



The Thriller

Norman Wright and David Ashford tell the tale

The Amalgamated Press had been quick to see the appeal of the thriller and detective story and, from its very early days when it was still called the Harmsworth Press, its publications had been liberally sprinkled with

48

century were without their resident detective.

While some of these stories were well written it cannot be denied that many were the work of hack writers who had little time for plot construction or characterisation and the discerning connoisseur of the genre left them well alone. It was this discriminating audience, who rarely purchased twopenny weeklies, that the Amalgamated Press hoped to entice with *The Thriller*.

The premise of *The Thriller* was that it would offer readers quality stories by well-known and respected thriller writers at a very modest price. In 1922 the firm had

launched *The Detective Magazine*, a fortnightly of one hundred pages costing 7d. This had contained serials by well-known crime writers but the magazine had been bogged down with too many articles and true crime features. The high cover cost, coupled with the need to buy the magazine regularly in order to follow the serials, had deterred readers and led to its early demise after just 65 issues. With *The Thriller*, however, Amalgamated Press had improved the formula, offering readers a full-length story and one serial episode (later a short story was sometimes added to the programme) all for 2d. One of the firm's long-running adverts stated its aim very succinctly: "You can

HE HATES THE WIRELESS!

Especially on Saturday evenings!
Why? Because that is the time
he always settles down to read
his copy of

THE THRILLER

the paper that gives its readers
the finest mystery stories pro-
curable, written by famous
authors, including—

FRANCIS GERARD
SIDNEY HORLER
GERALD VERNER
JOHN G. BRANDON
Flying-Officer
W. E. JOHNS
BARRY PEROWNE
DAVID HUME
etc., etc.

For sheer thrilling entertainment
you can't beat

THE THRILLER

Out on Saturdays. Price 2d.



The Thriller No. 1. 'Red Aces' by Edgar Wallace got the new paper off to a flying start in February 1929. This advert for the *Thriller* was regularly printed in the 'Sexton Blake Library'.

The THRILLER

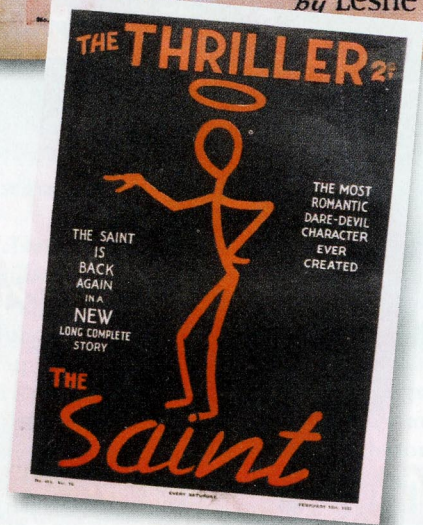
THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS 2d



THE STORY OF A DEAD MAN

by Leslie Charteris

CRIMINALS ARE NEVER
SAFE WITHIN!



'The Story of A Dead Man', in issue 4, was Leslie Charteris's first contribution to the weekly. By February 1937 the 'Saint' logo was so well known that little more needed to be said. This issue, No 419, contained a long 'Saint' story, plus the opening instalment of 'The Saint in New York'.

pay 7/6 for books by such famous authors as Edgar Wallace, John G. Brandon, Leslie Charteris, Hugh Clevely, Edmund Snell, and many others, but why should you? You can get the latest and most enthralling novels by all the leading authors for only 2d. Only in *The Thriller*...

For the inaugural issue, published on 9th February 1929, the Amalgamated Press pulled out all the stops to give their new publication a really memorable send-off. For that first issue they commissioned Edgar Wallace, then the undisputed king of crime writers, to produce a brand new story featuring his popular character J.G. Reeder, entitled "Red Aces". In the introduction to *The Thriller Index* (privately printed 1981), Derek Adley records that Wallace was paid £25 per thousand words for the story, a staggeringly high sum compared to the usual fee of two guineas per thousand words.

