

Astounding Hero Tales

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

Astounding Hero Tales is a collection of short stories, all of which are of the Pulp Fiction style found in the pulps from the 1930s and 1940s. From classic pulp writers to contemporary writers, each story is an action packed Pulp Adventure.

Hugh B Cave writes the forward to the book, and it's a rambling walk through the history of the Pulps dropping names left and right. If you ever wanted to start of list of authors and titles to go after the forward is a good start, and reminds the reader that just because the pulps stopped publishing around World War Two doesn't mean the writers stopped. A like he says at the end of it: You just can't keep a good thing down.

Like the pulp stories of old each of these tales is fast paced, even when they aren't action packed they don't slow the story down, any exposition is short, and the bad guys are bad guys and most of the time know it. And even when the good guys aren't so nice you immediately know they're the good guys. It's the kind of story that grabs you and runs down the plot with a train, and all of it very fun.

All of the stories are previously unpublished, so this isn't a rehashed collection, it's all never before read stories. And definitely worth the price on the cover.

Here's a very short synopsis of each story to pique your interest.

Death Was Silent, by Lester Dent. We follow private detective Hal Daine as he gets caught up in smuggling ring and tries to figure out just who is killing everyone with making a sound, while other people are in the room! The action in this one literally never stops.

The Mask Of Kukulcon, by Will Murray. Adam Dawn is a man that isn't quite human, but everyone vaguely remembers knowing him. He tracks down the thieves of an ancient artifact to a museum in Boston where assistant curator Eliese Drew is witness to events that she'll never quite be able to explain.

Two Fisted Crookback, by Steve Melisi. Proving that a street tough amateur boxer and Shakespear have a good deal in common.

Wolf Train West, by William Messner-Loebs. Two orphans running away to the wild west hop a train and come to find a little more than they bargained for. This one is one of my favorite stories in the book.

Godmother, by Steve Eller. This is a very strange tale, and while it never actually tells you who the

characters are you get a pretty good idea.

Missing Page, by Richard Dansky. This is a good old fashioned ghost story. Not a fast moving two-fisted action like many of the others in the book, but still an excellent tale.

Running Thunder, by John Helfers. This story answers the question of what a Royal Air Force Pilot, A Texas Rancher, Mexico, World War One and a Herd of Cattle all have in common. A fun ride through the desert at night.

Playback, by Patricia Lee Macomber. Court room drama with a twist, told from the eyes of the detective on the case. This one is a bit predictable, but still a good yarn.

A Lost City Of The Jungle, by Darrell Schweitzer. A tale recounted by an elderly gentleman in an adventurers club late at night. I think this story, of all of them, captures the romantic spirit of adventure the most.

It Came From The Swamp, by Ed Greenwood. A classic with the rugged hero, damsel in distress and the mad scientist. Complete with a twist in the end.

Slide Home, by David Niall Wilson. Baseball stories have a habit of catching the American Dream like no other sport, especially during the pulp era. And if you dream hard enough sometimes strange things happen. This is probably my favorite story in the whole collection, the sheer determination of the main character is astounding.

Out West, by John Pelan. During prohibition a group of small time thugs try to make the big times by heading west and taking over a small town, but this particular pulp is of the horror variety. This one has a particularly ironic ending.

Bandit Gold, by Thomas M. Reid. A classic tale of lost gold, Mexican bandits and Germans. A strait forward treasure hunt story, complete with a haunted city.

Kiss Me Deadly, by Weinberg. More zombies, more detectives, more gangsters. All the good stuff is in this story in spades.

The Forgotten Man, by Robin D. Laws. For a moment I thought the whole book would go past without a masked avenger of the night snuffing out the criminal elements with the roar from his .45s. Luckily it didn't, vengeance comes as death himself!

House Of Shadows, by Hugh B. Cave. This one is a little hard to categorize, perhaps a ghost story, or a love story. Either way, it's a fast paced little number that ends the book nicely.

I suppose if I could have asked for more, or something different, maybe a few more stories taking place in far off locations of the world. In most cases Mexico is about as estranged a location as you get. Maybe in Volume Two.

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