

Sixty Issues of the Review

by David M. Baumann

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1,491 words

The Mystery & Adventure Series Review

Since *The Mystery and Adventure Series Review* first appeared in the summer of 1980, surely several thousand readers have perused the articles and features of the magazine. Only Fred knows the actual number, but my guess is that many hundreds have been regular subscribers for several decades, and fortunate is the aficionado who has a complete set. When the sixtieth issue arrived in my mailbox in March 2023, it suddenly struck me that an article on the *Review* would be fitting, to show appreciation for the peerless publication that has been such a joy for so many collectors of series books.



Early in my search for the scarce and pricey high-numbered Rick Brant, a contact at a bookstore suggested that I contact Fred Woodworth in Tucson, Arizona. He told me that Fred had produced an authorized and inexpensive reprint of *The Deadly Dutchman*. I wrote my first letter to Fred in October 1996, and that led to a highly rewarding friendship of now more than a quarter of century. In addition to sending me his reprint of *The Deadly Dutchman*, Fred

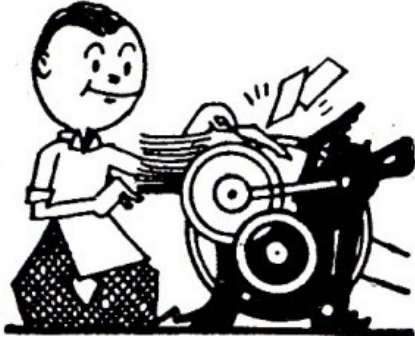


introduced me to his fanzine for series book collectors, *The Mystery and Adventure Series Review*. In my opinion, it is far and above the best publication of its kind on the subject; opinions in the Letters column show that that conviction is shared by many others.

My subscription began with sample issues, the earliest being number 24. I've forgotten now how I came into contact more than 25 years ago with an old man who lived on the

central coast of California, but he had been a subscriber to the *Review* from the beginning; he lent me his entire collection so that I could read the issues I didn't have. I am grieved that I have forgotten his name, but I will never forget his act of trust and kindness to another fan whom he knew only by name. Over the years, with a little effort and luck, I was able to fill out my collection from the first issue, and now have a complete set of original *Reviews*.

Fred uses no computer equipment of any kind in producing the *Review*. He typesets each issue, using beautifully-designed and ingeniously-constructed machines from seventy and more years ago; many of them he has rebuilt and maintains with



painstaking dedication. His magazines are designed with an eye to beauty for color, font style, illustrations, and readability. They are printed on decades-old offset presses. Fred collates the pages of each issue by hand, binds and trims them, and then mails them to his subscribers. I am sure that no modern printing method can come anywhere close to the artistry in the *Review*.

Looking at all issues at once, it is easy to see that the early issues of the *Review* had fewer pages than those that came later, and they came out frequently and regularly—four times a year in the beginning. Before long, however, this schedule became too demanding, and issues came out less frequently. Fred began to use color after a few years (utilizing a process he developed himself—see his column about it in issue # 27), and the quality of the appearance of the fanzine picked up in the 1990s. Then, beginning with issue #32 (Spring 1999), the dimensions of the magazine became larger, the quality ratcheted up again, and the page count increased. By that time the publishing schedule had changed from regular to being “published irregularly, as often as I can get it out.”

Moreover, the cost of receiving the magazine went from a set subscription price to a donation only. How often does anyone get a deal like that? I only hope that Fred's income from his hard work is worthy of his labor. (He wrote to me in 2018 to say that, after expenses, it comes to about forty cents an hour.)

The quality is unimpeachable. As Fred told me once, “High quality requires severe drudgery,” and I have known him to remake and reprint an entire page to fix a small error that few, if any, would notice. One can find typographical errors in the *Review*, but my guess is that there may be as many as three in all sixty issues. (Well, maybe a few more than three.) If one looks carefully, one can find many instances of creativity in the typesetting, such as words deliberately set “off balance” to make a point, shifting margins to appeal to the reader's eye, incredibly fine and detailed artwork from who knows what source(s), or font style and size that draw the eye. Many of these features are so subtle that they are only taken in subconsciously.

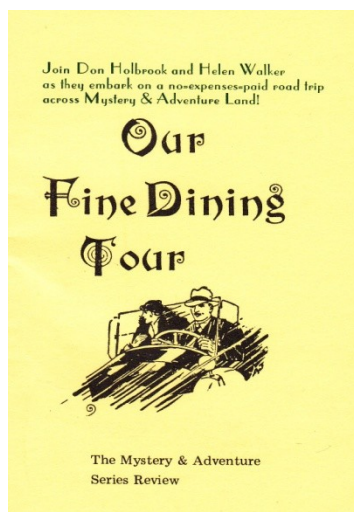
To prepare this article, I had the uplifting experience of going through my entire library of *Reviews* to note trends and write down figures to come up with a few statistics. It is hard to imagine a more enjoyable time for a die-hard series book collector and reader. After all, where else can you find an article called “Shooting Holes in Tires”? (See issue # 34.)