A photograph of Wallace, dictating "Red Aces" to his secretary, was printed on the editor's page and readers were promised a further new story of J.G. Reeder in issue number 3. In total Wallace contributed nine long stories and over two-dozen short stories to *The Thriller* during the course of its run. These were invariably published in the magazine ahead of book publication making Wallace issues of *The Thriller* extremely collectable.

From its very first issue *The Thriller* had an exciting look of brooding mystery, its stories taking the reader into a world of mean, East End streets, mist-wreathed country houses or Soho dives. This atmosphere was created as much by the artwork as by the stories. The artist who set the house-style for the paper, and whose work was used for hundreds of issues from number one, was Arthur Jones. It

THE THRILLER—FAMOUS FOR LONG COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVELS

THE THRILLER 2^d

WHO WAS THE
MYSTERIOUS
WATCHER
WHEN SIDNEY
GOT HIS?

THE MAN
WHO
KNEW
*This is a
'Toff' story
by*
JOHN CREASEY



No. 422. Vol. 16.

EVERY SATURDAY

MARCH 8th, 1937.

SENSATIONAL NEW NOVEL OF "RAFFLES"

THE THRILLER

This Useful
Key Chain
WITH SPLIT
RING FOR KEYS
FREE
INSIDE

THE PAPER WITH A
THOUSAND THRILLS

2^d



RAFFLES
AN AMAZING
NEW

COMPLETE STORY
OF THIS WORLD FAMOUS CHARACTER
By Barry Perowne

EVERY SATURDAY

JANUARY 20th, 1933

The paper featured many famous fictional characters. 'The Man Who Knew' was one of a handful of 'Toff' stories Creasey wrote for The Thriller. And in January 1933 it revived the popular Victorian character 'Raffles', with a new story penned by Barry Perowne.

was this man who, with his use of threatening shadows and his portrayals of slinking, slouch-hatted villains and brooding Limehouse back-drops, gave the paper such a unique feeling of menace.

The second issue of *The Thriller* contained a story by Hugh Clevely entitled "Lynch Law". Clevely is now a somewhat neglected thriller writer but, during the 1930s, his stories were avidly read. He notched up a total of nearly two dozen full-length stories for *The Thriller* and had some twenty hard-backed novels and collections of short stories published under his own name and a further eight under the pen-name of Tod Claymore. As with many of the writers who contributed to the weekly, Clevely

later adapted his *Thriller* stories for publication in book form.

One of the best-known writers to contribute to *The Thriller* was the famed creator of 'The Saint', Leslie Charteris. His first book, *X Esquire*, had been published by Ward Lock in 1927 and its modest success had led the firm to publish two further Charteris thrillers, *The White Rider* and *Meet The Tiger*. Largely unknown when *The Thriller* was launched, Charteris submitted a story to Montague Haydon, a controlling editor at the Amalgamated Press. Haydon liked the story and it appeared in issue number four as "The Story of a Dead Man". While "Meet The Tiger" had introduced Simon Templar, 'The Saint', Charteris had not yet

realised that his future lay in developing a single central character and "The Story of a Dead Man" had as its hero one Jimmy Traill. A few issues later another Charteris story, "The Secret of Beacon Inn", featured yet another 'Saint' clone with the improbable name of Rameses Smith.

