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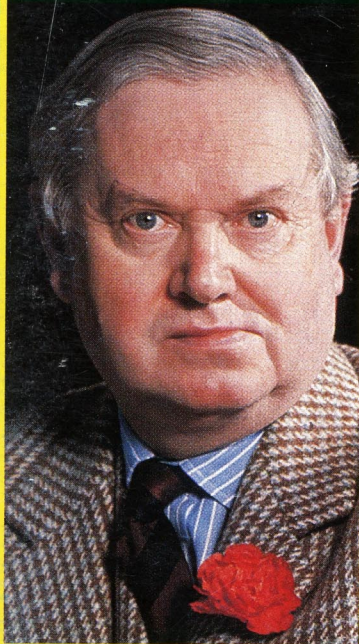
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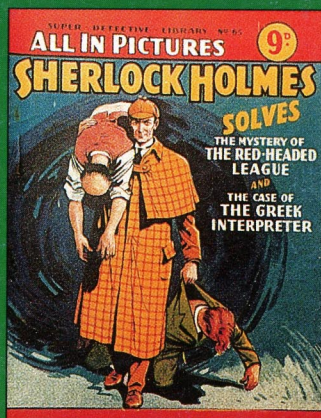
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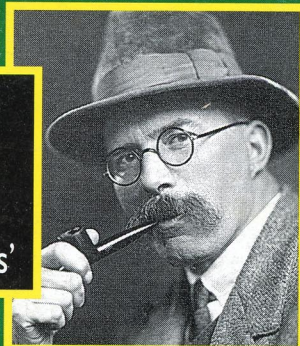
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COLLECTING  
'**SUPER  
DETECTIVE  
LIBRARY**'





# 'SUPER DETECTIVE LIBRARY'

BY NORMAN WRIGHT

**S**uper Detective Library was the third post-war, pocket-sized library to be published by the Amalgamated Press. Its 64-page format was exactly the same as its predecessors — *Cowboy Comics* (May 1950; see BMC 100) and *Thriller Comics* (November 1951; see BMC 9). Its run of 188 issues over a period of seven-and-a-half years was slightly shorter than its two stable-mates. Unlike *Thriller Comics*, there were only ever two issues per month.

*Super Detective Library* featured adventure strips of many well-known fictional detectives, and collectors of detective fiction who are not normally interested in comics are often eager to add copies of the comic to their collections if they feature a detective in whom they are particularly interested.

## REPRINTS

Unlike *Thriller Comics* and *Cowboy Comics*, a large number of the SDL strips were reprints. Some, like 'Buck Ryan', were culled from the pages of British newspapers while others were reprinted from foreign publications. Some issues were hybrids, made up of foreign reprints with new artwork at start and finish to enable them to fit snugly into the *Super Detective Library* format.

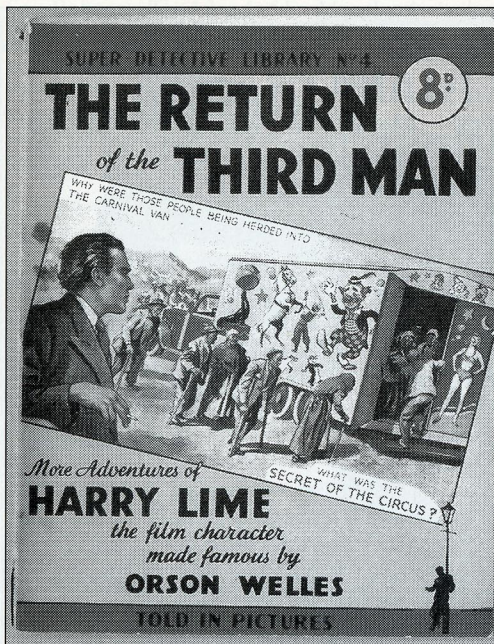
The first number, issued in April 1953, was an American

reprint entitled *Meet the Saint in the Case of the Contraband People*, a gloomy tale of illegal immigrants being smuggled into the U.S. by a ruthless, cold-hearted woman and her henchman. It was not particularly well drawn, relying heavily on its title and the 'Saint' logo on its cover to attract purchasers. There were eight 'Saint' issues of the comic. Most were



The first issue of *Super Detective Library* featured the Saint.





