

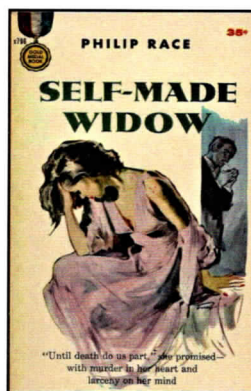
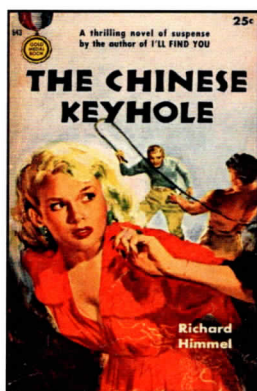
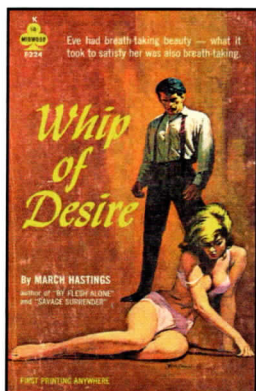
DAVID 'THE PREACHER' WILSON CHATS TO LEE GOLDBERG AND
JOEL GOLDMAN OF BRASH BOOKS AND CUTTING EDGE BOOKS

A BRASH ENDEAVOUR

Author's Note: I first became aware of Lee Goldberg when I discovered his wonderful books based on the popular television series **Monk**. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that Lee Goldberg has done much more than simply write books based on television programs. In fact, Lee has both written and produced television programs. His encyclopedic volume of **Unsold Television Pilots 1955-1989** is an interesting description of television history that was not to be. He has written a number of bestselling novels as well.

He continues to be active in writing fiction and his bestselling novel **Lost Hills** marked a grand entrance into realistic police procedurals that are every bit as good as Michael Connelly's **Harry Bosch** series. When he is not writing bestsellers or overseeing television production he works as the publisher of Brash books, which primarily publishes old gems of little-known or forgotten authors.

"We don't want potential readers to dismiss these stories as antiques from their grandfather's library. The goal is to draw a new generation of readers to these books."



David: How did you get into publishing?

Lee: This happened by, well, happenstance. All mystery writers have them – the cherished, often under-appreciated, out-of-print books that we loved and that shaped us as writers. They are the books that made an impression on me in my teenage and college years and still feel new and vital to me today. They are the books that I talk about to friends, thrust into the hands of aspiring writers, and that I wish I'd written. They are the yellowed, forgotten paperbacks I keep buying out of pure devotion whenever I see them in used bookstore--even though I have more copies than I'll ever need. I've been at this long enough that many of my own books have fallen out-of-print, too. But I brought them back in new, self-published Kindle and paperback editions and, to my surprise and delight, they sold extremely well. It occurred to me that if I could do it for my books, why couldn't I do the same thing for all those forgotten books that I love.

A little over six years ago, I started negotiating with the estate of an author (Ralph Dennis) whose books I greatly admired. Those books had sadly never achieved the wide readership and acclaim that they deserved. I was in the midst of those talks when, at a Bouchercon in Albany, I told my buddy Joel Goldman, a good friend, mystery writer, lawyer, and a successful self-publisher of his own backlist,

Oh, and of course the Cubans are again mentioned as the main supporters of the Surinamese uprising. De Villiers sure had it in for them. Has there ever been an **SAS Malko** novel without at least a cursory mention of them?

Malko 75 - The Widow of the Ayatollah

The German Malko #75 **DIE WITWE DES AYATOLLAH (The Widow of the Ayatollah)** is a translation of the French SAS 78 **LA VEUVE DE L'AYATOLLAH** (same translation as the German title), first published in 1985.

The more I recently read Malko again the more I became intrigued not just about how easily translations are (or are not) available in different languages and how this impacts the international awareness of certain cultural icons but also about the reputation this series has in general.

It has often been described as sleazy or downright pornographic though neither the German nor the English versions I have read would warrant this extreme description.

True, they all feature generous dollops of sexual escapades and even on occasion questionable attitudes to rape or consent but all in all they do come across as comparatively tame with a larger focus on the espionage or action scenes which leads me to suspect that both translations may have been sanitised to appeal to the readers of the new target markets.

What I ultimately would love to see is an article comparing all the different translations with their source novel to see what (if anything) was amended. Unfortunately my own French language skills are too rudimentary to even contemplate this kind of venture but I sincerely hope someone else more fluent in all three languages could come to the rescue.

There are two very obvious examples in this novel where I suspect entire scenes may have been cut:

One sees Malko in New York arranging a hook up with an old flame just to then be told he'd need to board a plane for his new mission right away and say Adieu to his planned date. In a later scene he meets two girls in Marbella who bring him to a house where it appears that an orgy is just about to start. Malko,

however, takes the keys to a car and heads back to his hotel.

What purpose would there be to tease the reader (in a series with a certain notoriety!) with hints of sexy time, just to then pull back from those?

Still, the book runs at 191 pages so is not exactly thin for a men's adventure type novel. And yes, it does still feature sufficient bedroom (and beach and yachting and...) action next to the more traditional Secret Agent stuff.

Malko sure does a lot of globetrotting here. The bulk of the novel is set in the British Virgin Islands but we also see him show up in New York where the likes of Andy Warhol and Grace Jones have small cameos, Switzerland, Vienna and the Costa de Sol.

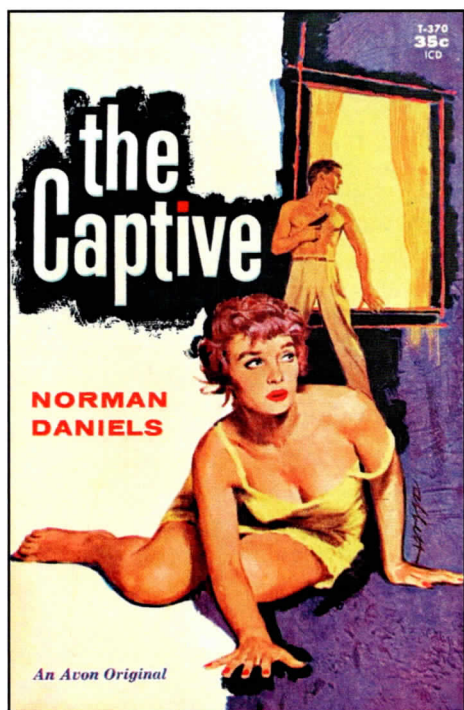
He is sent to look after the Indian widow of an Ayatollah who is in possession of important secret documents and her husband's ill-gained fortune and as such is being chased by both the US and Iranian secret service.

