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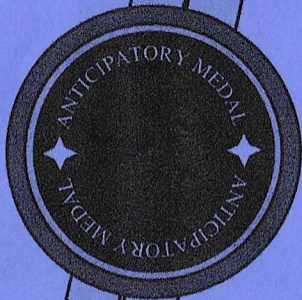
Edited and designed by Taylor Stout  
Cover art by Davis Dunham

# PULP!

Pulp!  
By Davis Dunham  
Issue 2, Chapters 4-6

I WAITED TWO  
WEEKS FOR THE  
SECOND ISSUE  
OF *PULP!* AND  
ALL I GOT WAS  
THIS LOUSY

**ANTICIPATORY  
MEDAL**





## Chapter Four

Magnus had never heard a door slam quite so loudly in his life. He had noticed how heavy the door was when Damon first swung it shut on their way to Rafferty's office, the sound it made reminding him of old submarine movies. However, behind it by himself for the first time after being returned to his, he supposed, office, the heaviness appeared as it had truly been the whole time: a barrier, holding back a mountain of information. But, he was "uniquely positioned"—to use some of Rafferty's business language—to drill a little hole in that barrier and let it all dribble out. This kind of heist was easy to fantasize about—during days spent on the couch with a book or, worse, television, waiting for his ship to come in—but to act on it was quite different. He did a mediocre job of suring himself up that he could face the challenge. (He was feeling rather high after stumbling upon such a gold mine, and getting carried away every once and a while is good for the soul.)

However, he was struck by a sudden, urgent thought: was the lock on the inside of the door, or the outside? He ran to it, and the rhythm of running—which he hadn't been doing much of lately—taunted the wound already tugged open by Damon's disdain for his hair. *Dammit*, he thought, *this stuff really does get in my face*. He was disappointed to admit that Damon was right, though, he reminded himself, rejecting the truth just to stick it to the man would only be realizing the man's most insidious tactic: making him stick it to himself. And he didn't really like getting stuck.

His hand struck the knob, and the door swung open. The air in the hall was cooler, though that wasn't saying much. How high off the ground could they be? He reminded himself of the view from Rafferty's office—though, he supposed, he had no clue whose office it really was. Rafferty seemed like the kind of guy to command from advantageous ground and leave without much of a personal mark. Comparing it to the view from his former office, he deduced they were somewhere around the twenty-fifth story. Rafferty's office had one of the only windows in the building,

which, because they were in one of the last true downtown skyscrapers, had a view that stretched unobstructed the whole way up Manhattan. The place around 23rd Street where the island curved a little, like a Bowie knife. The rivers sliding up each side like arms rubbing hips, rubbing thighs, clad in silk. The skyscrapers that lined the south side of the park—which, he had read, sat mostly unoccupied and swayed in the wind like blades of grass. He laughed. Depending on scale, King Kong was no bigger than an ant.

A nagging feeling came over him as he stood in the hallway catching his breath. Hanging out in the hall with the door wide open was probably not what he was supposed to be doing with his company time, and he had better get his ass back inside before someone walked by and saw him. Plus, privacy seemed better for the type of scheme he felt tickling the edges of his mind. *Just a little more information*, he thought, *and I'll know right where to grab. And pull.*

And where better to start than the stacks and stacks of information before him? Freshly inside, with the door closed and all hopes of a draft shut out behind him, Magnus surveyed his new kingdom: about fifty feet by one-hundred feet, he guessed, and whitewashed cinder blocks all around, save the steel submarine door, which he could only explain with the architect's overgrown desire for dramatic effect or economic involvement in the submarine manufacturing business. He walked to the closest stack and pulled a bankers box off the shelf, hoping it could tell him more about what he was there to do.

A quick scan for cameras. None found. He was naturally a paranoiac, so it was tough for him even in everyday situations not to convince himself that everyone was out to get him. (This was, of course, just him projecting his self-disregard onto others. Other people didn't like him because he was detached and pretentious, not because there was a conspiracy against him.) Now, he was actually in a situation where someone might be watching, and the

first thing he did was pant dramatically in the hallway and start rifling through boxes? He knew to do better than this. He had to do better than this if he wanted the story.

