

Confession of a Series Book Collector

by David M. Baumann

Summer 2005

updated June 10, 2007

742 words

My entire collection of series books consists of about 600 volumes. I recall several years ago pulling *The Mystery of the Sultan's Scimitar* off my shelf and opening it with genuine sadness. At the time, it was the last series book I had collected that I had never read, and I felt that there just were no other series to attract me. "Newness" would never come again—only repetition.

Fortunately that feeling didn't last. Through the recommendations of friends and chance discoveries in used bookstores, I discovered other series and sets that interested me, and the chase was on. Some objects of search were lesser-known series with only a few books in them. The Bret Kings (1960-1964) are well written and illustrator Joe Beeler is one of the most skilled in the series book world.



Joe Beeler's illustration from Bret King, *The Mystery at Blizzard Mesa*, 1961

Where I had passed up the Leo Edwardses before, I gave them a second look and eventually covered two and half feet of shelf space with the Jerry Todds and Poppy Otts.

Issue 17, summer 1986, edition of the Review presented an article called “Brains Benton, the Last of the Best.” The article led me to that fine six-volume series (1959-1961), but I recently discovered that most of the stories in the 43-volume set of Three Investigator books (1964-1987) are more than creditable.

I had thought that the Christopher Cool series (1967-1969) had such a dated and dim-witted name that I never even considered reading it, but a friend pressed the first two volumes on me. I read them and liked them. Fortunately finding the six books in this series was easy and none of them was expensive.

Another friend gave me a duplicate of the second book in the Wynn and Lonny Racing Series (1975-1978). I’d never even heard of that set of six books, but *Road Race of Champions* was a fine story. With one exception, the other books in that series were also easy to find and inexpensive. The last book, *The Midnight Rally*, is scarcer than python gloves; it’s also not much in demand, but that doesn’t make it any easier to find. It took me six months to find that one. This series is especially interesting because it was the very last one put out by the Stratemeyer Syndicate.

I know collectors whose shelves bear five thousand, ten thousand, or even fifteen thousand volumes. Obviously they are acquainted with and collect far more series and related books than I have or am familiar with, but there are four sets of books I haven’t heard too many people mention, and have found without too much difficulty.

So if there is no chapter of Bookaholics Anonymous in your area, I suggest that you collect the thirty-six volumes of *The Teenage Library* (1946-1959) and the eleven *Boys’ Life* books of short stories (1963-1966). Most of these are readily available, inexpensive, and reward the reader who enjoys the best of a previous era’s juvenile books. These volumes feature short stories written in and for the youth of simpler times and clear values like justice, compassion, honesty, and wholesome adventure. They’re about sports, exploration, history, small town life, nature, mystery, and science. Science fiction buffs will enjoy the thirty-six books in the Winston series (1950s-early 1960s), as well as the juveniles by Robert A. Heinlein (1947-1963).

Now, I think, I am finally finished with collecting. I’ve thought that before and found I was wrong. This time, though, I really mean it. Check back with me in a year and see if I’m right.

P.S. Nearly two years later: Nope, I wasn’t done. In the past year the Ted Wilford series and the Mill Creek Irregulars have been recommended to me, and I’ve packed them onto my shelves and found both to be superb series. I also acquired

many of the Enid Blyton juveniles. Just a couple of days ago I made a great find in a local used bookstore: two early volumes in the Roy Blakeley series—in excellent condition in dust jacket for only six dollars each. Now I have to find a place for them in the Percy Keese Fitzhugh section of my hoard. I thought I would hold firm with my Fitzhughs with the Tom Slades, Westy Martins, Hal Keens, Skippy Dares, and a few single volumes.

<Sigh> These are all great reads. I need either more shelf space or more self-control.

#