The widow is reputedly so rich that when her ash tray is full, she throws away her Rolls Royce! She is also man hungry and a) first makes love to Malko only after he slaps her when she accuses him of being just after her money and b) subsequently threatens him with a gun and demands he'll love her or she'll kill him. No wonder he quickly becomes so infatuated with her that in order to protect her, he rejects CIA instructions and temporarily gets fired, leaving his castle potentially forever in a state of disrepair.

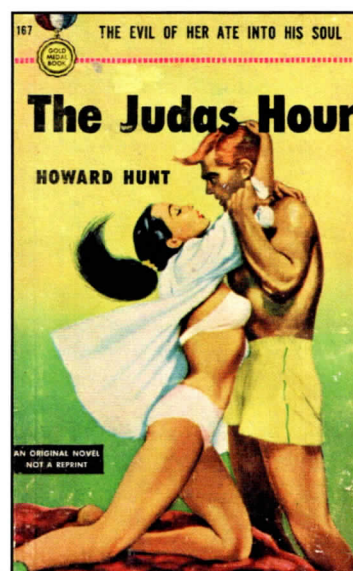
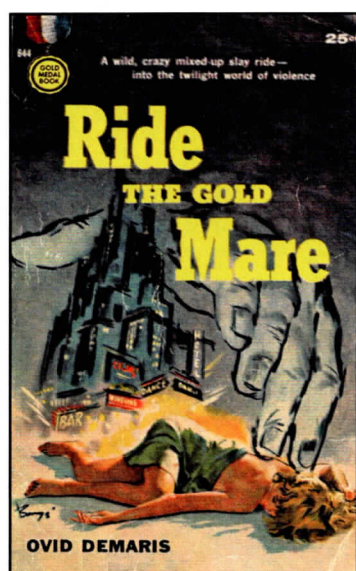
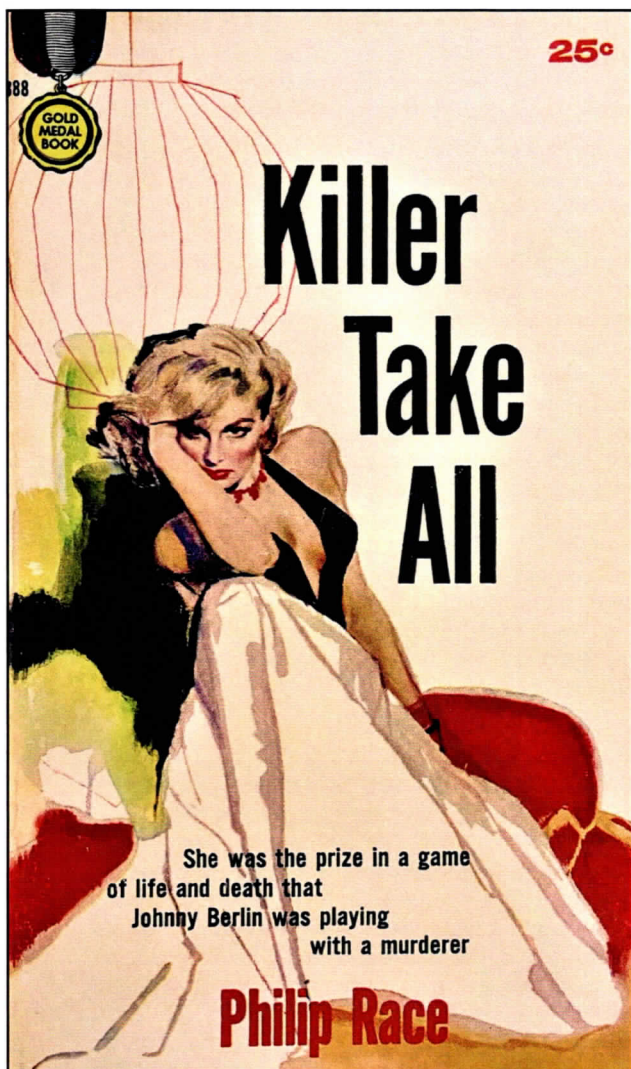
As usual, parts of the De Villiers' research had me hit Google. His description of the Savak, the Shah's intelligence service, and Khomeini's successor organisation as well as details about the British involvement in the Ayatollah's rise to power, all at least appear very realistic for someone as ignorant as me about the inner workings of the Iranian revolution.

Mandy Brown, a recurring character in the novels, also makes some memorable appearances in this book. All one needs to know about her is that in the French books she is known as "*Mandy la salope*" (*Mandy, the slut*).

For more of Holger's writing, check out his e-books **The Many Masks of Dr. Mabuse** and **Ollie's Last Round** which are available through Amazon.



"They are the books that I talk about to friends, thrust into the hands of aspiring writers, and that I wish I'd written. They are the yellowed, forgotten paperbacks I keep buying out of pure devotion whenever I see them in used bookstores."



what I had in mind. Joel got this funny look on his face and said, "That's a business model. I really think we're really on to something. We could really make this work." We?

It turned out that, like me, he'd been getting hit up constantly at that conference by author-friends who were desperate for his advice on how they could replicate his self-publishing success with their own out-of-print books. Many of these books had won wide acclaim and even the biggest awards in our genre. Joel had been trying to think of a way he could help them out. Now he thought he had the solution: What if we combined the two ideas? What if we republished the books that we had loved for years as well as the truly exceptional books that only recently fell out of print? It sounded great to me. And at that moment, without any prior intent, we became publishers of what we considered to be the best crime novels in existence. It was a brash act, and that's how, as naturally as we became publishers, we found our company name. Brash Books.

David: How difficult is it to obtain the rights to the materials you publish?

Lee: It has been easy at times and other times it has been extremely difficult and expensive. The easy cases have been reaching out to authors I know personally or who are friends of authors I know personally. It gets hard when the author is a stranger, or has disappeared, or wrote under a pseudonym, or moved to another country, or has died. We have frequently been forced to employ a private detective to hunt down authors, estates, and to sort out who actually has the rights to some of the out-of-print books we've wanted to acquire. It was a real odyssey acquiring the rights to the Ralph Dennis books and searching for his lost manuscripts. I have written about this journey in several essays for **CrimeReads** and my quest was even covered by **Publishers Weekly**.

