

Jerry Cotton's Rivals The Lesser Guns of German Pulp

For 50 years, G-man Jerry Cotton (see ThrillerUK issue ?) has been Germany's best known pulp hero. As might be expected, Cotton's success spawned a host of imitations and in the 1960s and 1970s, German newstands were full of titles such as *FBI Agent Jeff Conter* (1960 to 1965), *Glenn Collins USA Special Agent* (1967 to 1970), *Mr Brooklyn* (1978 to 1980), *Mr Chikago* (who misspelled the name of his hometown and lasted from 1968 to 1974), *Toby Gin* (1961 to 1964), *Inspector McCormick* (who later had to change his name because German readers didn't know how to pronounce it and lasted from 1961 to 1967) and many others. Some of these Jerry Cotton imitators became long-running successes in their own right, others were so obscure that they only lasted for a few issues. In the following, I will look at a few of the more notable crimefighters of German post-war pulp.

The most famous of the Cotton imitators is *Kommissar X* (Inspector X). The brainchild of former Jerry Cotton author C.H. Günther (writing under the house name Bert F. Island), *Kommissar X* was launched in 1959 by the publisher Pabel. The title *Kommissar X* is something of a misnomer, as the hero is not a police officer but a private investigator from New York City. And his name is not X but Jo Luis Walker (note the misspelled first name). A later issue explains that the *Kommissar X* is a sort of honorary title bestowed upon Walker. Perpetually aged 29, Walker smokes Chesterfield cigarettes and drives a red vintage *Indian* motorcycle. He lives and works in the Bronx and frequently co-operates with Tom Rowland of the New York police department. Walker and Rowland have been friends since the Korean War. The initial adventures were set in the USA, later stories had Walker fighting crime all over the world. As Walker always worked closely with the authorities, he had police liaisons in most of the countries where he operated such as the French Inspector La Porte (named after C.H. Günther's French mother). After Günther left the series, Walker's lifestyle was spiced up. Subsequent authors gave him an exclusive apartment (there can't be too many of those in the Bronx) and a succession of expensive sports cars. At one point, Walker even acquired a female assistant, a move that Günther always resented.

Unlike the rather puritan *Jerry Cotton* series, the *Kommissar X* guidelines were far less strict. Thus, the adventures contained generous amounts of sex and violence, though the authors were discouraged from making any kind of political statement. The racier content of *Kommissar X* is also apparent in the lovely covers of the early issues, which often depict voluptuous temptresses in various states of undress.

Like *Jerry Cotton* before him, *Kommissar X* also made the transition to the silver screen. Eight *Kommissar X* films appeared between 1965 and 1971. Tony Kendall (in truth the Italian actor Luciano Stella) starred as Jo Walker, Brad Harris was Tom Rowland. Considered classics of trash cinema, these films are far better known outside Germany than the pulp series that inspired them.

In 1964 C.H. Günther left *Kommissar X* to start a new series called *Mister Dynamit*, also for the publisher Pabel. *Mister Dynamit* was not so much a Jerry Cotton but a James Bond clone. Robert "Bob" Urban, also known as Code 18, is the best agent of the BND, Germany's foreign intelligence service. The formula of the series was

simple: exotic locations, stories playing on the political fears of the day of the day and a generous dose of sex. The predominantly red covers (by artist Firuz Askin) and titles like *Land der 1000 Henker* (Country of a thousand hangmen), *Der Spion am Galgen* (Spy on the gallows) or *Stirb mit mir heut nacht* (Die with me tonight) promised thrills and excitement to legions of eager readers.

Especially in the early years, the *Mister Dynamit* adventures had a rather aggressive tone which meant that the series caught a lot of flak from left-wing critics. To quote 1970s pulp critic Bernt Kling, *Mister Dynamit* regularly saved the world from “everything that was left, black, yellow, red or just different”. Bernt Kling’s assertion is a little bit unfair, since Bob Urban spent just as much time fighting old and new Nazis (who could have guessed that they were the ones who really shot John F. Kennedy?) as communists, terrorists and other geopolitical lowlifes. In later years, the series was toned down, both in reaction to criticism and to changes in the world political climate. But the following dialogue snippet from a 1960s *Mr Dynamit* story clearly illustrates just what it was about the series that got critics all riled up:

“Why can’t we have world peace?”

“Because a man can’t only breathe in either.”