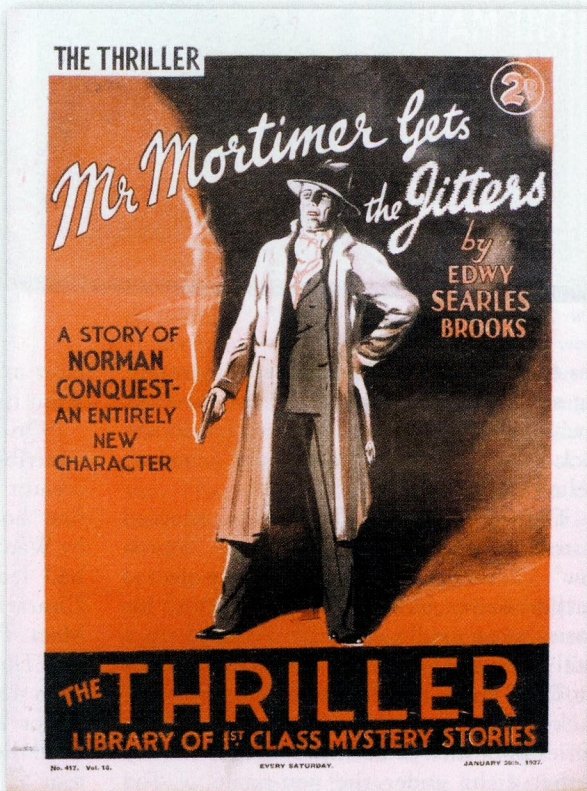
By this time, however, Charteris was beginning to realise that, if his writing career was to succeed, he needed to concentrate on and develop just one lead character who would attract a faithful following. He decided that 'The Saint' had been his most successful creation thus far and decided to focus on developing the redoubtable Simon Templar.

His first 'Saint' book for Hodder was a re-write of two Thriller stories

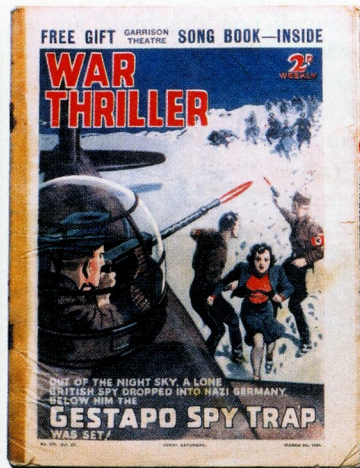
His next story for *The Thriller*, "The Five Kings", published in issue number 13 in May 1929, featured Templar and his four friends, collectively known as 'The Five Kings'. Their calling card was not the matchstick man 'Saint' figure, but the four kings and joker from a pack of cards – Simon Templar being the joker. Five further 'Five Kings' adventures appeared in *The Thriller* during 1929. In February, March and April 1930, Charteris contributed his last non-Saint stories to the weekly, a trilogy featuring the vengeance-seeking Jill Trelawney.

In May 1930 Hodder & Stoughton became Charteris' publisher and, from then on, the vast majority of his output consisted of novels and collections of short stories featuring 'The Saint'. The first Hodder title, *The Last Hero* (May 1930) was a re-write of two

'Five Kings' *Thriller* stories, "The Creeping Death" and "Sudden Death", with all references to the 'Five Kings' removed. Soon afterwards Charteris turned all his early non-'Saint' and 'Five Kings' *Thriller* stories into fully fledged 'Saint' stories for eventual book publication. The opening sentence of Charteris' next *Thriller* story, "Without Warning", published in May 1930, clearly defined the blueprint for all future stories: "In continuing the stories of the Saint, I prefer to choose them from among his later exploits, from the days when he was working practically alone." Charteris continued to write for *The Thriller* with a further twenty long stories, six short stories and the serialisation of, what many enthusiasts consider to be his finest novel, *The Saint in New York*, appearing in the



The first 'Norman Conquest' story, 'Mr Mortimer Gets the Jitters', was the only Conquest adventure to appear under Brooks's proper name.



The first issue with title 'War Thriller' (March, 1940) gave away the 'Garrison Theatre' song book – but made no mention of the Biggles serial that started therein!



weekly. Nostalgically, in 1936, "The Five Kings" was serialised in the paper due to public demand. By the mid 1930s the Saint's matchstick-man trademark was so well known that the cover illustration of *Thriller* no. 419 was simply a large, orange matchstick 'Saint'. All issues of *The Thriller* featuring Saint stories are highly collectable.

While the editor of *The Thriller* liked to boast of 'full length' or 'book length' stories, the main offering each week was actually 'novella length', around 25,000 words, or approximately one third the length of an average detective novel. When Charteris and other *Thriller* writers re-used their material from the weekly they frequently collected three stories together to form one book.