He brought the box over to the scanning station. It was heavy, maybe ten pounds or so, and full to the brim with papers organized neatly in tabbed folders. He dragged his finger down the raised line of tabs and felt them thud back against the air with drunken pleasure. Just the day before, he had traced his finger down the spines of his bookshelf and wondered if the future had a fate in store for him. Finally, it had come to meet him, and, being as shameless and opportunistic as he was, he had chosen to meet it back.

Magnus pressed a key, and the computer lit up. A high-pressure green seeped out through the openings the characters made in the wet, noxious screen like they were being extruded. He did as ordered and placed the first sheet in the scanner. After he pressed the Enter key, a series of green dots grew across the screen until a single, crystalline check mark plinked up near the edge. As he took the document from the scanner, he memorized what he could of it before dropping it into the paper shredder, which received it with a pleasant, satisfied whirring sound. He walked back to the box and started to do it all over again. It certainly wouldn't hurt to look busy.

## Chapter Five

Magnus walked out onto Baxter Street. Though the sun hadn't quite set, the jagged, man-made skyline around him cast him—along with all the people bustling west toward the train, the cars jockeying for top spot at the traffic light, and the down on their luck shaking to light pipes and foraged butts—into premature darkness. He looked at the building across from him: six stories, a typical downtown townhouse. From down here, he couldn't

imagine climbing up the facade without catching a wave of vertigo, but from the window in Rafferty's office he hadn't even been able to see it. Where was the vertigo then? Come to think of it, he hadn't gotten short of breath on the elevator ride up, either—only on the ride down. His instincts had reacted to the influx of titillating information by shutting off his vertigo, his claustrophobia—all his extraneous worries—only to restart them now that he, like the hot moisture that followed him down in the elevator and out through the lobby, was free.

All day he had labored over that scanner, and he had barely made it through two boxes. He was prepared to use the ancient scanner as an excuse for his speed if push came to shove. Going low-tech left less risk to be neglected, he supposed. Or not neglected.

All day, and nothing to show for it. Yet. Damon hadn't been kidding—it was all company stuff. From the best that he could figure out, it was payroll and invoice information. Each account had its own boxes organized chronologically, sometimes with only one sheet in each folder—May 1983, Bachman, money out; October 1977, Rosco, money in. He didn't know what organizational tactic existed to keep things straight once he uploaded the documents, though he supposed that wasn't really his business. None of it was his business really, he reminded himself, so why not see how far he could go? He reminded himself to ask Damon what went down on the digital end after the green check mark hit the screen. He doubted he would be seeing Rafferty again very soon.

He moved with the flow of traffic toward the train until he felt someone reach into his pocket and remove his phone. Without thinking—or, perhaps, feeling inflated by his recent luck—he followed what little he could see of the thief dashing perpendicularly into an alley through the human rush. Magnus couldn't afford another phone. He nearly fell into the alley but caught himself at the last moment, dusting his clothes off quickly as he rose to continue the chase. But, he saw, the thief, instead of running, was parked with a leg cocked out to the side, dangling

Magnus's phone like a red flag meant to taunt him, a smirk spread across his face.

Before Magnus could start to figure out what was going on, he became aware that a man had slowly, solidly, but steadily sidled up behind him—and a big one at that. He froze. *How fitting*, he thought. *I get a story and then I go and get myself killed*. He didn't have time to consider that the two happenings might be related before the blackjack hit his skull right behind the ear.

\* \* \*

"Boy, those gangsters really did a number on you, didn't they?"

A blonde head floated in Magnus's vision like a screensaver.

"Wha—," he started. "What? Who—." He stuck his hands out toward the alien creature before him.

"Careful there, sport. You should probably wait to see straight first." Authoritative hands closed on Magnus's wrists and dragged them downward to his chest. "Those two gangsters. What were they up to?"

Though the physical effects of the blow were waning, Magnus couldn't help but acknowledge that the man's presence was worsening the mental discombobulation by the second. The man's face was still blurry, and his voice had a strange, sing-song cadence to it that, as his senses began to clear, Magnus realized was not a distortion caused by the blow but in fact an accent. "I—," he started.

