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The Classic Era Of American Pulp Magazines



Synopsis

The period between the World Wars—the era of sexual liberation, Prohibition, the rise of organized crime, and the Great Depression—was also the classic era of American pulp magazines, the subject of this fascinating volume. Pulps, with their lurid color covers depicting the thrills of sex and violence, and with stories to match inside, fuelled America's dreams and nightmares. For a few cents they offered everything young men wanted: sex, action, adventure. But they also fostered the talents of some of the greatest popular writers of the century—Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, and Dashiell Hammett, among others—and virtually invented the genres of science fiction and hard-boiled crime. From the cheap thrills of the “hot” and “spicy” pulps and the sexual sadism of the “shudder” pulps to the weird worlds of the fantasy, sci-fi, and horror pulps, this book displays their art and tells their history, capturing the original magazines in all their sleazy, sensational glory.

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Customer Reviews

Peter Haining (The Fantastic Pulps) pays homage to the sensation-packed, nickel and dime publications that brought the "stuff of dreams" to millions of ordinary people from the 1920s to the '40s in The Classic Era of American Pulp Magazines. Numerous cover illustrations and sketches culled from Haining's personal collection of pulps complement a running narrative that chronicles the inception and expansion of the mass-produced magazines. From "hot and spicy" pulps to sci-fi

and crime pulps, Haining details the trends that evolved to accommodate the times and notes the authors such as Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov and Edgar Rice Burroughs who made their mark writing for the pulps. With its tantalizing story excerpts and luscious artwork, this volume is an essential collector's item for pulp aficionados and sci-fi, horror and fantasy fans. (Chicago Review Press, \$39.95 240p ISBN 1-55652-389-0) Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

The golden age of American pulp magazines has been the subject of numerous retrospectives, often emphasizing the cover art, but this British import provides an excellent overview of all aspects of the topic. Haining, a pulp collector and unabashed fan whose lively prose reflects his enthusiasm, isolates the three key ingredients in pulp stories--action, adventure, and sex--and traces how these elements were exploited in various genres: hard-boiled mystery, fantasy, science fiction, horror, and spicy romance. He traces the publishing history of each genre, with equal time given to the notable authors, the superb cover artists, and the cultural phenomena that created a receptive audience for the pulp worldview. And, of course, the pages are filled with well-produced, nicely printed reproductions of those fabulous covers (see front cover of this issue). Eminently browsable, this delicious volume will be a welcome treat for pulp-era devotees. Bill Ott Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Great book with tons of awesome art.

Peter Haining has published a huge number of volumes on a variety of topics, which tend to be both well illustrated and very carelessly researched. This latest addition to the stack unfortunately follows that pattern. First the good stuff: the book offers a large number of well-reproduced covers from a wide variety of pulps. The images are photographs (two are out of focus slightly), and so do not have the problems seen in several similar recent books which had electronically-scanned covers displaying a color palette nothing whatsoever like the actual covers. Now for the bad part. The text is mainly just a description of particular magazines which happen to be in the author's personal collection. Where the text departs from what is really just a catalog of the collection, to provide background on publishers, specific titles and authors, the material is so riddled with errors as to be of very limited use and reliability. So much of the text is clueless, every reader will have his favorite (and different) gaffe. Mine is the reference (p. 203) to "famous American space artist Chester Bonestall." He's apparently not as famous as I thought! To summarize the contents: Chapter 1 provides a confused account of the origins and types of pulp magazines. Chapter 2 is devoted to

the very-soft-porn pulps usually sold from under the tobacco shop counter. Chapter 3 deals with detective, crime and gangster pulps. Chapter 4 covers the "spicy" pulps and their imitators. Chapter 5 introduces the weird fantasy pulps, of which the best and best known were WEIRD and UNKNOWN. Chapter 6 surveys the "shudder" pulps which featured heavy doses of sadism and torture. Chapter 7 fairly casually dips into the huge sea of science-fiction pulps. Finally, chapter 8 shows us a little bit of the little-known world of British pulps and pulp publishing. (About half the space actually is devoted to paperbacks rather than pulps.) Notable complete omissions from the book are the most popular pulp genre, westerns (perhaps half of all pulp titles at peak), and the justice-figure pulps such as THE SHADOW, DOC SAVAGE and the SPIDER, which are the best remembered pulps today. Also largely ignored are the general fiction titles, such as BLUE BOOK, ARGOSY and ADVENTURE. With such omissions, the present book cannot be considered very valuable even as a pictorial survey of the pulp era. Buy it for the cover reproductions and you won't be too disappointed. But if you try to read the text, you're in for dismay and frustration.

The colorfully covered, cheaply printed pulp magazine of the 1920s and 30s grew out of the 19th-century dime novel and served as the forerunner of the comic books and paperback novels of today. In its heyday, pulp magazines were a staple of popular culture that offered every genre of readership the thrills, adventures, and entertainments they craved -- often to the dismay of parents, teachers, and clergy! Virtually creating the now popular literary genres as science fiction and the hard-boiled private eye mystery, these magazines were the incubators of such American literary talents as Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Dashiell Hammett, and a legion of others. An outstanding recommendation for personal, academic, and community library collections, *The Classic Era Of American Pulp Magazines* tells the complete story of these colorful pulps and those that wrote and published them, with a wealth of colorful cover art giving today's readers an accurate sense and taste of what the glory years of pulp magazines had to offer their enthusiastic readers.

A somewhat personal account at times of the editor's interest in pulp magazines. He mentions when he first saw them in Woolies in the 50s - saying they were used as ballast in ships, then sold cheaply. That is whacky, but good for him, after scoring a *Weird Tales*. He goes through various different types, spicy, detective, fantasy, shudder, hot, etc. Also, being a pom he talks briefly about the magazines there, especially when the yank imports were banned, and some of the artists. That is where a heavy focus of this book is, the artwork. He does detail some of the publishers, who put

them out, the strategies they used, etc., but also talks a lot about the artwork and styles used as far as what they could and could not get away with as American became more and more puritanical moving into the 50s. He deliberately ignores the superheroes, or the major variety, mentioning a couple in passing like the Black Bat and the Crimson Mask. Nothing much on the Lone Ranger or various Westerns either, or major science fiction magazines. So partly interest, partly what has been covered already drove his editorial decisions, presumably. People who like those covers will like it, hardcore pulp historians maybe wouldn't be so thrilled, but would still be interested somewhat. 3.5 out of 5

Your "helpful" votes are appreciated. Thanks. As a non-artist, it's hard to write a review of an art book, but I know what I like. So here's a non-expert's opinion. This book is well worth the price. It is full of color covers of pulp magazines from the 1930s through the 1950s. I've owned it for many years, and I still love browsing through it. I've copied a couple of them and hung them on my wall. Also, if you don't already know about Bud Plant, then also check out his site. You'll go broke ordering from it. What a wonderful collection classic illustrations! Check out my download pictures.

Obviously the politically incorrect covers are the first attraction. You can't ignore the cultural significance of the covers and thus, if you are a teacher of semiotics or visual interpretation, I can't think of a richer source. Congrats to the publishers for printing such a glorious book. For those more interested in what's between the covers, Haining gives insightful critical analysis of the different genres. A great gift for anyone; a wonderful coffee table book for yourself. It's worth every penny.

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