Another popular character to appear regularly in the paper was A.J. Raffles, the 'gentleman crook', originally created by E.W. Hornung in the 1890s. Raffles' last exploit written by his actual creator, Mr. Justice Raffles, was published in 1909. In the early '30s, however, *The Thriller* editor gained permission from the Hornung estate for Philip Atkey to write new stories featuring Raffles and, in January 1933, the front cover of *The Thriller* announced the appearance of "Raffles

– an amazing NEW complete story of this world famous character". Writing as Barry Perowne, Atkey wrote compelling stories of the character in a contemporary 1930s setting. Perowne's Raffles stories were immensely readable and they gathered a huge following in *The Thriller*, where they were illustrated by Michael Hubbard, an artist ideally suited to depict the debonair cracksman. Perowne wrote over a dozen Raffles stories for *The Thriller* and these were invariably collected in book form. After the war Perowne continued writing adventures of the character in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* and the *Saint Mystery Magazine* and these short-story stories were also collected in book form. Issues of *The Thriller* containing Raffles stories are much in demand.

One of the paper's most enduring characters was devil-may-care adventurer Norman Conquest

Also very much sought after are the handful of *Thriller* issues written by John Creasey. His first story for the weekly was "The Black Circle", an adventure featuring 'The Toff', published in issue 252, in December 1933. Sharing many characteristics of both Raffles and 'The Saint', 'The Toff' was to develop into one of Creasey's most popular characters. Creasey only contributed four stories to *The Thriller* and 'The Toff' never made it into hardback form until 1938, when *Introducing the Toff* was published.

An interesting series of stories to appear in *The Thriller* were the adventures of 'The Shadow', by Maxwell Grant. This character, created for an American radio series in 1930 and featuring in over 300 issues of *The Shadow Magazine* between 1931 and 1949, was anglicised when the stories were published in *The Thriller*, with the setting moved to London. Just over a dozen 'Shadow' stories, together with one serial, appeared in *The*

THE THRILLER 2^d

ALWAYS CONTAINS
The Best Mystery Novel
of the week



CALLING ALL CARS!

A STORY OF
HIGH SPEED
SMUGGLING

BY
Flying-Officer
W.E. JOHNS



EVERY SATURDAY

AUGUST 1938

No. 232 Vol. 15

INSIDE—A DRAMATIC LONG STORY OF RED SWORD—THE SCOURGE OF THE NAZIS!

WAR THRILLER

2^d
WEEKLY

No. 242 Vol. 16
EVERY SATURDAY



NAZI TRAP FOR
A BRITISH AIRMAN!
A TENSE MOMENT FROM
"STORM TROOP
OF THE
BALTIC SKIES"

THRILLS AND ADVENTURE WITH THE BOYS OF THE BULLDOG BREED

Thriller, the first being "Enter The Shadow" in the issue for 26th March 1938. These issues are of particular interest to American collectors, many of whom seem to be unaware of these English 'Shadow' reprints.

One of the most enduring characters to start life in *The Thriller* was Norman Conquest, the devil-may-care adventurer created by Edwy Searles Brooks. The first story, "Mr. Mortimer Gets The Jitters", published in January 1937, was written under Brooks' own name, but the subsequent twenty-eight Norman Conquest stories that appeared in the weekly were all published under his Berkeley Gray pen-name. Brooks, being a past master at the art of pulp fiction writing, constructed his *Thriller* stories so that he could easily use three of them to form a complete novel for hardback publication, rather than three separate novellas. In total Brooks had 49 hardback Norman Conquest novels published,

W.E. Johns made regular contributions to the paper. 'Calling All Cars' (his first contribution), and (right) the only Biggles cover to grace the weekly, painted by Eric Parker for the April 1940 issue.

with a further two being co-written by his widow and son after his death.

Under the pen name of Victor Gunn, E.S. Brooks created yet another popular character who made his debut in *The Thriller*. This was the irascible Bill Cromwell of Scotland Yard, known as 'Ironsides of the Yard'. The first story appeared in the issue for 30th September 1939 and a further three adventures were published before wartime paper shortages brought *The Thriller* to a close. Ironsides, like Norman Conquest, was virtually indestructible and, between 1939 and 1966, Brooks had 43 'Ironsides of the Yard' novels published by Collins.