Two scarce early issues: No 4, *The Return of the Third Man*, and No 10, *The Black Abbot* by Edgar Wallace.

American reprints, but a few were originals, drawn by British artists, and these were far superior. The final adventure of Charteris' swashbuckling adventurer appeared in issue 59.

The second issue of the comic was the wholly home-grown *The Riddle of the Frensham Will*, which introduced 'The Armchair Detective' Ernest Dudley, a popular character of both novels and radio. (Ernest Dudley played himself in a film version of *The Armchair Detective* in the early 1950s, and wrote many novels featuring his character, Doctor Morelle.) The strip was drawn by Reg Bunn. Probably the best 'Armchair Detective' issue of the comic was No 8, *The Case of the Sinister Castle*, a superbly atmospheric tale masterfully drawn by Bryce Hamilton.

There were three further 'Armchair Detective' issues: No 18, *The Mystery of the Hooded Man*; No 22, *The Secret of Lessinger's Loot*; and No 46, *The Man Who Made Gold*. Numbers 18 and 22 were drawn by Bunn, while number 46 was another beautifully drawn Hamilton strip.

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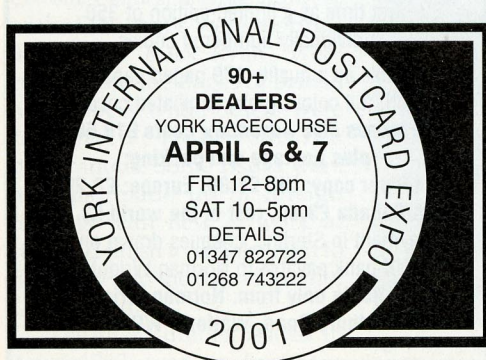


*The Man Who Made Gold* also featured Captain Dack, a character created by John Hunter, who had appeared in the *Sexton Blake Library* during the 1930s and still made the odd appearance in the 'Blake' stories during the early 1950s. Dack's first appearance in the comic had been in issue 43, entitled *Meet Captain Dack*. His third and final appearance in the comic was in No 55, *The Mystery of Peril Island*, a South Seas adventure drawn by Ron Turner, best known for his science fiction strips.

## SAPPER

Issue No 3 featured a strip version of *Bulldog Drummond*. The story was rather complex to adapt down to 64 pages but it was fairly well done, retaining much of the flavour of Sapper's original novel. A second 'Drummond' adventure, *Bulldog Drummond Again — The Final Count*, appeared a few months later in issue 13.

Issue 4 was an interesting film 'spin off', *The Return of The Third Man*. No credit was given to Graham Greene, but Orson Welles, star of the film, was mentioned on the cover in bold type: 'More adventures of Harry Lime the film character made famous by Orson Welles'. The comic comprised two adventures, *The Secret of the Circus* and *Too Many Crooks*. More 'Third Man' titles were promised but never materialised.



The scarce 'Fu Manchu' issue is highly prized and sells for up to £25.

*The Great Flying Saucer Mystery* in issue 5 was a 'Saint' story. Its companion that month was the comic's first Edgar Wallace strip, entitled *The Door with the Seven Locks*. Unlike Graham Greene, Wallace was given full credit on the cover. There were only three Edgar Wallace issues of *Super Detective Library* and all are sought after by Wallace 'completists'. The other two were *The Black Abbot*, a ghostly tale drawn by Colin Merritt in number 10, and *The Fatal Feather* in issue 30. The latter comprised two strips, *The Fatal Feather* and *Gamblers Doom*, both featuring Wallace's well-known adventurers, 'The Three Just Men'.