David: Can you tell me about how these people have been impacted by your work?

Lee: The widows and families of some of the dead authors we've republished have been delighted by the royalties, but I believe they are even more delighted just seeing the books brought lovingly and respectfully back into

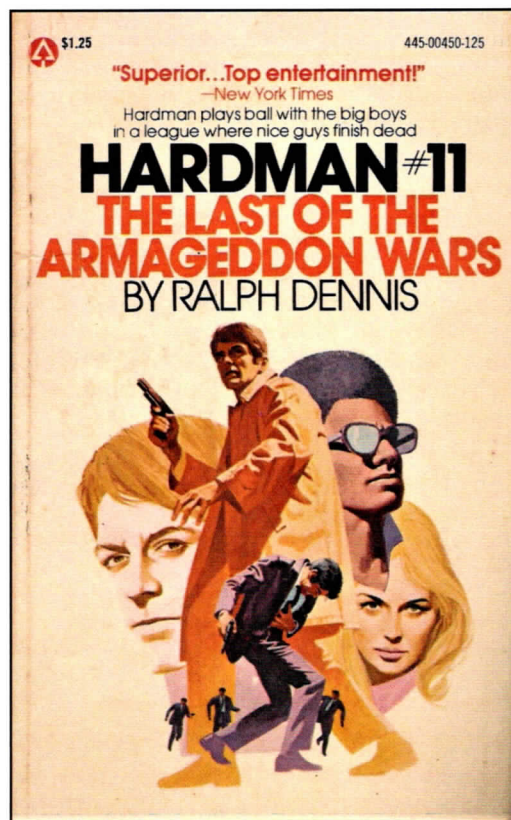
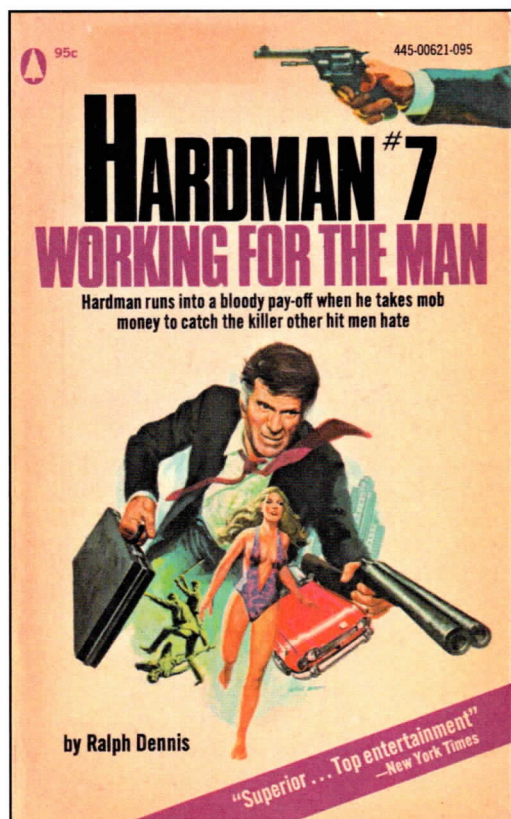
print to reach a new audience. I've had the widows and children of dead authors call me up in tears upon receiving the new copies of the books. They are often joyful to simply see them back in print and sad that the authors didn't live to see their books finally released so beautifully. I have to say I often end up in tears, too, when I get those calls.

Joel: I'm most proud of bringing back Barbara Neely's series featuring Blanche White. Barbara was a ground-breaking author who blazed a trail for women and minority crime writers. We were thrilled when the Mystery Writers of America named her a Grand Master in 2019. While she was able to enjoy the honour, she passed away shortly before the awards banquet.

Lee: In other cases, like Ralph Dennis and Carolyn Weston, I have bought the copyrights outright from the authors estates-- meaning

"I was at a crime writers conference somewhere, standing in the book room, when author Bill Crider, an old friend of mine, approached me with a tattered, paperback copy of a Hardman novel in his hand. He insisted that I buy it."

that I am, for all intents and purposes, I am now Ralph Dennis and Carolyn Westin in terms of their literary lives. I am not paying royalties to anybody on books that I've republished that have fallen into the public domain, because by definition they now belong to everybody. There is nothing I can do to prevent another, or ten other, or fifty other publishers from releasing the same book. That said, I am not, like so many other publishers who reissue PD work, using the original covers because the art work has not fallen into public domain, the rights belong to the artists or their estates or to the publishers (or whoever has acquired or been assigned the companies rights/assets). There are many publishers who use the original artwork anyway, despite violating the copyright (and moral rights) of the artists because they believe it's a low-risk proposition. What are the odds of being sued?



And even if you are, odds are you can get away with just dropping the cover and adding a new one. I won't play that game out of respect to the artists.

In those cases where copyright to an out-of-print work hasn't expired, finding the author or whomever owns the rights now is not impossible, but it can be very time consuming and expensive. There are sleazy publishers out there who are too cheap and too unscrupulous to go to the cost and trouble, again believing that the odds of getting caught or sued are small. I won't do that. We have spent tens of thousands of dollars on private eyes and lawyers to not only find the legitimate rights holders, but to make certain they actually do hold the rights they think or claim they have. In one case, we found the widow of an author, and she believed she had the rights to her dead spouse's work, but unbeknownst to her, she didn't. The rights had been bequeathed to, and shared by three institutions (a library, a hospice and a performing arts center). The three institutions have been unable to agree to any deal with anyone, so this author's books have remained out of print. Another author's books were willed to his wife, when she died to her sister, and when she died to her four children. All four children must agree to a deal (and not one of them had ever met the author!) In that case, one child refuses to make a deal, so the books have remained out of print, though we keep going back to them to see if she has changed her mind.

David: You mentioned the quest to gain the rights to the Hardman material?

Lee: I was at a crime writers conference somewhere, standing in the book room, when author Bill Crider, an old friend of mine, approached me with a tattered, paperback copy of a Ralph Dennis Hardman novel in his hand. He insisted that I buy it.

It was obvious from the numbered title that it was one of those cheap, men's action adventure paperbacks, a genre I knew well, having written, under the pseudonym "Ian Ludlow," a series called .357 Vigilante in the mid-1980s. While there were some gems in the genre, as readers of **Men of Violence** well know, most of them were hack work, badly written excuses for explicit sex and graphic violence that were sold in grocery store spinner racks nationwide. And a book called "Hardman"—wink, wink, nudge nudge—promised to be among the worst of them.

