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True Crime Detective Magazines

Eric Godtland

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The Golden Age of bad girls: Gun-toting femmes fatales caught in the action!

“My buddies wanted to be firemen, farmers or policemen, something like that. Not me, I just wanted to steal people’s money*!”*
—John Dillinger

At the height of the Jazz Age, when Prohibition was turning ordinary citizens into criminals and ordinary criminals into celebrities, America’s true crime detective magazines were born. *True Detective* came first in 1924, and by 1934, when the Great Depression had produced colorful outlaws like **Machine Gun Kelly, Bonnie and Clyde, Baby Face Nelson**, and **John Dillinger**, the magazines were so popular cops and robbers alike vied to see themselves on the pages. Even FBI boss **J. Edgar Hoover** wrote regularly for what came to be called the “Dickbooks,” referring to a popular slang term for a detective.

As the decades rolled on, the magazines went through a curious metamorphosis, however. When liquor was once more legal, the Depression over and all the flashy criminals dead or imprisoned, the “detectives” turned to sin to make sales. **Sexy bad girls in tight sweaters, slit skirts, and stiletto heels adorned every cover**. Cover lines shouted “I Was a Girl Burglar—For Kicks,” “Sex Habits of Women Killers,” “Bride of Sin!,” “She Played Me for a Sucker,” and most succinctly, “Bad Woman.”

True Crime Detective Magazines **follows the evolution and devolution of this distinctly American genre from 1924 to 1969.** Hundreds of covers and interior images from dozens of magazine titles tell the story, not just of the “detectives,” but also of America’s attitudes towards sex, sin, crime and punishment over five decades. With texts by magazine collector **Eric Godtland, George Hagenauer** and *True Detective* editor **Marc Gerald**, *True Crime Detective Magazines* is an informative and entertaining look at one of the strangest publishing niches of all time.

Text in English, French, and German

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