E. Phillips Oppenheim, a contemporary of Wallace, was billed as 'The Prince of Story Tellers' on the cover of issue 7, *The Treasure House of Martin Hews*, his only contribution to the library. Another popular thriller writer with only one SDL strip to his credit was



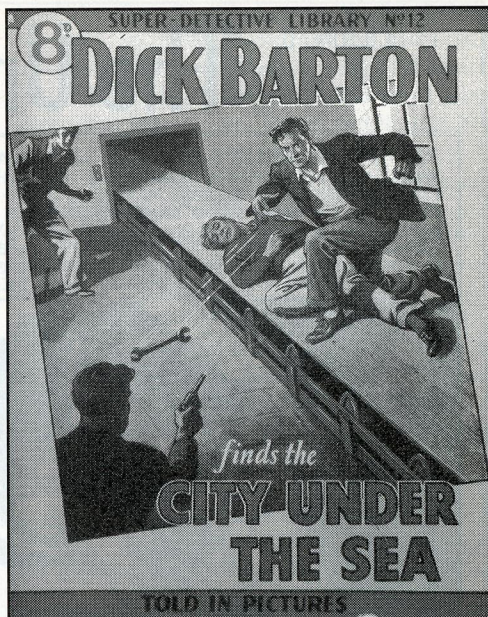
Sax Rohmer. *The Island of Fu Manchu*, in issue 9, was, as the cover proclaimed, 'a tale of exciting mystery'. It was splendidly drawn by Philip Mendoza. It is a pity that more of Mendoza's work wasn't used.

## DICK BARTON

Number 12 was an issue that combined both science fiction and a cult radio character of the day in *Dick Barton Finds the City Under the Sea*. The cover portrayed a typical cliff-hanger ending, so much part of the daily radio serial, with Dick and Snowy on a conveyor belt just about to enter the 'innards' of a machine. The strip was excitingly drawn by Selby Donnison, but was the only 'Barton' strip to appear in *Super Detective Library*. Other early science fiction issues of the comic included No 29, *Menace from the Moon* ("Space travel and secret service," boasted its cover); *The Rocket Racketeers* (No 21), a story of 'Blackshadow — Secret Agent'; and a watery SF tale, *Crime Under the Ocean* (No 36).

The covers of most of the early issues of the comic had a predominantly yellow background with a full-colour rectangular painting slanting across it. The effect was rather like looking at a film still outside a cinema and was very effective. A few early issues, No 2 for example, had a full-page cover illustration. Later issues of the comic dropped the 'film still' effect in favour of full-page cover paintings, but they were rarely as striking as the early-style covers.

Victor Canning had seven of his stories adapted for the comic. *Panther's Moon*, in issue 58, and *The Golden Salamander*, in issue 72, were both drawn by Ron Embleton and, in the



The only 'Dick Barton' issue of SDL is worth up to £20.

opinion of many enthusiasts, represent some of the artist's finest black-and-white strip work. Canning fared well with his illustrators in the comic. Number 95, *The Jewel Smugglers*, adapted from his story, 'The Man from the Turkish Slave', was drawn by James Drury, while *Oasis of Mystery*, an adaptation of *Oasis Nine*, was the work of Ron Turner. Canning's other contributions to *Super Detective Library* were *A Forest of Eyes* in No 84, *The Three Riddles* in No 106 and *The House of the Seven Flies* in No 60.

Amazingly enough, it was not until issue No 65 that the first 'Sherlock Holmes' adventure appeared in the comic. *Sherlock Holmes Solves the Mystery of the Red Headed League* and *The Case of the Greek Interpreter* had a striking cover depicting Holmes, complete with deerstalker hat and Inverness cape, hauling off two unconscious villains. The strip itself was an American reprint containing 'revisions' that must have made Holmes fans shudder!