Bill must have seen the skepticism on my face so he smiled and said, "Trust me. You won't regret

it.” He was a kind, decent, warm man, an acclaimed author, and an expert on crime fiction. So I took his word for it and bought the book and quickly read it. I loved it. I immediately devoured all 12 **Hardman** novels, which I freaking LOVED, then I read Ralph’s three other published novels. They were good, but they weren’t the same as **Hardman**, and in the case of **MacTaggart’s War**, what I saw most was the squandered potential, a book that might have succeeded if only he’d had a good editor. It was frustrating. I wished there was something I could do about it and some way I could get **Hardman** out to a wider audience. And then it hit me—maybe I could. I’d enjoyed a lot of success self-publishing my out-of-print backlist, in some cases making much more money off the new editions of my books than I did when they were originally released. I figured if I could do it for my own work, why couldn’t I do it for Ralph?

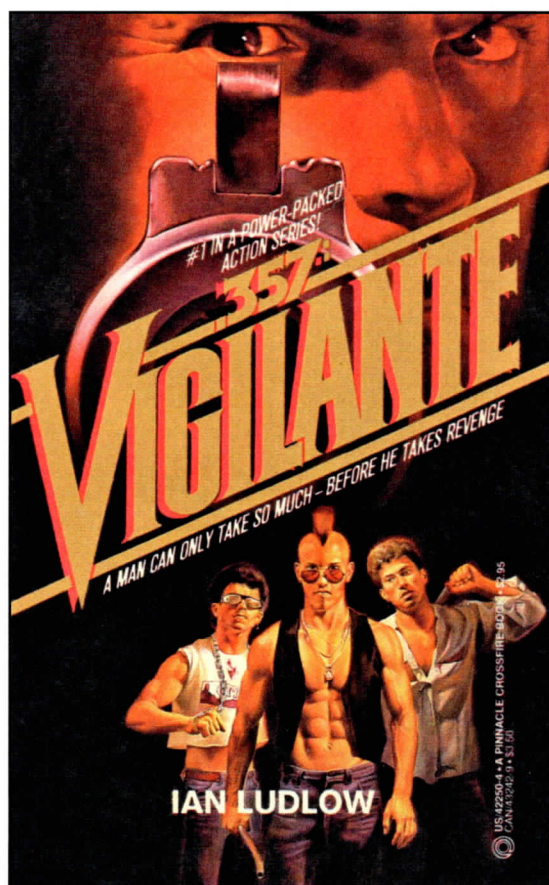
I did some digging and learned the rights to Ralph’s books had passed to his sister Irma and then, upon her death, to her four heirs. Irma’s attorney was kind enough to share with

me Ralph’s unpublished manuscripts. None of them was a lost **Hardman**, much to my disappointment, but they had potential if I could do some editorial work on them. So we launched Brash Books, and I made my pitch to Ralph’s four heirs: I wanted to acquire the copyright to **Hardman** novels, and everything else that Ralph wrote, published and unpublished, and bring them back into print. I wanted the copyright, rather than simply licensing them to republish, so I would have the freedom to make the editorial changes that I felt were necessary to get his unpublished books into shape. I also wanted to significantly revise **MacTaggart’s War**.

But I couldn’t nail down a deal. It took three years and in the interim, we published dozens of other novels. I won’t get into all the complications, but once I finally secured the rights to Ralph’s work, we republished all twelve of the **Hardman** novels (with new introductions from authors like Joe R. Lansdale and Paul Bishop), his three standalone novels (**The War Heist** (aka **MacTaggart’s War**), **The Broken Fixer** (aka **Atlanta**) and **A Talent for Killing** (aka **Dead Man’s Game**) and some of his previously unpublished work (like **The Spy in a Box** and **Dust in the Heart**). The reviews from **Publishers Weekly**, **Mystery Scene**, **Kirkus Reviews** and many other respected critics for the reprints and new books were wildly enthusiastic. The only sad thing was that Ralph wasn’t alive to see it.

All of the time I spent editing Ralph’s work made me eager to learn more about him as a person. I knew Ralph was a student, and later an instructor, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during the 1960s. So, in the summer of 2019, I went to Chapel Hill to read through Ralph’s papers at the UNC library, to meet some of his old drinking buddies, and to see the places mentioned in his books.

On the flight to North Carolina, I began reading Ralph’s unpublished manuscript **The Polish Wife**. It was about a disbarred lawyer-turned-Atlanta lobbyist who gets hired by a



“Men’s action adventure paperbacks, a genre I knew well, having written, under the pseudonym Ian Ludlow.”

"In the case of MacTaggart's War, what I saw most was the squandered potential, a book that might have succeeded if only he'd had a good editor."

lawyer to go to London to find a missing man. I immediately noticed some striking similarities between **The Polish Wife** and a **Hardman** novel. First off, **The Polish Wife** was written in what was unmistakably Hardman's first-person voice. Or was this just Ralph's voice? Additionally, the lawyer had the same name as a lawyer who had appeared in the final **Hardman** novel. That left me puzzling over the big question: Was **The Polish Wife** actually a rewrite of an abandoned **Hardman** novel? Even if it wasn't, would I be going too far, and taking too many creative liberties, if I revised it into a **Hardman** novel anyway? I certainly now had the legal right, but should I do it just because I could?

The question was eventually answered for me by Ralph himself in a letter I found in his papers in the Chapel Hill Library. It was a letter he wrote from London, where he was doing research for **MacTaggart's War**, to a professor on campus. In the letter, he wrote:

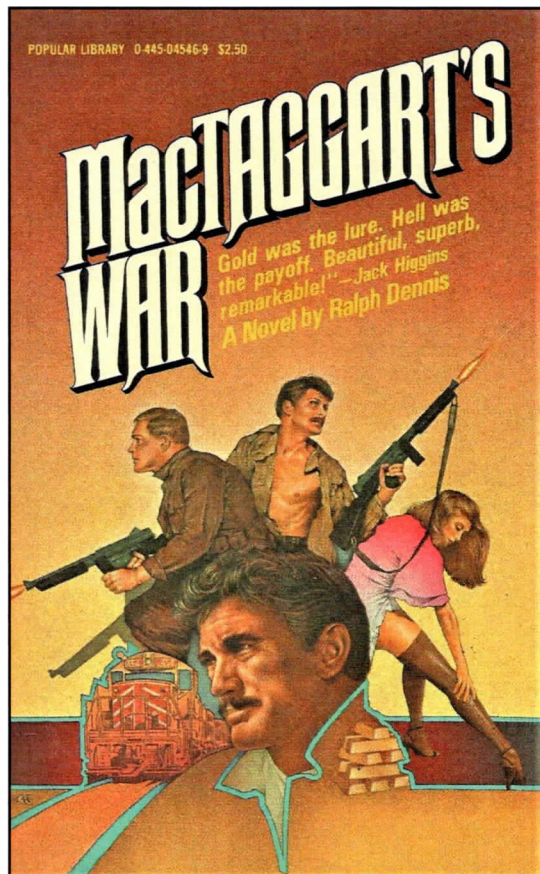
"I may do a Hardman in London for some extra money. I can do it while I'm doing the research for the real project."

