This is the * First Issue * of what was, for a week at least, the distinctly ~~fan~~ phantom S^C^R^I^M^S^H^A^W (not to be confused with the Kipling title, which was "The Phantom Rick Sneary," of course) of Bill Blackbeard, pubbed on the ~~Ricks~~ Rex Rotary by the same bb @ Castle Splitrent as an apazine for the F 'n L of it on this eighth day of April, 1965 whew. Read it & queep...

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Susie saw a BEM. The BEM saw Susie. The BEM was choosy. His chews were Susie.

Burma Shave

* *

You were promised informative pieces in SCRIMSHAW. You are going to get them. The first, which follows, is called

THE OTHER COLLECTOR SNATCHED THE MIRACLE SCIENCE STORIES FROM UNDER MY VERY FINGERS

or

BEATEN TO A PULP

and will deal with a few basics in the popular magazine field which were once part of the elementary knowledge of every fan, but have become, largely because of the relative inaccessibility of pre-1950 prozines, either unknown or misunderstood by a sizable number of contemporary fans.

First of all, there seems to be an honest confusion in many fans' minds or computer units over the range of published material covered by the term, "pulp magazine." Some think that the term includes the true detective and confession magazines, as well as the stapled "mens" magazines (as opposed to the saddle-stitched variety).

Now while it is perfectly true that most of these magazines are printed on a "pulp" variety of paper, they are not pulps. The reason is simple. They print material that is loosely, very loosely, termed non-fiction. And to every editor, publisher, writer, reader and collector of the pulp era of American publishing, "pulp" referred wholly and exclusively to the all-fiction magazines of the time. (Conversely, the term, "slick," now largely obsolete, did really mean almost any magazine printed on slick, i. e., smooth-surface, paper, from Liberty to Sunset, from The Open Road For Boys to Vogue; to a writer, the term meant higher word rates and a step "up" from the pulps.)

Thus, the all-fiction "pulp" was a very specific kind of magazine. However widely differentiated the contents of these zines: science fiction, weird, fantasy, detective, mystery, air-war, sports, horror, terror, adventure, western, war, spicy, etc., etc., they were, like the paperback novels of today, nearly all the same general size and shape -- for convenience of printing by mass publishers and ease of display in stands three times as crowded as those of today.

Some were trimmed, and some were shaggy, but the general dimensions of all were six inches by ten inches; in the '20's they averaged 130 pages each; in the '30's (when the dime fiction magazine, and after a while, the "new" dime novel, were introduced), about 110 pp.

Held to this precise definition of content and size, there is only one honest-to-Munsey pulp magazine still extant: the quarterly Ranch Romances of Standard Publications, distributed almost entirely in the western states, with (alas) a diminishing circulation every year.

But even in the heyday of the pulps, there were dimensional sports. Such zines as Weird Tales, Blue Book (both in the '20's and in the '40's), Fantastic Adventures, and a majority of the Gernsback fiction zines, all of these 100% fiction titles and printed on undeniable pulpwood stock, appeared in a larger format at one time or another, approximating nine inches by twelve inches in size, and about 96 pages in thickness. These were included in the pulp catagory despite their size. And when the reduced, digest-size all-fiction zine was introduced by Street & Smith in the mid-'40's, the term embraced this variety as well.

Standard size overlooked, then, there are perhaps a dozen to two dozen pulps, all digest-size, still on the stands. Most of these, as we know, are science fiction. Of the others, a couple are sex-sadism, one is horror-fantasy, perhaps half a dozen are detective-mystery. And that's it.

For all practical purposes, the traditional pulp is gone, replaced in large part by the original paperback novel (as pioneered by Fawcett's Gold Medal Books circa 1950, when the big pulp chains were falling apart forever) -- but *only* the novel. The short story and novelette, as units of fiction, and for half a century the mainstay of the pulp, seem to have lost all appeal for the great bulk of the reading public, who presumably prefer a half-hour tv show to a half-hour story in a magazine, and would rather get their teeth into a good novel for serious reading -- if serious reading is to be undertaken at all.

In ten years certainly, possibly five, even the scattering of pulps we still have will be gone, absorbed in some fashion into paperback format, or simply vanished altogether. *EQ'sMM* will probably be the final holdout, but in the end, it too will succumb to the public's increasing inability to waste time looking for reading matter anywhere other than the paperback racks. And an era will have come, belatedly, to an end.

Except, possibly, for *Ranch Romances*...

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Where did the pulp come from, then? It did not, as many fans think, evolve from the dime and nickle novel at all. It did, in fact, co-exist with these for years, but was not regarded in that turn-of-the-century era as in any way similar to them.