The other two 'Holmes' issues, *Sherlock Holmes in the Thames Afire* and *A Scandal in Bohemia* (No 74) and *Sherlock Holmes in The*

**Next issue  
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# The Unknown Peril

ALL THAT DAY, AND ON THROUGH THE NIGHT, QUAIN LAY UNCONSCIOUS IN A BEDROOM IN THE HOTEL OWNED BY DOCTOR JOHANN STAHL, THE MAN WHO HAD GOT HIM OUT OF THE WRECKED WAGON. AT TIMES HE WAS STILL - ALMOST AS THOUGH DEAD - AND THEN SUDDENLY HE WOULD SHOUT AND MOVE ABOUT VIOLENTLY SO THAT IT TOOK THE STRENGTH OF THE DOCTOR AND TWO SERVANTS TO HOLD HIM DOWN. THE BLACKNESS OF QUAIN'S MIND DISSOLVED INTO A WHIRLING VORTEX OF LIGHT WHICH SPUN AND SPRAYED OUT POINTS OF GLOWING LIGHT. THESE IN TURN GREW TO FORM A FANTASTIC, MOVING PICTURE IN WHICH HE COULD SEE HIMSELF RUNNING - RUNNING - RUNNING - AND YET NOT MOVING - AND WANTING TO SHOUT TO WARN CATHERINE ABOUT THE PANTHERS, AND NOT BEING ABLE TO UTTER A SOUND -





*Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Missing Heiress* (No 78) were equally poor, with the names of some quite major characters changed in the *Baskerville* strip. Nevertheless, in spite of their shortcomings, the three 'Sherlock Holmes' issues of the comic are amongst the most sought after.

## SEXTON BLAKE

Sexton Blake, the Amalgamated Press' very own detective, only appeared in one issue, *Sexton Blake's Diamond Hunt* (No 68). It is somewhat surprising that there were not more 'Blake' strips when one considers that the Amalgamated Press had a wealth of material from Blake's weekly *Knockout* strips that they could have reprinted. Perhaps it was considered that, with the monthly *Sexton Blake Library* stories and the weekly *Knockout* strips, any more Blake could have been too much of a good thing!

It soon became the policy of the comic's editor to concentrate on a limited number of

detective characters and, sadly, the interesting 'one-offs', so much a feature of the first thirty or so issues, became almost a thing of the past. One of the longest lasting characters was Lesley Shane, the lady sleuth. Her debut was in No 16, *The Riddle of the Race Gang*, a tale of the turf. In all, there were well over a dozen 'Lesley Shane' issues of *Super Detective Library*.

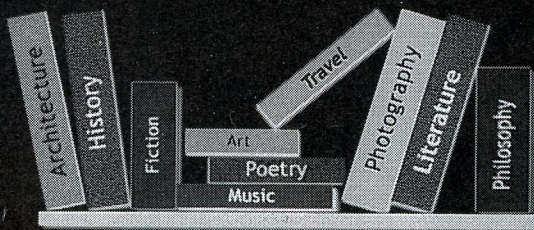
Another popular character was Roderic Graeme's 'Blackshirt', introduced to readers of the comic in *Blackshirt and the Golden Horse* (based on *Blackshirt Passed By*) in No 81. With the exception of the final 'Blackshirt' strip in issue 155, all fifteen 'Blackshirt' issues were credited to Roderic Graeme on the cover. The best of the 'Blackshirt' strips were excitingly drawn by the prolific Bill Lacey.

Other less well-known regulars included Vic Terry, sports reporter, Inspector Chafik of the C.I.D. department of the Baghdad Police, and Tod Claymore. Issue 104, *Tod Claymore and the Mystery of the Mardi-Gras*, has one of the comic's most striking covers depicting