It was soon followed by another letter to Wallace, dated January 10, 1977, that said this, among other things:

"If I can find a typewriter, I might write a quick Hardman in London and put that money aside for a trip to Italy and France after I've finished the big book. I can probably write the Hardman during the later afternoon hours after I return from research."

The letters were "the smoking gun" I needed to justify to myself revising **The Polish Wife** back into a Hardman novel. So that's what I did, releasing **All Kinds of Ugly** in February 2020, a long-lost, final **Hardman** novel. I can't tell you how happy that made me.

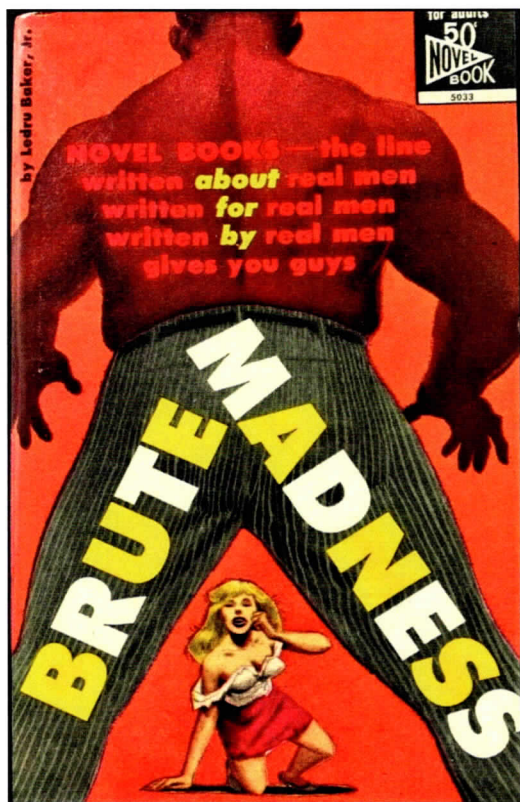
For Cutting Edge, many of our titles are already in the public domain. In those cases, there's no need to get permission from anyone, though I have had to use our private investigator a few times to double check the rights on some books to be sure they truly are out of copyright. But we've also licensed and



acquired rights to books for Cutting Edge with authors and estates and we are also publishing some never-before-published "lost" novels by authors of vintage paperbacks and even some original "new" novels that don't quite fit into the Brash niche. For one thing, we aren't limited to crime novels at Cutting Edge, though most of the titles are in that genre. We are also publishing westerns, literary fiction, vintage "sleaze" fiction, and even some non-fiction.

David: Which of the Cutting Edge titles would you classify as your greatest achievement for this line?

Lee: We brought back Carolyn Weston & Jan Huckins' **Face of My Assassin**, a 1959 literary novel about racial strife in the deep south, that is like a cross between **To Kill a Mockingbird** and **In the Heat of the Night** but it predated both of them. The book got incredible reviews in its day, but fell out of print and into oblivion...and yet, sadly, it's every bit as



"I just loved Bud Clifton's tightly plotted hit-man novel *The Murder Specialist*, Chalmers Green's wickedly subversive, unpredictable hard-boiled gem *The Scarlet Venus*, and the brutal, bizarre, and totally unhinged plotting of Ledru Baker Jr.'s *Brute Madness*"

powerful and relevant now as it was when it first came out over sixty years ago.

I'm also delighted to have resurrected some forgotten, obscure, true masterpieces of noir by some authors nobody has heard of...

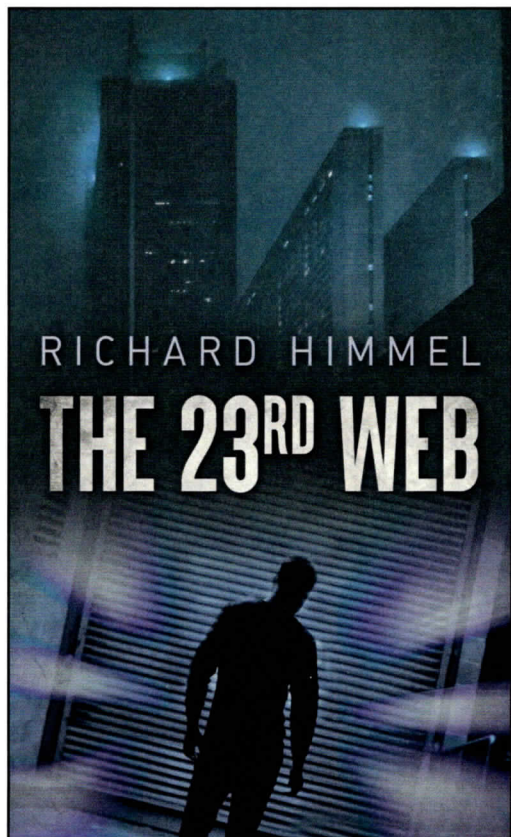
I just loved Bud Clifton's tightly plotted hitman novel ***The Murder Specialist***, Chalmer Green's wickedly subversive, unpredictable hard-boiled gem *The Scarlet Venus* and the brutal, bizarre, and totally unhinged plotting of Ledru Baker Jr.'s ***Brute Madness*** (though it features some of the worst sex scenes ever written which, in their own hilariously bad way, are a guilty pleasure).