But despite heavy criticism, *Mister Dynamit* was popular enough to survive until 1992. And since 2001, brand new *Mister Dynamit* adventures by C.H. Günther have been appearing in book form once again, courtesy of the speciality publisher Oerindur. What is more, *Mister Dynamit* even made the jump across the pond, when eight of his adventures were published in the USA in the mid 1970s, something that even the juggernaut *Jerry Cotton* never managed to accomplish. In the first issue of the US release, *Mister Dynamit* was still called *Max Galan: Hunter of Men*, from issue two on the series became known under its original title.

Like his predecessors *Jerry Cotton* and *Kommissar X*, *Mister Dynamit* was also adapted for the silver screen. The single *Mister Dynamit* movie, *Morgen küsst Euch der Tod* (Tomorrow death will kiss you) was released in 1966. Lex Barker (who appeared in many German films of the 1960s) starred as Bob Urban, aided and abetted by such stalwarts of German cinema as Eddie Arent (known for his roles in many of the Edgar Wallace films), Ralf Wolter and Wolfgang Preiss (who played the supervillain Doctor Mabuse in five films of the 1960s).

C.H. Günther, the man who created both *Kommissar X* and *Mister Dynamit*, is one of Germany’s best known pulp authors. Among other things, he worked on the *Jerry Cotton* series and even penned the screenplay of one of the Cotton movies. After *Kommissar X* and *Mister Dynamit* folded in 1992 due to changes at the publishing house, Günther drew on his experience as a Navy officer in WWII to write submarine adventure novels. In 1979, Günther also penned *Liebe so kalt wie der Tod* (Love as cold as death), an interesting thriller about a marriage of convenience between a WWII *Luftwaffe* major and a Jewish woman in the employ of the US Army.

On the surface, the still nameless series that made its debut in the pulp anthology *Chicago Roman*, published by the long vanished publisher Hallberg in 1953, looked like any other hard-boiled mystery series. However, it was not the tough lawyer Mike Rander who solved the crimes but his butler Josuah Parker (note the unusual spelling of the first name). Parker is the epitome of the British butler, always correct

and polite. He is also an amateur detective with a penchant for gadgetry that would make even James Bond green with envy. Parker's favourite weapons are his ever-present bowler - which is steel-lined, taking a cue from John Steed and *Goldfinger's* Oddjob - and his umbrella which doubles both as a blackjack and a blowgun. On occasion, Parker also uses a special catapult as well as any weapon he can get his hands on. He drives an old London taxi that is armed to the hubcaps and smokes a special brand of cigars called Black Torpedoes whose smell no one but Parker can stand.

Parker and Mike Rander made spotty appearances in a variety of long forgotten pulp magazines throughout the early 1950s. From 1956 on, they found a home in the anthology series *Bastei Kriminalroman* (Bastei Mystery Novel), where *Jerry Cotton* had gotten his start three years previously. In 1959 finally, the series was picked up by the publisher Zauberkreis and soon became a permanent fixture in their *Silber Krimi* (Silver Mystery) magazine. Zauberkreis reprinted most of the earlier adventures and commissioned new ones. In 1969, the series changed its title to *Butler Parker* which is how it continued to be known until its end in 1986 when it folded along with the publisher Zauberkreis.

Butler Parker was created by author Günter Dönges. Dönges published the first few adventures under a variety of American sounding pen names such as Glenn Larring, Dan Cillingh and John D. Acton. In later years he used his own name. Dönges was a prolific writer who worked on various pulp series and TV-shows. He even authored a few *Jerry Cotton* novels.

The early *Butler Parker* adventures were set in the USA and cast very much in the *Jerry Cotton/Kommissar X* mold. The cases were murders, gang wars and other violent crimes with occasional excursions into the bizarre. Thus, Butler Parker also battled ape men, monster ants and fake aliens in his early adventures.

In 1972, Butler Parker returned to Britain. He quickly found a new employer, the eccentric amateur detective Lady Agatha Simpson. Mike Rander eventually moved to London as well to aid Butler Parker and Lady Simpson in their fight against crime. The move to Britain irrevocably changed the tone of the series. The violence of the early years was gradually replaced by wit and humour. The stories started to focus more on the interplay between the characters and less on the individual cases. The cast expanded to include such characters as Kathy Porter, Lady Simpson's secretary and Mike Rander's girlfriend (thanks to the Lady's matchmaking attempts), Chief-Superintendent McWarden of Scotland Yard and the aptly named Horace Pickett, a former pickpocket whose life Parker has saved from the mob. Fans generally prefer the whimsical adventures of the 1970s and 1980s to the more violent stories of the early years.

