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The Best of Adventure: Vol. 1, 1910-1912

Doug Ellis, editor
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The Best of Adventure is full of intrigue, action, mystery, danger, and daring—and this is just the first volume! The pulp magazine *Adventure* started 100 years ago. It became renowned for publishing top authors of the day, including H. Rider Haggard (King Solomon's Mines) and Rafael Sabatini (*Captain Blood*). The stories range from covering the idyllic but perilous South Seas to the scavenger-dog infested shores of Constantinople.

As the first editors noted, "Adventure is a pretty big word; it's an elastic word, too, and a comprehensive one. It does not mean merely shooting big game in the jungle, or getting shipwrecked, or seeking treasure in the tropic seas. Just as certainly there are adventures in love, in politics, in war, in finance…"

Full of plot and mystery, these stories are bound to appeal to fans of adventure novels such as *39 Steps*, *Kidnapped!*, and *She.* They feature strong, brave men and an occasional plucky young woman. My favorite is the girl who barricades herself in the wheelhouse of an abandoned ship overrun with rats while she waits for the albatross to return with help.

By far the best story in the collection is "Brethren of the Beach" by H.D. Couzens. It's about a handful of beachcomber workmen who loot the shell beds on a desolate, wind-swept island in the South Pacific. "The uncertainty of the pearl-fisher's trade makes it one of the most fascinating in the world, for while an entire bed may yield nothing more valuable than the shell, every oyster may hold a potential fortune." Like a Polynesian *Treasure of the Sierra Nevada*, the story centers around a down-on-his-luck loafer and outcast, Tom Matthews, who takes up with five white men "with shady pasts" whose greed threatens to turn their success into disaster.

One drawback to this collection is that the volume has no titles in the running heads and no separation between stories other than a line break. Although these adventure tales are dated in language and racial bias which can be off-putting, they still provide darn-good storytelling full of solid characters whose wanderlust has driven them about the world, not necessarily looking for adventure but "quick enough when need be" to handle adversity when faced by it.

TRINA CARTER (January 7, 2011)

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