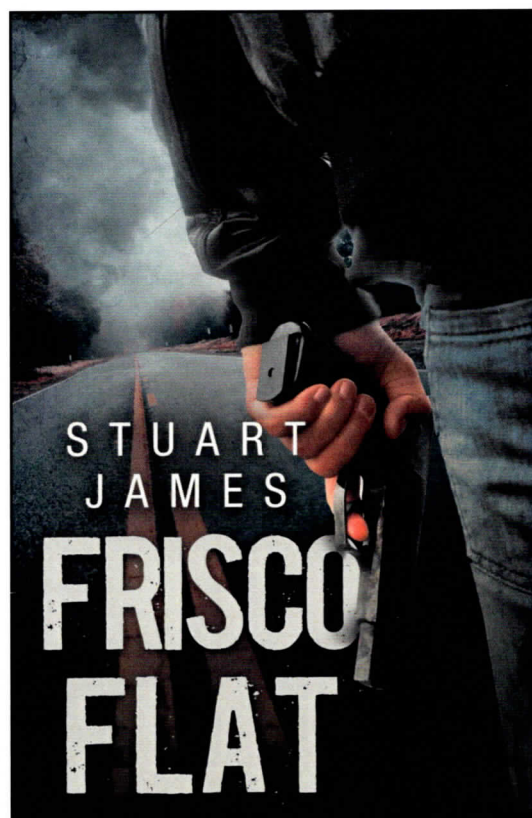
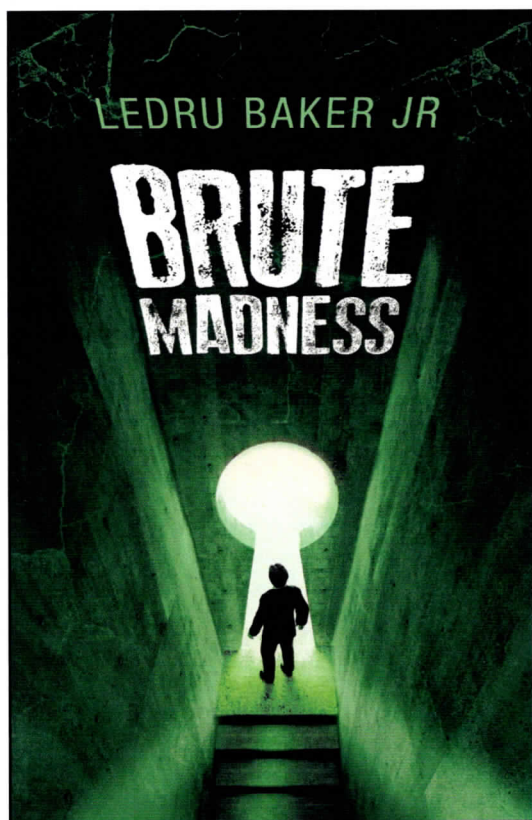
We've also dug up some long-lost Ralph Dennis short stories, in a collection called ***Tales of a Sad, Fat Wordman***, that are remarkably revealing about the sad life and troubled personality of the man behind the ***Hardman*** novels.

David: Can you expand on why you use utilize modern artwork rather than a vintage style?

Lee: As I mentioned earlier, while most of the books republished by Cutting Edge are in the public domain, the artwork is not. We respect copyright and we refuse to use art that we don't own. Frankly, the cost of finding whoever owns the artwork now and licensing it is prohibitively expensive. And commissioning new artwork in the same style would also be far too expensive. The profit margins on these books are slim to non-existent as it is, especially when considering that anybody can release the same public domain books that I have.

But there's also another reason we don't use vintage, or vintage-style, covers on these books. While I LOVE the old artwork, as much as I know you and your readers do, it dates the books and dooms them to appeal to a very narrow niche of





readers. We need to reach a much wider audience than that if we are going to recoup our investment in Cutting Edge and make some money, too. This is a labour of love, but it's also a business.

I'm a writer myself, and what I love about these books are stories and the writing. I buy them for that, not the covers. So that's what we're selling: the stories and the writing, not the covers. I believe that's what truly endures.

Joel: Crime fiction is not time bound. A book's appeal doesn't depend on when it was written. We choose modern artwork because we're introducing authors to new audiences and we want the books to have a fresh, contemporary appeal.

Lee: We don't want potential readers to dismiss these stories as antiques from their grandfather's library. The goal is to draw a new generation of readers to these books. We want them to fall in love with the work of these authors the way we have. We strongly believe to do that, we need the books to look new and fresh. We want to pitch these as compelling crime stories that just happen to be written in and set in the past. We believe that they are as relevant, entertaining and satisfying as any crime novels set in present day or as any new books written and published today that happen to be set in the past. Packaging them as "vintage" work will push away the new readers we want to attract.

The success of our reprints at Brash proved that strategy works so that's the approach we've taken with Cutting Edge as well.

David: How do you choose the materials you seek to "republish"?

Lee: First, as I mentioned before, it began with a list of books that I loved. The late Bill Crider also recommended a lot of great books to us. For Cutting Edge, our new vintage books imprint, I've received terrific advice from the team at Paperback Warrior and from the posts on the 'Men's Adventure Paperbacks of the 20th Century' Facebook Group. I've discovered a lot of titles on my own at used bookstores and vintage paperback shows.

David: Lee and Joel, thanks for chatting to me and all the best for 2021.

JUSTIN MARRIOTT ON THE RENEGADE PUBLISHING HOUSE,
MANOR BOOKS

GRINDHOUSE PUBLISHING

Manor Books were the New York based publisher whose catalogue, packaging and business tactics were reminiscent of the exploitation films that played at the grindhouses in the notorious 42nd Street district. As you will probably be aware, the exploitation movies copied popular themes from films produced by mainstream studios and produced their own low-budget versions, with added sex and violence to compensate for a lack of production values and name actors. The grindhouse theatres that showed these exploitation movies had little regard to the quality of the movies they showed, with their focus being on quantity as their modus operandi were triple-bills and 24 hours opening. Kung-fu, cannibal and chicks-in-chains were all popular genres in the grindhouses.

Manor operated at even lower level on the publishing ladder than Pinnacle or Belmont Tower, and applied the exploitation movie techniques to their output. Pinnacle may have invented the men's adventure series with the likes of **The Executioner**, but Mack Bolan wouldn't have knocked a nun out cold with a sucker punch (**Mondo**), used spiked knuckledusters (**Gannon**), encountered an ex-Vietnam veteran with a taste for human flesh (**Keller The Cannibal**) or featured a castrated criminal who commands a giant praying mantis to rip the breasts off women in his quest for vengeance (**Eat Them Alive**).