Here's what I came up with: In issues 1-60, there are 2,852 pages and 446 individual articles written by 55 authors. The number of series (or authors of series) addressed in those articles is 80. The four top-mentioned series are Rick Brant (35 articles), Ken Holt (33), the Hardy Boys (18), and Tom Quest (17). The series author featured in the most number of articles (14) is Capwell Wyckoff. Letters have been published from 378 individual correspondents.

Those who've written for the longest time and most often are Mark Brandau, John Cody, Peter Eipers, John Enright, Al Fick, Kingsley Hahn, Doug Harrison, Mark Johnson, Nick Klaus (who, at 35 letters, has had his published the most, beginning with issue #25), Tom Layesman, Larry Lisle (second in being published most frequently at 26 letters, beginning with issue #27), Bob Miller, Joe Orton, Richard Polt, John Rush, Mike Saavedra, Daniel Schroedl, Bob Weiss, Andrew Zerbe, and myself. Letters have come to Fred's P.O. Box from Japan, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, other parts of Europe, and other parts of the world.

Series book authors (or their connections) who've written are: Betty Cavanna (Connie Blair), Hal Goodwin (Rick Brant and more), Clemens Gretter (artist), Bill Hallstead (author of the original text of *The Secret of Wildcat Swamp*), Peter Harkins (Rick Brant and Biff Brewster), Cindy Walz (niece of Norvin Pallas), Evelyn Singer (Franklin Folsom's agent), Julie Tatham (Trixie Belden and Cherry Ames), and Charles Spain Verral (Brains Benton).

In addition to the articles, there are the regularly-appearing columns. Some of these were short-lived, others have been regular features from the earliest days. These are: From the Editor (appearing in every issue and covering hundreds of interesting topics from observations about series books, their authors, and a plethora of comments on a wide variety of topics about cultural trends), Hunting for Hidden Books by Kent Winslow (beginning with the first issue but skipping an issue now and then, on engaging topics like cuneiform writing, finding rare books in bookstores, and odd characters in series books); Buried Treasures (by Iris Lane, only appearing twice, on the topic of unusual and overlooked series); Series Subjects (by John Enright, appearing twelve times with reflections on odd facets of series books); Fine Dining



Department (eight entries by Don Holbrook and Helen Walker on dining experiences and recipes suitable for various series book settings); Book Notes (three columns by I. R. Ybarra on odd series book items); Getting Straight on Where it Was (nine columns about real locations mentioned in series books); and the Typographical Corner (22 columns on the details of classical typesetting and printing techniques).

As if all this wasn't enough to inform, engage, and entertain the readers, Fred also produced two Companion volumes. "Real Characters in Rick Brant" is a 28-page booklet with twelve essays on the Rick Brant series, most of which had previously appeared in the Review. Fred prepared and published it in 1998. "Our Fine Dining Tour" is a highly entertaining booklet published in 2002, claiming to be a

“no-expenses-paid” road trip by Don Holbrook and Helen Walker and featuring recipes that appear as the two go adventuring through Mystery & Adventure Land. Many but not all of the entries had previously appeared in the *Review*.

For coming on 43 years now, Fred has been preparing, printing, publishing, and posting the *Review* to fans all over the world. He has written millions of words, spent uncounted hours working alone in his workshop, and—along with the thanks of many readers—has faced repeated complaints from cranky readers and troubles from postal regulations and ever-increasing postage rates. He keeps going. Of all the letters published in the *Review*, maybe this one from Bob Miller is the one that hits the nail on the head.

Happy Faraway Days

Dear Fred: Whenever I get an issue from you, my mind goes back to very happy days. Growing up in the 1950s to early 1960s was wonderful. I had good parents and a roof over my head, a peaceful and secure world (at least in my mind) and a large number of boys' books to read. As long as I could hide out with a Hardy Boys, Ken Holt, Rick Brant or Tom Quest book, I was happy and content.

It was easy to lose myself in some faraway place or country with the boys. Even though the stories and plots are long forgotten, I can still remember the excitement of wanting to finish that next page or chapter and see how they got out of a particular predicament. Although there seemed to be enough Hardy Boys stories coming out, there never was sufficient Tom Quest or Rick Brant to read. Those were wonderful books and wonderful years in my life. Thanks for keeping those memories alive!

— Bob Miller, Alhambra Calif.

... thousands of letters like this, over the years, have been my main reason to keep going.