Butler Parker even spawned a TV-series of 26 half-hour colour episodes which aired in 1972. Dirk Dautzenberg played Josuah Parker, Eckart Dux was Mike Rander. Future star Gaby Dohm had a small part as Mike Rander's secretary. Unlike many other vintage German TV-shows, *Butler Parker* has never been rerun, though videos show up from time to time.

However, the photo that appeared on the cover many early *Butler Parker* adventures does not show Dirk Dautzenberg but a bowler-hatted Ernest Borgnine from the 1960

film *Pay Or Die!* (which has no relation to *Butler Parker* at all). Like many other pulps of the period, the *Silber Krimi* mags of the 1960s frequently used still photographs of totally unrelated films in lieu of cover illustrations. Sometime in the late 1960s, the *Butler Parker* series switched to painted covers by artist R.S. Lonati. For most fans, these wonderful illustrations are the defining image of Butler Parker and his supporting cast.

The German pulps have been on the wane since the 1980s. Many established publishers folded or merged and long-running series such as the three described above were cancelled. Romance pulps and to some extent horror and western series continue to sell, but crime mags are having a difficult time due to changes in the public's reading tastes. In this age of complex psychological thrillers, the simpler adventures of pulp crimefighters often seem hopelessly dated. As a consequence, few new pulp magazines have been launched since the mid 1980s. Nevertheless, occasionally a publisher is daring enough to give a new series a shot.

One of these new series was *Peter Mattek*. Peter Mattek was conceived as a sort of German Jerry Cotton by *Cotton* publisher Bastei-Lübbe. Tough guy cop Mattek is an agent for the BKA, Germany's answer to America's FBI. At least, that's how pulps and TV-shows choose to depict the German federal law enforcement agency. In a curious case of real life imitating pulp, Germany's secretary of the interior has recently announced his plans to restructure the BKA after the image of the FBI.

The parallels between *Jerry Cotton* and *Peter Mattek* are obvious. Like Jerry Cotton, Peter Mattek fights organised crime in all its forms from drug-smuggling via prostitution to arms trading. Jerry Cotton has Phil Decker, while Peter Mattek has a trusted friend and partner in Paul Koslowski a.k.a. the Pole. The regular cast also includes Mattek's boss at the BKA Joellenbeck and his frequent nemesis chief prosecutor Karl Lohmeier. Based in Berlin, Mattek tackles cases all over Europe with a marked preference for warm and sunny Mediterranean beaches, conveniently ignoring the fact that the real life BKA is based in far less flashy Wiesbaden and has no authority outside Germany. Jerry Cotton has his red Jaguar, Peter Mattek drives a Porsche 911. Unlike Cotton, Mattek has plenty of sex with both female colleagues and suspects. The start of each adventure frequently finds him with his pants down - literally. However, Mattek is rather unlucky in romance, as his girlfriends tend to end up dead at the end of each issue. As with Jerry Cotton, Peter Mattek's adventures are narrated in the first person to give the illusion that these are the true memoirs of an actual BKA agent.

The series *Peter Mattek* was created by Peter Hebel in 1990. In the early 1990s, reunified Berlin with all its problems was a popular setting for German crime thrillers and *Peter Mattek* was probably created to cash in on the trend. Alas, the series lasted only for 75 issues and was cancelled in 1992. In 2000, Peter Mattek got a new lease on life under the title *Der Bundesbulle* (The Federal Cop). The second series lasted for only 29 issues, a few of which were reprints from the original run. Sometimes, these reprints were hastily updated to fit in with a changed political situation. In one *Bundesbulle* adventure, for example, all references to German marks were duly replaced by euro, but references to Spanish pesetas (which were also supplanted by the euro) were left intact.

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Many blatant *Jerry Cotton* imitators lasted even shorter than *Peter Mattek* did and their names have long faded into pulp obscurity. But there were characters and titles such as *Kommissar X*, *Mister Dynamit* and *Butler Parker* which managed to rise above their epigonous beginnings and deserve to be fondly remembered in their own right.