

Weirdbook

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From the Editor's Tower

Welcome to *Weirdbook* #35!

*Though April showers may come your way
They bring you Weirdbook that looms in May*

(Al Jolson is probably rolling in his grave right now.)

It's time again! *Weirdbook* #35 is here, and we're bringing you another cavalcade of the bizarre, the frightening, the adventurous, and the fantastical! In other words what you are holding is the fix for your weird jones.

This issue contains 17 stories and 5 poems. These were selected from the over 350 submissions that I received last October. I ended up choosing what I felt to be the 58 best stories and poems. In doing this I went overboard in spending my publisher's hard earned cash by stuffing each issue to bursting with over 80,000 words of content in each issue. That is because I received so much wonderful material that I couldn't bring myself to let any of it slip by. So hopefully we'll manage to sell a few extra issues in order to cover the cost overrun.

It's my deepest and sincerest wish that each and every issue of *Weirdbook* delivers an enjoyable and satisfying reading experience. Thought is continuously given to balancing the content of each issue, and I hope that each tale is a pleasant surprise.

I don't know if I've mentioned this before, but we will soon be publishing our very first themed Annual. This year's theme is "Witches," and the Annual will be out in time for Halloween.

And, as always, I want to think everyone who has submitted to the magazine, everyone who has supported the magazine, and (of course) everyone who reads the magazine. Bless you all!

In closing I want to dedicate this issue to the memory of my step brother Stephen Leibrand, who left us a few weeks ago, so much sooner than he should have. You were a fine man and your passing has left a void that won't be filled.

Till next issue.

—Doug Draa



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The Pullulations of the Tribe

Adrian Cole

I was engrossed in the paperback, a battered crime pulp labeled *A Fistful of Femme Fatales*, so it took me three grabs to get a hold of the ringing phone. I paused in my chewing to mumble a response, but when I heard the voice on the other end, my mouth opened, the gum dropped into my lap and the paperback flopped onto the floor.

“How you doing, Razorface?” Only certain people called me that. The voice was breathy, laced with sex. FiFi Cherie, nightclub singer *extraordinaire*, never usually rang me in my den.

I made some kinda noise so she knew I was still on the end of the phone.

“Hope I didn’t startle you.” I could just picture her face, half screened by that long drop of shining black hair, silky and shimmering. She laughed huskily and then slipped back into the voice I was more used to, that of Ariadne Carnadine, my sometime partner in crime fighting. She knew well enough I was a sucker for her alter ego, the singer who melted hearts in her club, *Diamonds Are Forever*.

“I was thinking of dropping by at the club,” I said.

“That’s sweet of you, honey, but one of the reasons for the call is that I have to fly over to Europe for a few days. Gay Paree. The business won’t run itself and this deal needs the personal touch.”

“You’ve just ruined my week.”

“I’d take you with me, but I know what flying does to your digestive system.”

Not to mention the rest of my system. Any kind of plane was my idea of hell on earth, or above it. “There were others reasons you rang?”

“Yes. I have a little problem for you to solve. Specifically for FiFi.”

“How could I refuse? So what gives?”

“You know I like to choose my singers very carefully. I like to find the best of the new talent.” It was true—she had a good ear and had pulled some real charmers from the many wannabes who auditioned in her club. “The thing is, at least two potential new kids on the block have gone missing. I got word to them after their auditions that I wanted them back, with the likely prospect of a contract for them. Usually, that kind of offer is something they’d bite your hand off to get.”

“I know it.”

“So it’s weird that I’ve heard nothing. I’m organizing a Big Jamboree at *Diamonds Are Forever* soon and anyone who’s anyone in this town will be there. It’s a real prestige event. Big opportunity for these girls, so it’s very strange that they’ve disappeared. I put the word out and had some of my people check things. No sign. Nothing. Both girls have left town quick. I don’t like it, Nick.”

“Rival concern?”

“I’d know if it were. No, this is weird. Will you poke around for me, see what you can dig up?”

“It’ll cost you. A whole weekend.”

“Don’t sell yourself short,” she purred, using her FiFi Cherie voice again.

“Okay, let’s say a month.”

“Now you’re being greedy.”

* * * *

Ariadne had furnished me with details about the two young singers, both of them from the city, kids who ought to know their way around and who should have been streetwise enough to look after themselves. Neither had an agent, which was maybe a good thing, as the music agents I knew were the land equivalent of great white sharks.

I did a bit of legwork for a couple of nights, drawing blanks until I got my first sniff of something in a rundown club down on the waterfront. Called *The Gunrunner Club*, it was run by an ex-pro boxer, Mo Karstein, whose main claim to fame was that he’d gone ten rounds with the world champ of some ten years back. He’d had his lights punched out, but that wasn’t the point—he was still a local hero.

Mo poured me a double, on the house, and pointed me in the direction of one of the bar floozies, a sleepy-eyed vixen by the name of Selene. She must have used more paint than the entire cast of a Broadway show and wore a pink wig that looked like the insides of a mattress had exploded over her. When I walked up to her and gave her a cheery wave, she grinned at me like she had hit pay dirt.