The basic pulp format itself -- two columns of type on a fairly wide and high page (as opposed to most books' single column of type per page) was standard in general non-fiction magazines of the early and middle parts of the nineteenth century in both America and England. *Harper's* was the leading American magazine of this kind to first adopt the approximate height and breadth of what was later to be the standard pulp size, although numerous others, from *The Atlantic* to *Godey's Lady's Book* (which printed Poe), quickly followed suit.

This size for general non-fiction magazines was the norm when Frank Munsey, trying to find a way to rebuild the circulation for his *Golden Argosy* (a tabloid-size boy's fact & fiction magazine) hit upon the notion of an all-fiction periodical for men, emphasizing adventure, printed on inexpensive pulpwood paper at the outset, and run off on one of the larges presses handling the general non-fiction magazines of the period. Thus *Argosy*, after many fluctuations in title, content, and even paper stock, was born. And with it, the pulp magazine.

The dime novels, on the other hand, were approximately the size of the comic books of today (about an inch larger all around -- save in thickness -- than the pulp); nearly always, as their catagorical name implies, contained nothing but the text of one novel apiece; and were published to appeal largely to adolescents -- while the pulps' appeal was always, at least nominally, to adults. And when the dime novel metamorphosed into its pupal stage -- the first truly popular paper-back books in this country, mostly printed by Street & Smith in the early 1900's -- all physical resemblance to the pulps ceased (until, of course, the idea of the dime novel was revived by the pulp publishers themselves in the early '30's).

In its first thirty years, the pulp magazine carried none of the popular onus of the dime novel. The pulp fiction titles were considered amusing supplemental reading, excellent hammock

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fare for men or women (Munsey had broadened the appeal of some of his titles to reach feminine readers), and as reasonable a source for top-quality popular fiction as the big slicks of the time. Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. Rider Haggard, and Joseph Conrad all appeared in the same magazines, selected by the same editors, and read by the same public, and all were enjoyed for the common denominator of exotic adventure in their work.

The depression dealt a ruinous blow to this idyllic situation. It suddenly became difficult to sell fiction magazines at the old prices -- and to afford the writers whose names on the covers sold what magazines that were sold. Prices were slashed, contents cut, "name" authors abandoned, and lurid covers adapted by several publishers -- and one new publishing house which entered the field in the very early '30's, Popular Fiction, abandoned all standards of external taste.

Horror Stories, *Terror Tales*, *The Spider*, *Spicy Mystery*, *Detective*, *Western* and *Adventure* (a jaunty set of four), became the "typical" popular fiction pulp magazine for most people, and all pulp magazines suffered an according decline in reputation. Many fans who could have bought *Amazing* or *Wonder* or *Weird* in the late '20's with no more than a curious glance by parents, found in the '30's that the most obviously staid science fiction magazine was transformed by parental eyes into a counterpart of *Torrid Thuggee Tales* and castigated accordingly.

Still, the desperate need for diversion in the depression years and later in the war years kept the pulps selling despite their increasingly cheap appearance and precipitate decline in quality of contents. The futile attempt of one or two publishers, such as Street & Smith, to reverse this trend with attractive magazines and a high level of material in both fiction and illustration, only underscored the approach of the end.

This came, of course, once the war was over and the combination of the new household idol of tv with a returned GI orinted by tens of thousands of Army Overseas paperbacks to think in terms of single-subject books and fiction made the basically unaltered pulp look like one of the most indisputably dispensable items around.

It was dispensed with quickly. Except for the science-fiction titles, the five years between 1945 and 1950 saw the demise or obvious imminent ruin of all the great pulp houses and their dozens of titles (a majority of which, unrevived, had been victims of wartime paper shortages), and the few remaining writers of any worth in the field, contacted by Gold Medal or Lion or Popular Library, got out of the sinking ship fast. With no sources for even readable fiction, no rates to pay writers even if they could get them, and no reader interest, there was nowhere for the pulps to go but away.

Which is where they went...

(The foregoing has been, of course, a very sketchy and superficial discourse on the pulps. Despite the general truth of the trends described, the 1930's was in many ways, for many fans, the Golden Age of the pulps -- and the same Popular Fiction Publishing Company which tarred so many innocent zines with their lurid brush was responsible in great part for this, with their superb *Dime Detective Magazine* -- which launched Raymond Chandler at his best -- their even better *Detective Tales*, which gave John D. MacDonald his first leg up; their fabulous *G-8 & His Battle Aces* and their unforgettable and gorgeously-written (if almost entirely psychopathic) *Spider*. To those of us who grew up in those years, the pulp size was ideal, the format and illustrations an integral part of the whole, and no matter how high the quality of the fiction sold in paperback today, the special magic the newsstand had for us then is gone forever today -- the pathetic rearguard of digest-size zines left today more an irritating reminder of this than an authentic remainder.)