Once he could focus his eyes, he began to see the man more clearly. Blonde. Buzz cut. Skin on the dryer, more papery side that tended toward middle-aged, but it was still tight enough on the bones that he couldn't have been much past his late thirties; just, perhaps, a hard thirty or so years. He had a long face, but even, with his features branching off like yards on a mast. The sails, his

cheeks, showed similarly even stubble somewhere between blonde and gray.

The man quickly stuck his hand out. "There we go," he said, pulling Magnus to his feet.

"Who were those guys?" Magnus asked, whipping his head around and going from dim and confused to sharp as a tack within the four words.

"Welcome back," the face said. Now, Magnus found it was not only attached to a head, but attached to a body as well—long, too, like the face, and thin but clearly powerful. Tall, though the Doc Martens gave an extra inch or so. Dressed all in black, save the Metallica logo on his t-shirt. He looked like a run-down Viking who'd never quite given up on the 80s.

"Barry. Barry Bergh," the man said. Again, he stuck out his hand, this time for a shake. "I knocked those two guys off of you back there. Didn't get your phone, though. Sorry."

Magnus smacked his lips. "Damn, man. Well, thank you. I don't have anything or else I'd—" he patted his pockets to make a show of it.

"I don't want your money," Barry said. "I followed you here, just like them. Do you know who it is you're working for?"

## Chapter Six

When he was fourteen, Magnus decided on a beach trip with his family that guidelines were just that—guides, and not rules—and that it would be okay to take the rented jet ski much farther out than the half-mile limit that had been ascribed. When he was first heading out on that B-line from shore, he didn't look back for a long time.

He thought he would be surprised at how close everything still was. He had been sure that "far" wasn't as far as he'd been told.

As he looked over Barry's shoulder at the entrance of what was now his place of work, Magnus felt the same feeling he had felt when he'd sat on that jet ski, let its roar die to a purr, to a rattle, felt it settle down between his legs, and turned his neck past his shoulder to see a beach so distant that each person was nothing but a black speck. He hadn't even been able to tell if one of them was waving to him.

He started back immediately, but the real cause for concern met him halfway. There was not enough fuel in the vessel for a return trip from such a distance. This was communicated as a way to discourage people from going very far, but, after the fact, Magnus decided he must have taken a minute to ogle something aside from the instructor before taking off, because he had no memory of that warning at all.

"Hey," Barry commanded, snapping in his face. "I hate to disrupt your daydreams, but I need some answers here. In case you haven't guessed, you're already in quite a bit of trouble, so I suggest you work with me. Maybe I can help you get out of it."

Through the litany of panicked demands dancing in the glass of his mind like marbles, Magnus decided to see what he could get out of the man. "Who exactly are you?"

"Barry Bergh. Oslo police. I just saved you from those crooks you let bait you into the alley." He looked at Magnus with wide eyes, as if to say, *Are you getting it yet?*

"How do I know you don't just want whatever they wanted?" Magnus said while rubbing the sore spot already appearing behind his ear.

"Oh, I can guarantee you they still want it. And it's not a thing, it's you. My guess is they were planning on convincing you to join

their cause.” From his expression, Magnus could guess that their methods of conviction were not much fun.

“That building you were just in?” Barry continued. “I’m guessing it’s slightly more secure than you were thinking. And a bit more high tech. How much of it did you see?”

“Not much, just halls and two offices. The whole place was hot and damp. No circulation.”

“They took you up the back way. How many floors?”

“About twenty-five or so, by my guess. Why?”

“I want to know where it is.”

“Know where what is?”

Barry threw his hand toward the red, sparsely windowed monolith that seemed to inflate slightly every time Magnus looked away. “Who do you think owns that building?” Magnus said he didn’t know.

“Wilson McKinley,” Barry continued. “He and his family have owned that building since its construction, and they have no intention of selling it. Want to know why? It’s the single most lucrative building in all of Manhattan.” He paused. “Do you know what a safety deposit box is? Anything about secure document storage?”

Magnus nodded. As of today, he was an industry professional

“That building is the only successful digital safety deposit box in this city. Believe me, I’ve checked. Every other one had leaks in the past five years.”

“Every other one?” Magnus said.

“You would be amazed at what a little money will do to someone’s sense of security. The more you want to keep secure, the better you want security to be. It’s that simple. Think of that building as the place where people with a lot to keep secure pay a large amount of money to Wilson McKinley to do it.