Throughout its long run of almost six hundred issues a large number of writers contributed stories to *The Thriller* and in a short article like this it is only possible to pick

out the 'highlights' and discuss issues written by particularly collectable authors. One issue that must not be overlooked is number 217, published on April 1st, 1933, containing "The Mystery Man of Soho", written by one of Britain's foremost thriller writers, Margery Allingham. While not featuring her regular character, Albert Campion, it is an immensely enjoyable detective thriller written with all her usual verve and charm.

Other notable contributors included John G. Brandon, Ladbroke Black, Donald Stuart, John Hunter and Richard Essex. Even Agatha Christie, the undisputed 'Queen of Thriller Writers', while never contributing any long stories to *The Thriller*, had three of her short stories published in the weekly during 1934.

The most sought after issues in the entire run of *The Thriller* are those featuring the work of W.E. Johns. While mainly noted for his Biggles adventures, during the 1930s, Johns broke into the adult thriller market, most notably with a series of high speed air adventures featuring Deeley Delaroy, known to his friends and enemies as 'Steeley'.

Like many of the most popular characters in *The Thriller*, Steeley was not above helping himself to other people's wealth. Returning

from the Great War Steeley found, not a land fit for heroes, but a place where those one-time heroes were often forced to sell matches in the gutter to make ends meet. He became a sort of aerial Raffles, using the skills he had honed on the Western Front to make a living by unlawful means.

Some issues can be bought for a modest fiver, others change hands for up to £50

The first Steeley adventure was serialised in the British pulp, *Air Stories*, between January and March, 1936, as "Aerial Enemy No.1", published in book form by Newnes in February, 1936 as *Sky High* and then dusted down for a two part serialisation in *The Thriller*. For some inexplicable reason the editor chose to re-title the first half of the story (published in *Thriller* number 392, dated 8th August 1936) as "Calling All Cars", a weak, unimaginative title for what was a most exciting story. The second half of the adventure, published the following week, had the more suitable title of "Steeley Muscles In". As with all the Steeley adventures, "Calling All Cars" and "Steeley Muscles In" were written in the first person by

The THRILLER

306

29-9-34

The £10 ADVENTURE

Mr. Roberts was a very ordinary man. He was so ordinary that when he suddenly took a look at himself, he received something of a shock and determined that the only thing that could save him was an ADVENTURE. And so he sallied forth with £10 to spend and hope in his heart. Yet even he could not foresee the amazing events which lay in wait for him.



Stretched out on the bunk was the lightly-clad figure of the mystery girl, her arms bound behind her and a gag over her mouth.

By **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

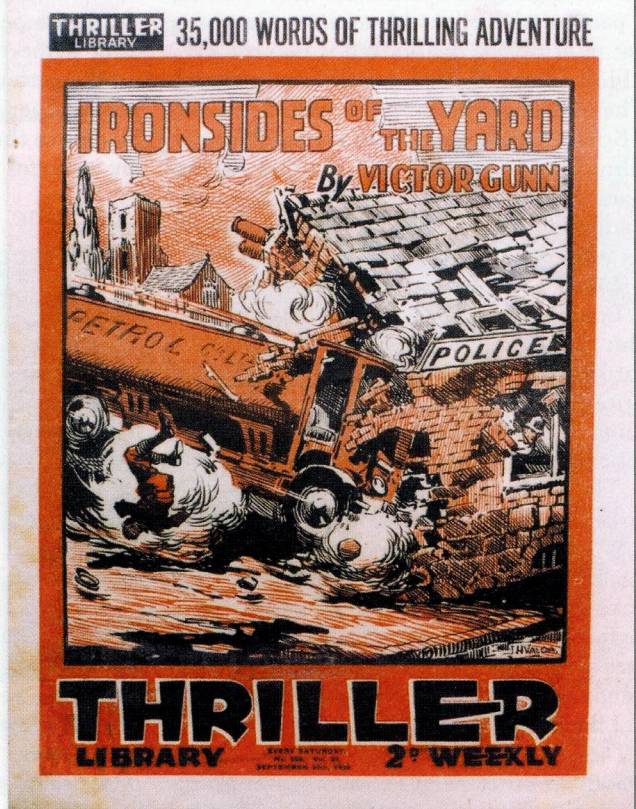
The first of three Agatha Christie short stories to appear in *The Thriller* during the course of its eleven-year run.