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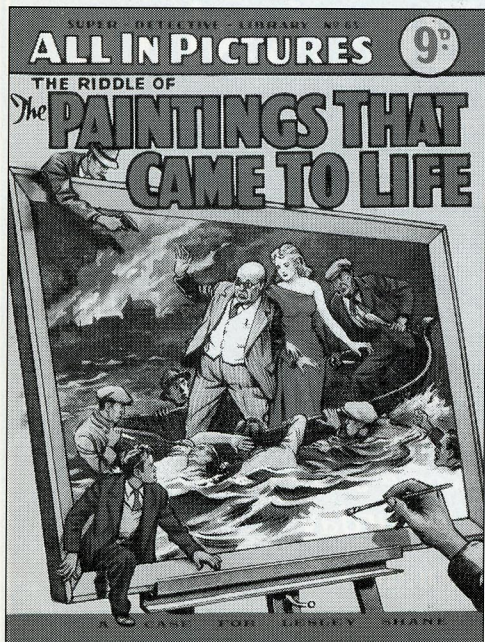
dozens of characters in fancy dress at the mardi-gras.

A slightly odd character for a detective library was Dirk Rogers, created by Frank Crisp. The character was summed up in his second adventure, *Battleship Mystery* (No 99), where the reader was told, "Mystery at the bottom of the sea was Dirk Rogers' speciality". All three 'Dirk Rogers' issues were drawn by Bill Lacey.

## THE TOFF

Two issues of the library featured The Toff, John Creasey's upper-class hero. The first was *The Toff at Butlin's* (No 61), the second *The Missing Millionaire* (No 110), based on *A Six for the Toff*.

One of the most popular characters to appear in *Super Detective Library* was the space detective, Rick Random. He was an original character created specifically for the comic. The first 'Rick Random' strip, *Crime Rides the Spaceways*, appeared in issue 37. But it was the second 'Random' strip, *Kidnappers from Space* (No 44), that introduced the definitive 'Rick Random' artist, Ron Turner.



Issue 63, featuring another 'adventure for Lesley Shane'.



The first 'Sherlock Holmes' issue, now worth £20-£30.

Turner excelled at drawing machinery and monsters. Readers did not worry that his figures were a little stiff for they had been captivated by his wonderful, imaginatively drawn spacecraft. The pages of Turner's 'Rick Random' strips are full of futuristic cities and well-conceived gadgets. His aliens are no mere bug-eyed monsters, but varied and interesting life forms. Of the two dozen 'Rick Random' issues of the comic, over three quarters were drawn by Ron Turner. The final 'Random' strip appeared in issue 163 and was entitled *The Kidnapped Planet*. All of the 'Rick Random' issues by Turner are highly sought-after by collectors.

## WAR STRIPS

Turner was also responsible for three of the dozen or so 'John Steel — Special Agent' strips that appeared in the comic in its final months. Numbers 169, 177 and 183 all show Turner's flair for drawing machines, vehicles and weapons. Turner also drew the very last issue of the comic, entitled *The Shadow — Mystery Man of World War Two* (No 188). If the *Super Detective Library*

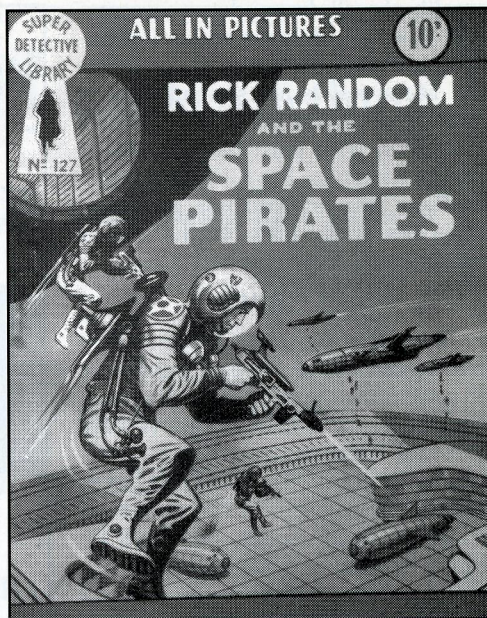


had continued, no doubt he would have drawn further war strips.