It wasn't just the contents of Manor Books which were rough. Another distinctive characteristic of Manor's publications are the way their covers have physically worn. Many of the second-hand copies I've picked up have covers scarred with strange scuff marks which I've not observed on any other used-book. Not all their paperbacks have physically aged in such a bizarre manner, but presumably at some point the company employed a cheap(er) printing process which means the paper and card have deteriorated more noticeably than other books of that period.

Their business practices were rumoured to be

rough as well. Manor once published a SF book called **Titans of the Universe** by James Harvey, which was copyrighted to 'Moonchild' and later found to be a word-for-word copy of an earlier Gardner Fox effort **Escape from Cosmos**.

They had a hardcore porn fiction line Pleasure Books, which pirated other titles and often reprinted the same story under different titles, sometimes in the same batch of releases, presumably without paying the author.

Jack Moskovitz wrote a book called **The Arson Job** as Jack Moss for them, and later quipped in an interview published in **Books Are Everything** fanzine that, "Manor had no manners." In a memoir from Stephen Mertz (page 44), other authors that were on the wrong end of Manor are mentioned.

Initially the packaging of Manor Books was professional and eye-catching, with cover art from professionals such as Ken Barr, Bob Larkin, Bruce Minney, George Gross and Raymond Kursar.

But I wonder if there was a change in ownership, as later in the Manor run, the covers were often reuses of existing art, sometimes recycled from previous Manor Books even if their relevance to the content is tenuous at best, or badly-reproduced and washed-out images from UK paperbacks, a tactic most seen on their SF paperbacks with Bruce Pennington the artist most likely to be pirated.

Also the lettering began to resemble lettraset transfers - the type I used to use on fanzines in the 1980s - and at times weren't even in a straight line.

For a period in the mid-1970s they carried the Manor Books "Seal of guaranteed READER satisfaction. If you purchase any Manor Book with the above seal and you decide you were disappointed in any way, simply return the book to the publisher with only 25c to cover postage and handling." I suspect I know how Manor would respond to any reader foolhardy enough to take them up on the offer.

DAVID 'THE PREACHER' WILSON ON THE THIRD IN THE HARDMAN SERIES WHICH HAVE BEEN REPRINTED BY BRASH BOOKS

THREE THE HARD WAY

Men's Adventure series from the 1970's tend to be hit and miss.

Often, they are a thorough mixture of graphic sex and violence that pushed the boundaries of good taste. However, from 1974-77, Ralph Dennis had twelve books published by Popular Library in The Hard Man series that was hard-boiled and gritty without being erotic or gruesome. The series took its title from an unlicensed private eye, accompanied by his black pal Hump, a former NFL player. The novels are set in Atlanta, Georgia and the reader can feel almost feel the humidity or the "cols", as Dennis describes it.

Of course, the elephant in the novel (rather than the room) is the relationship between Hardman and Hump. Here are two guys who are fully aware that they come from different cultural backgrounds and yet simply deal with it. Spenser does this in his Parker novels with Spenser and Hawk, though at times there is more racial tension between the two. Joe Lansdale does it later in his Hap and Leonard series, complicating it further with Leonard's homosexuality. It's neat to know that as early as the 1970's authors could write about people from different backgrounds with tolerance being demonstrated.

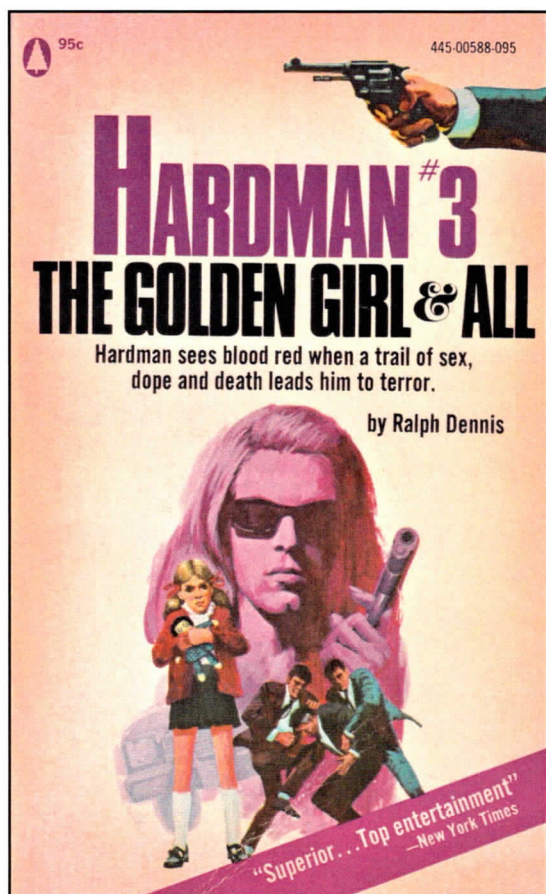
Hardman is a former cop, no longer with the department because of his involvement in a scandal. He does not bother to seek a license and works both sides of the law. In fact, from time to

time he acts as a drug mule for the mob. His boundaries are different than what we normally see in our heroes and it adds strength to the characterization. The fact that he is not a cop and does not adhere to police procedure allows him to interrogate people differently, pursue clues differently, and even exact revenge.