Steeley's friend, Tubby Wilde.

Later in the year the second Steeley novel, "Steeley Flies Again", was published as a two-part serial in *The Thriller* as "The Kidnapping of Virginia Marven" and "Steeley in the Gangster's Stronghold". As with its predecessor the two parts were published on consecutive weeks. The gangsters Steeley encounters in this pair of yarns are tough, ruthless characters and are dealt with equally ruthlessly. There was certainly no restraint on blood letting in the Steeley adventures!

The tough, grittiness of the Steeley stories proved popular with readers and the third adventure enjoyed the distinction of appearing in *The Thriller* before book publication. Thus "Prisoner of the Dope Ring" and "The Dope Smugglers" were the main offerings in the issues dated 16th and 23rd January, 1937, preceding the book publication (entitled "Murder By Air") by seven months. In this adventure Steeley works on the side of law and order, with his old adversaries, Inspector Wayne C.I.D. and Colonel Raymond (a carry over from the Biggles books), becoming his allies. Near the start Raymond comments that he hopes Steeley will have as much success on the side of the law as he had done whilst opposed to it. Johns was always an author to get maximum mileage from his work and *Murder By Air* enjoyed a second serialisation in the pages of *Flying*, in the spring of 1938.

The fourth pair of Steeley adventures in *The Thriller* appeared in June and July 1937. These were "Scandal At Castle Deeping" (No. 436) and "The Counterfeiters" (No. 441), adapted for book publication in May 1938 as *The Murder at Castle Deeping*. Despite its



The first adventure to star Victor Gunn's (E.S. Brooks) 'Ironsides of the Yard'.
The cover artwork is by J.H. Valda.

evocative title it is, arguably, the weakest of the Steeley adventures. This may account for the fact that, unlike others in the series, Newnes rejected it and it was issued by John Hamilton.

Unlike its predecessors, the fifth Steeley adventure, "Wings of Romance", was serialised in the back of *The Thriller* during the autumn of 1937, rather than offered as one of the paper's lead stories. During the course of this serialisation, a 'one off' Steeley adventure, "The Missing Page" was published as the main feature in issue number 454. The final Steeley adventure, "Nazis in the New Forest", was published in the issue dated April 27th, 1940. In 1942 Johns changed the names of the lead characters in this story and re-wrote it as

the first part of his juvenile novel, "Sinister Service". "The Missing Page" and "Nazis in the New Forest" were not republished in their original form until 2000, when they appeared in the limited edition, "Steeley and the Missing Page and other Stories".

W.E. Johns' final serial for the weekly came right at the end of the paper's run. The issue dated March 9th saw the title amended to *War Thriller* and an advert for the newly named weekly reflected the change of policy in story content: "35,000 words of war adventure every week". Gone was the traditional detective and cracksman type of story and in their stead were war-related adventures with such titles as "Gestapo Spy Trap" (no. 579), "Scourge of the Nazis" (no. 585) and "Spy Bait" (no. 587), not to mention John's own aforementioned war-related story, "Nazis in the New Forest". In the issue that saw the change of title, *War Thriller* began the serialisation of a Biggles adventure entitled "Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies" (published in book form in June 1940 as "Biggles in the Baltic"). Surprisingly

no announcement of this new serial appeared on the cover of the issue and the fact that it was a Biggles adventure seems to have been played down. Nevertheless the serial was felt important enough to warrant a cover devoted to it a few issues later, when Eric Parker (see BMC 218) painted an atmospheric illustration depicting an incident from that week's episode. "Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies" came to an end in the very last issue of *War Thriller*, number 589, dated 18th May 1940.