When I told her who I was and that I wasn’t looking for a good time, just information, she shrugged and swigged resignedly at her gin cocktail. I slapped a good few greenbacks on the bar and they disappeared like they’d never existed.

“Mo tells me you do a bit of singing,” I said.

“He’s being kind. We used to have a thing, and he humoured me. These days he sees that I’m all right. Let’s me take a turn at the mike when there’s not too big a crowd. Don’t tell me you’re interested in my voice, mister.”

“My guess is, you know a good voice when you hear one, right?”

“Sure. I got a good ear.”

“I’m looking for two kids who can sing. Word is—they’re good. Maria Mozzari and Suki Yosimoto. Names mean anything to you?”

I always watch the eyes. They usually give the game away. I could see this lady recognised the names—her eyes narrowed slightly, she looked away for a moment, then back at me, composed again.

“Listen, I’m no bank, lady. But I’ll give you a fair price. What do you know?” I shoved a few more greenbacks at her. She counted the money, folded it and shoved it somewhere private.

“A few nights back, the place was jumping. Rock and roll night and more than a few fresh customers from outside. We all had a good time. Two of the new faces were hoods. It wasn’t just the suits that gave it away. I can smell hoods a mile away. Not sure whose mob they were from. Maybe outta town. Carrying enough hardware to start a war.”

“You talk to them?”

“Nah, but I listened in over the shoulder of the bozo who was trying to carry me off into the night. Fat chance. I was holding him up.”

“So what did these guys talk about?”

“Something was going down. Big action. They were posing as talent scouts. Like I’m an opera diva. Talent scouts! White slavers more like. Anyways, they was watching the girls’ acts. I watched them. Weird thing was, they didn’t take a load of notice of all the naked flesh on display, you know, the tasteful dancing and stuff. Most guys had their eyes and tongues hanging out. These two were listening.”

“For the singers?”

“Sure. You mentioned two names.” She looked around as if it would be a bad idea to repeat the names like they were a curse or something. “When they did their acts, these guys perked up.”

“The girls were good?”

“Yeah. Like I said, I got a good ear. These two had class. I’d give a lot to have a voice like that. And they had the chassis to go with the voices. Sleek. I hated them.”

“What happened?”

“I heard one of the hoods say these two would be right for some woman. I guess she was their boss. She had a fancy name.” She swigged her gin as if it would fuel her memory. Her eyes blinked in concentration. I motioned for the barman to top up her glass.

“Cadenza?” she said. “Was that it?”

I felt as though a sudden cold wind had blown across the room. “Carmella Cadenza.”

“Yeah, that wuz it. Mouthful. Sounds like some piece from Holly-

wood. Anyway, the hoods muscled their way over to the stage and spoke to the girls and I reckon they bought them drinks. That wuz it. Cleared off soon after.”

“You said these guys were talking about something before that.”

“My head was full of booze—when isn’t it?—so I didn’t get much more than the drift of it. Something about power. The girls wuz gonna help this Cadenza woman get some kind of power.”

The cold wind blew colder. I’d crossed paths with Carmella Cadenza before and it had taken a certain amount of strange power to foil her unsavoury ambitions. She’d lost out, but my guess was she was the kind of woman who’d go looking for an alternative means to get what she wanted, none of it any good for the rest of us. If she was kidnapping young women, there were several potential reasons that sprang to mind, all of them unpleasant.

“You look like you could do with a stiff drink, mister,” said Selene, like she was mounting a half-hearted attempt to seduce more cash out of me.

“You have any idea where these hoods and the girls went? Does anyone?”

She shook her head. “I’ll ask around. Come back tomorrow. I’ll have something for you, even if it’s only a warm bunk.”

* * * *

I spent the next day mooching around town and I was beginning to get the feeling that I’d have to go back to *The Gunrunner Club* and see if the delectable Selene had dug up anything for me, other than a warm bunk. With more than a little reluctance, I was heading in that direction, when a voice behind me pulled me up short.

I turned to face the cracked smile of a grizzled old sailor, Sten-Gun Stan, mechanic to the eccentric Henry Maclean, a youngster who spent a lot of his time cruising about in an unlikely tin can he called *The Deep Green*—a submarine of sorts, in which I had once experienced the very dubious delights of underwater travel.

“Been looking for you,” he said. Stan’s crumpled jacket reeked of oil like he’d just finished greasing the engines on that infernal machine of his.

I let him direct me to one of the buildings along the sidewalk, a place where auctions were held from time to time. Today was one of those times, and a crowd had assembled within, shoulder to shoulder, so I wondered what they were pedaling.

“Keep a low profile,” said Stan.

“You expecting trouble?” I asked, but it was a dumb question. Whatever he and Henry were up to would likely have questionable ramifications.

“Henry’s after something. There’s a whole load of musical instruments