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Men of Violence





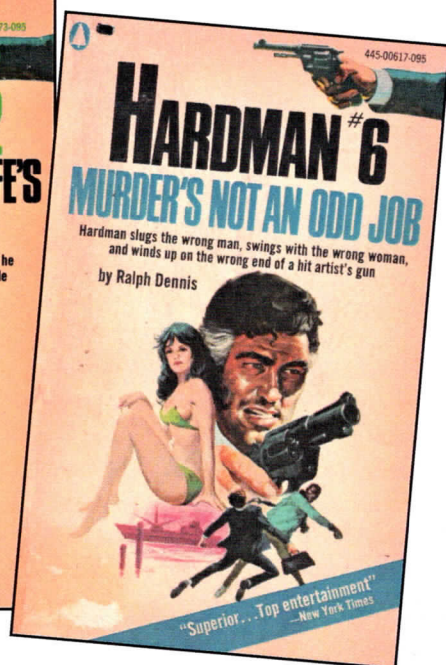
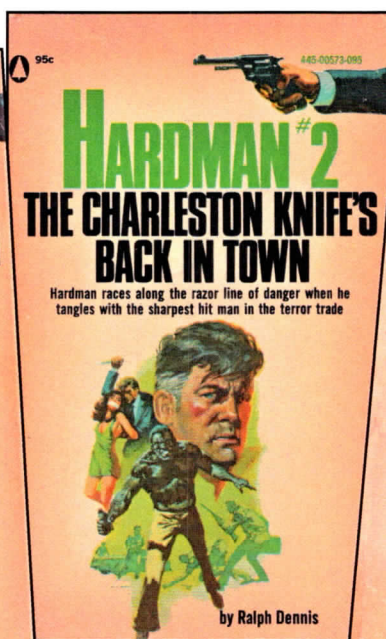
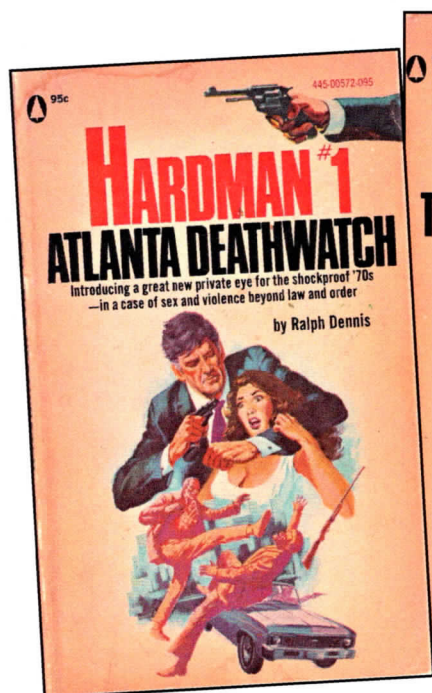
Working both sides of the law, Hardman finds himself in conflict with both police and the mob. In the first two books he develops a relationship with "The Man," a black mob boss. Their relationship becomes very reciprocal, but "The Man" seeks to keep his relationship with Hardman undercover, unwilling to have it known that he cooperates with Hardman.

Hump and Hardman are concerned about the little guy, but they are not adverse to seeking ways to feather their own nests. For example, in the second book of the series they are hunting down a gang of youthful robbers to protect them from the mob hitman that is after them.

Despite helping keep a young man alive for his grandmother they are thinking about getting their hands on at least some of the stolen loot. The author creates a balance between humanitarian and mercenary purposes.

Hardman's Cop friend, Art, talks a good game about police procedure and how Hardman needs to stop holding back information, but all along he knows that Hardman and Hump are not straight arrows. He often bends rules in the name of friendship. In the second book, he almost assuredly is aware that Hump and Hardman are taking some of the loot, but barely acknowledges that fact.

Hump and Hardman alternate back and forth in "good cop-bad cop" when fishing for information. Their occasional disagreements



over who should play which role are amusing and reveal their respect for one another. In fact, at times, they switch mid-interrogation as if they can read one another's minds. Their individual roles are usually chosen based on the ethnicity or background of the one they are interrogating.

In **The Golden Girl and All**, the third instalment, Hardman continues crashing through the underworld of 1970's era Atlanta, clashing with cops and crooks alike in his quest for justice. Sadly, in the middle of this conflict is a poor little girl. The primary motivation for Hardman is getting the girl back, but his is also motivated in obtaining justice for an old friend from his policing days.

Hardman is brought in by a lawyer and asked to locate the little girl who is the victim of a parental kidnapping. The mother is the likely suspect and she has a history of drugs and rotten boyfriends. She apparently is a wild vixen in the bedroom, but always attracts the wrong sort of men.

It is important to remember that Hardman has no credentials. A former cop, Hardman simply does favours for people in exchange for cash. He even occasionally smuggles dope for a local drug dealer.

Hardman manages to get a line on the little girl's location almost immediately. Of course, along the way there is a dead body, the brother of a legendary cop now crippled and thus retired. The girl is kidnapped from the mother because she has several pounds of high-grade, uncut, heroin. The poor little girl's situation gives this novel more emotion than the first two novels in the series.

In fact, this novel has much more emotion seeping from the pages than the other novels. The author manages to conjure powerful emotion as the possibility of the cop's dead brother being crooked emerges and appears likely. Another of the cops, a tough and brash man, seeks to protect his friend from this knowledge in a display of extreme loyalty. This loyal display gives the reader cause to like the tough cop who is otherwise unlikeable. Amid a cast of unscrupulous and selfish characters this cop was a nice reality touchstone.

The strongest emotional material, however, was in the author's ability to describe the affliction of the injured cop. Dennis works magic as he describes the sound of the crutches, the sound of the breathing, the weariness, and the broken spirit of this man. Everyone around him feels his pain as he

walks about. The reader is never permitted to forget that this man was once a legendary servant of justice and now is simply suffering through the remainder of his life.

Hardman and Hump like to drink and they always find a way to have a bottle on hand. They are not drunks, but they always have a way to find a bottle somewhere. Sometimes they use the liquor to ingratiate themselves with underworld types or to obtain information. In one scene, a bottle of peach wine is used to bait an old wino into providing information.

Dennis describes Atlanta lovingly. One area, the Underworld, a run-down area below a set of train tracks. While this is 1970's Atlanta, my curiosity was piqued by the description of this area. At the time of the writing the goal of a group was to bring about a revival of the area and make it an area for viable businesses. Reading this book, I wondered if that goal was later successful.

As usual in this genre, there is plenty of action and violence. There are enough double-crosses to generate tension. And all along the way, the motives of the girl's mother are in question. The reader at times despises her and at others is led to empathize with her, waiting for the conclusion to discover if she is going to act in the child's interest or her own. The conclusion is perhaps the best in the series thus far.

Hardman and his partner, Hump, go to visit the crippled cop to explain his brother's death. There is a moving scene where they all sit down to play a hand of poker as they discuss the details. This ties the novel into a fine conclusion and really humanizes all of the surviving characters. This time around, Hardman's strong external nature is softened by the need of the little girl. This is not a dash for cash, a need for revenge, or a race to survive. The rescue of the little girl becomes the novel's focus and gives it strength. A very well-written thriller.

The **Hardman** series is gritty and suspenseful. This was written in the early days of "men's fiction." One expects it to be violent and sexy, but though there are sexual moments, they are never erotic or graphic.

The main caveat for the reader is to remember that this series was written in the 1970's and some of the attitudes of some characters towards race may prove offensive. However, the friendship between Hump and Hardman more than balances out the racist jerks that pop up from time to time.