The Thriller was a remarkable publication. During its long eleven year run it not only published stories by many of the top thriller writers of the day but, through its own pages, created and built the reputations of others, several of whom became household names. Whilst some issues can still be bought for a modest fiver, others are highly collectable and can change hands for up to fifty pounds. As more collectors of classic crime fiction become aware of the treasures that can be found within its pages, its desirability and value can only increase.



Margery Allingham's only contribution was this story from issue 217, with its brooding Arthur Jones cover.



Price Guide to Thriller titles mentioned in this article

Prices are for copies in VG condition

No. 1 "Red Aces" by Edgar Wallace (9th February 1929)	£50-£60
No. 2 "Lynch Law" by Hugh Clevely (16th February 1929)	£10-£20
No. 4 "The Story of a Dead Man" by Leslie Charteris (2nd March 1929)	£20-£30
No. 9 "The Secret of Beacon Inn" by Leslie Charteris (6th April 1929)	£20-£25
No. 13 "The Five Kings" by Leslie Charteris (4th May 1929)	£20-£30
No. 208 "Raffles" by Barry Perowne (28th January 1933)	£15-£20
No. 217 "The Mystery Man of Soho" by Margery Allingham (1st April 1933)	£15-£20
No. 252 "The Black Circle" by John Creasey (2nd December 1933)	£30-£40
No. 295 contains the short story: "The £10 Adventure" by Agatha Christie (29th September 1934)	£6-£8
No. 306 contains the short story: "Accident" by Agatha Christie (15th December 1934)	£6-£8
No. 309 contains the short story: "Philomel Cottage" by Agatha Christie (5th January 1935)	£6-£8
No. 392 "Calling All Cars" by W.E. Johns (8th August, 1936)	£40-£50
No. 393 "Steeley Muscles In" by W.E. Johns (15th August 1936)	£40-£50
No. 401 "The Kidnapping of Virginia Marven" by W.E. Johns (10th October 1936)	£40-£50
No. 402 "Steeley in the Gangster's Stronghold" by W.E. Johns (17th October 1936)	£40-£50
No. 415 "Prisoner of the Dope Ring" by W.E. Johns (16th January 1937)	£40-£50
No. 416 "The Dope Smugglers" by W.E. Johns (23rd January 1937)	£40-£50
No. 417 "Mr. Mortimer Gets The Jitters" by E.S. Brooks (30th January 1937)	£10-£15
No. 419 "The Return of The Saint" by Leslie (13th Feb 1937)	£20-£25
No. 436 "Scandal At Castle Deeping" by W.E. Johns (12th June 1937)	£40-£50
No. 441 "The Counterfeiters" by W.E. Johns (17th July 1937)	£40-£50
Nos 451-456 "Wings of Romance" (serialisation) by W.E. Johns (18th Sept- 30th Oct 1937)	each: £8-£10
No. 454 "The Missing Page" by W.E. Johns (16th October 1937)	£40-£50
No. 477 "Enter The Shadow" by Maxwell Grant (26th March 1938)	£20-£25
No. 556 "Ironsides of The Yard" by Victor Gunn, (30th September 1939)	£10-£15
No. 586 "Nazis in the New Forest" by W.E. Johns (27th April 1940)	£40-£50
Nos 579-589 "Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies" by W.E. Johns (9th Mar-18th May 1940)	each: £18-£25 (except no. 586 see above)

OTHER ISSUES:

Issues by Barry Perowne featuring Raffles	each: 312-£15
Issues with long stories by Leslie Charteris	each: £20-£25
Issues with short Saint stories and Saint serial episodes	each: £10-£12
Issues by Berkeley Gray	each: £10-£15
Issues by Victor Gunn	each: £10-£15
Issues by Maxwell Grant	each £15-£20
Issues by John Creasey	each: £20-£30
Issues by Edgar Wallace	each: £12-£15
Issues by Gwyn Evans	each £6-£8
Issues by Gerald Verner	each £6-£8
Most other issues	each: £3-£5