“When you have a hard copy, you can keep an eye on it. But a hard drive—which is how McKinley stores his clients’ data—connect it to the internet, and for all you know someone’s rooting around in it like a mouse in a gym sock. How would you know? It’s all hidden in the ones and zeroes, in the circuits. McKinley and his folk know that better than anyone. That’s why the whole building is disconnected from the web—so he can fill it up with the independent hard drives he calls digitanks without worrying that someone can hack in. For himself, though, he takes it a step further. All the family’s personal records are filed, physically, in a secure room on, what was it,” Barry said, gesturing toward the upper part of the building, “the twenty-fifth floor?”

Magnus nodded. “About.”

The foreign cop returned the word in his accent and nodded back. “Three months ago, Anton McKinley, Wilson McKinley’s son, murdered a young Norwegian woman in Oslo. Trude Oddvarson. Someone he had been seeing. He was caught on camera leaving the scene of the crime, but since no physical evidence linked him to the murder, he was let go. That’s what they say.” Barry paused. “I’m sure his father’s connections,” he said, taking another long pause before the last word, “didn’t hurt his case. Of course, Digitank—that’s the name of McKinley’s company—would never peek in the back doors of its clients’ “vaults”—their private, off-line secure hard drives. But, it turns out, knowing where to throw the right threat can get a young man from a Norwegian prison onto a private plane over the Atlantic in less than twelve hours.”

As the older man spoke, Magnus watched his face change from an unnervingly smooth and elastic slate into a rictus of ultimate

disdain. It was clear Barry had no sympathy for the plights of the wealthy, nor had he likely, it seemed, had much of a shot at being one of them himself. His eyes narrowed in the corners and darkened, his top lip widening into a snarl that tugged at the tender, center part of his bottom lip.

"They're having me digitize the records. The ones in that room," Magnus said. "I think."

Barry's face lightened somewhat as he spoke. "I know. You're the only person who's gone in or out all day. Those guys, the ones that hit you. They're with the plumbers' union. They're trying to strong-arm McKinley into giving them data from your Mayor's drive so they can blackmail her into reforming a bill to track how much of the proceeds from government-subsidised building projects go to the workmen."

"Holy—," Magnus said. He threw his hands in the air and walked in a loose circle, head tilted up at the sky with his hands knitted behind his head. "Plumbers? I can't believe they jumped me. I would have supported their cause, man. I love unions."

"Not plumbers. Gangsters. Hired by the plumbers' union. And no leaks, remember? Not one since it opened. Their plan is misguided. It wouldn't have mattered. You wouldn't have gotten the data out. And McKinley himself benefits from the misappropriation of those subsidies, so don't count him out. This isn't the only building he owns, and he's got many more on the way."

The two stood in silence. In light of recent events, he was no longer so sure the temp agent deserved such a "thank you" at the end of all this. First, he hoped this was the end of all of it, that the Coast Guard would come get him quite soon, pull him and his jet ski aboard, and deliver him back to his family. Second, whether it was a check, a flaming brown paper bag on her doorstep, or a court summons, whatever gesture of thanks he sent the temp agent would be one for the books. Perhaps one for one of his books.

With that thought, the faraway shore of the McKinley building's descent into the sidewalk took a step closer. *Books*, Magnus thought. *Story. My story*. He would've kissed the blonde man's freckled forehead if Barry hadn't been more than four inches taller than him. Who needed the Coast Guard? He had a six-foot Norwegian dolphin skimming him back to shore with his hands around its fin. The jet ski that got him there could stay and rust.

Barry pulled a cigarette out of a beat-up pack from his jacket pocket, in which he'd also tucked a neon orange disposable lighter.

"Come on," he said, lighting up, taking a deep breath, and consequently exhaling a long trail of smoke from either side of the wagging cigarette. He saw Magnus's eyes on the lighter. "I know. I'm more of a black kind of guy," he said, gesturing up and down his front. "It's the only one they had. And when you need a fix." He shrugged to indicate he was not taking opinions on the matter. "Let's grab you a drink. We can talk. You could use it."

He brushed past Magnus and went down the alley. A few seconds passed. Then, Magnus turned and followed the puffs of smoke that traipsed through the air.