three-martini lunch. But they are also the names of a few of *The Bloody Pulps*, those likably lurid dime novels for which whole forests were leveled and upon which a whole generation of American youth was hair-raised. Thumbing his way back through the pulps' ragged pages and rugged prose, Charles Beaumont, our master of memorabilia, now treats us to another of his nostalgic tours of the not-so-long ago. When not digging into the past for *PLAYBOY*, Beaumont has found time to write 70 television plays and 10 full-length motion pictures. Among his TV credits are scripts for *Thriller*; *Dick Powell Theater*; *Have Gun, Will Travel* and *Twilight Zone* (for which he, Rod Serling and *PLAYBOY* contributor Richard Matheson shared an Emmy). His movies include *The Brothers Grimm*; *The Intruder*; *Burn, Witch, Burn*; and several others awaiting release.



BEAUMONT