Towards the end of its run, the comic reprinted many strips which had originally been published in newspapers. *The Man Who Stole a Million Dollars* in No 120 was the first to feature the bespectacled American private detective, Rip Kirby. All of the 'Rip Kirby' strips reprinted in *Super Detective Library* were drawn by the character's creator, Alex Raymond, perhaps best remembered for his science fictional creation, Flash Gordon.

## VILLAIN

Several booklets of Rip Kirby's adventures had been issued in the U.K. prior to his debut in *Super Detective Library*. The first, an oblong, sixteen-page booklet entitled *Menace of the Mangler*, published in the late 1940s, ended with the apparent destruction of Kirby's arch enemy, 'The Mangler'. But, as readers of his exploits in *Super Detective Library* soon found out, that resourceful villain was still



A typical 'Rick Random' issues sells for £10-£15.



Rip Kirby became a regular during SDL's middle years.

very much alive. Many adventures ended with his 'death', but like Raymond's other arch villain, Ming, in the 'Flash Gordon' strips, he seems to have had nine lives and always resurfaced for another encounter with Rip Kirby. The eighteen 'Rip Kirby' issues have a wide appeal to both British and American collectors.

Buck Ryan, the *Daily Mirror* 'Tec', and his assistant, Zola, took over as one of the comic's regular private detective in issue 156, entitled *Appointment with Danger*. All the 'Buck Ryan' adventures were written and drawn by Jack Monk who had created the character for the *Daily Mirror* in March 1937. Readers certainly got good value for money with the 'Ryan' strips as there were often as many as nine frames crammed on each page. The final 'Buck Ryan' strip, *Buck Ryan and the VV Bombs*, appeared in issue 186, in the penultimate month of the comic's run.

*Super Detective Library* ended in December 1960 after a comparatively short run of only 188 issues. Apart from a slight swing towards World War Two secret agent-style strips at the end, it stayed very true to its title, featuring a



wealth of well-drawn detective strips. The shortness of its run makes it possible for collectors to build up a complete set. Many issues are sought after by enthusiasts of one particular character or author, with particular interest in Sherlock Holmes, Rip Kirby and Edgar Wallace issues. Another group of collectors avidly seek out the science fiction strips drawn by Ron Turner.

## ELUSIVE

Interest in the comic has increased considerably in recent years and almost all issues are now quite difficult to find, with 'Sherlock Holmes', Edgar Wallace and Rick Random issues being particularly elusive. In 1992, A. & B. Whitworth published a short illustrated guide to the comic, compiled by David Ashford and Steve Holland — a useful reference work if you want to track down a favourite strip. A revised edition appeared last year, in a larger A4 format, and with all the covers illustrated in full colour. These can be obtained by sending a cheque for £12 (1992 edition) or £16 (2000 edition) made payable to B. Whitworth at:



*The final issue of SDL, The Shadow, issued in December 1960.*

## PRICE GUIDE TO 'SUPER DETECTIVE LIBRARY'

A guide to current values of comics in Very Good condition.

No 1 (April 1953) .....	£75-£100
No 2 (April 1953) .....	£25-£35
No 3 (May 1953) .....	£20-£30
No 4 (May 1953) & 5 (June 1953) .....	each £25-£35
Nos 6 (June 1953) to 13 (October 1953) .....	each £25-£30
'Rick Random' issues .....	each £10-£15
'Sherlock Holmes' issues .....	each £25-£35
'Saint' issues (other than the above) .....	each £15-£20
'Rip Kirby' issues .....	each £8-£12
Miscellaneous issues 14 (October 1953) to 39 (October 1954) .....	each £10-£15
Miscellaneous issues 40 (October 1954) to 188 (December 1960) .....	each £8-£12

### FURTHER READING

Ashford, David; and Holland, Steve: 'SUPER DETECTIVE LIBRARY': AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE (A5; wrappers) (A. & B. Whitworth, 1992) .....	in print £12
ditto. Revised Edition (A4; wrappers) (A. & B. Whitworth, 2000) .....	in print £16

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