

The Adventure Stories of Graham M. Dean

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For nearly thirty years I have browsed used bookstores looking for volumes to enhance my ever-burgeoning collection. Occasionally I would spy an attractive book by an author named Graham M. Dean. The first one I found was *Agent Nine Solves His First Case*. It was a fine looking item in a good dust jacket and cost very little, so I took a chance on it. I set it on my shelf but didn't read it for a year or two; when I did, I realized that I had made a find. It was a well-told adventure story set in the mid-1930s. More about it below.

After reading this story, I knew that Dean was a good writer and I kept his name in mind. Now and then I'd find another of his books and place it on my shelf. Finally, having read yet another fine story by this author, I set out to do a little research, and found that he had published seventeen books. To my delight, I saw that I already owned nearly a dozen of them, gleaned singly just through occasional visits to bookstores. So I gathered up the rest and determined to read them through and put together this article.

Series book friends have recommended some fine books to me, and thanks to them I've been privileged to introduce readers of the *Review* to a few little-known but outstanding series (like the Ted Wilfords, Mill Creek Irregulars, Wynn and Lonnys, Mary Louise Gays, and the Morgan Bays) and a number of sets of worthy juveniles (see my article, "Seven Women", published in 2011 in the *Review* #45). I hope that this article will lead some readers to another collectible set of juveniles.

Graham M. Dean appears to have had expertise in several areas. His seventeen books cover the topics of journalism, horsemanship and ranching, flying, the work of a secret agent, railroading, and West Point sports. His writing style is terse, sharp, colorful, and absorbing. He writes with the best blend of talents of a newspaper reporter who gets his facts down in good order and a fiction writer who can create and develop a good story with appealing characters. Curiously, most of Dean's books do not have one single female in them; in these volumes there are no mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends, or even female secretaries.

Nearly all his stories feature young men who are getting a start in their field; they succeed because they are virtuous, honest, and clean-living. They are frequently opposed by another young man who lacks these qualities. Now it may seem that squeaky-clean living, good workmanship, and self-sacrifice can come across in our time as hokey and unrealistic. I make no apology that I fervently disagree. Moreover, I might go so far as to say that clean living is one of the attractions of classic series books. If I want tawdry, crude, and exploitative stories—which I don't—I can read today's news or so-called "grown up" novels. There's nothing encouraging or uplifting or inspiring there; such things just bring people down.

If anyone has read any newspaper article in recent decades that deals with something he himself knows about, most likely the reader concludes that the reporter doesn't know what he's talking about. Whenever I read articles about something I am an expert in, I cringe when I see the egregious errors and misinformation put out for the public to read. It is not hard to assume that newspaper articles written on subjects I know little about are just as error-filled.

Not so with Dean. Perhaps the standards of journalism were higher fifty and more years ago, or maybe Dean and the circles he worked in were the exceptions. His books on the subjects he knew about are rife with technical detail that do not cram or overwhelm the story, but rather add impressive verisimilitude to it. There is real depth here, whether we're reading about how to use a teletype, how to saddle a horse, how to check a two-passenger biplane for flight in rough weather, or how to train for a major football game.

In order of publication, his seventeen books are:

Gleaming Rails (1930)
 Front Page Mystery (1931)
 Daring Wings (1931)
 Sky Trail (1932)
 Circle 4 Patrol (1933)
 Jim of the Press (1933)
 The Treasure Hunt of S-18 (1934)
 Slim Evans and His Horse Lightning (1934)
 Bob Gordon, Cub Reporter (1935)
 Agent Nine Solves His First Case (1935)
 Agent Nine and the Jewel Mystery (1935)
 Herb Kent, West Point Cadet (1936)
 Herb Kent, West Point Fullback (1936)
 Riders of the Gabilans (1944)
 Wings Over the Desert (1945)
 Dusty of the Double Seven (1948)
 Deadline for Jim (1961)

They can be organized as follows:

The First Book

Gleaming Rails (1930)

The Tim Murphy Series

Daring Wings (1931)
 Sky Trail (1932)
 Circle 4 Patrol (1933)
 The Treasure Hunt of S-18 (1934)

The Agent Nine Series

Agent Nine Solves His First Case (1935)

Agent Nine and the Jewel Mystery (1935)

The Herb Kent Series

Herb Kent, West Point Cadet (1936)

Herb Kent, West Point Fullback (1936)

Westerns

Slim Evans and His Horse Lightning (1934)

Riders of the Gabilans (1944)

Dusty of the Double Seven (1948)

The Young Reporter Series

Front Page Mystery (1931)

Jim of the Press (1933)

Bob Gordon, Cub Reporter (1935)

Wings Over the Desert (1945)

Deadline for Jim (1961)

Of the seventeen books, thirteen were published from 1930 to 1936, when he was 26 to 32 years of age. He published three more, in 1944, 1945, and 1948. Then after thirteen more years, his last published book came out in 1961. He was only 57.

Finding biographical information on Graham M. Dean is difficult. There's not much available in any public records I could dig up; I can't even find out what the "M" stood for¹. There is some material on the dust jackets of the books, however. He was born in Iowa City, Iowa, on August 10, 1904. He married Ruthe S. Wheeler in 1928. At some point—I couldn't discover just when—he moved to Porterville, California, a picturesque mountain town at the foot of the Sierras. He died there at the age of 70 on November 20, 1974.

Biographies on the dust jackets tell the reader that Graham Dean was a newspaper man who had had a variety of experience. At the University of Iowa he majored in journalism, and by the time he was a junior he had worked on the *Iowa City Press-Citizen*. He was nineteen when he was made managing editor, the youngest in the country at the time.



In his writing about the newspaper business, I have the impression that nearly everyone worked about eighteen hours a day seven days a week, with frequent stretches of thirty-hour shifts if there were some important breaking news, and typesetting that has to be torn down and an entirely new front page put together in half an hour. I hope it really wasn't like that all the time, or the pharmaceutical companies could have added to their already massive fortunes selling heart medicine, headache pills, energy drinks, and uppers to the newspaper industry.

Let's look at each of the books.

¹ I found out later it stands for "Morse".

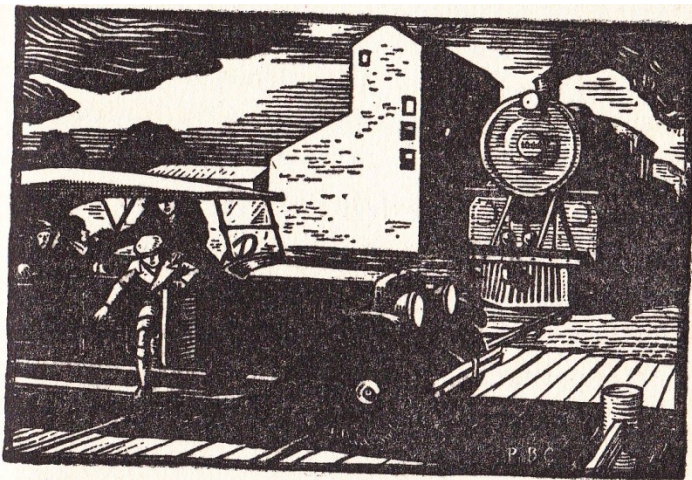
Gleaming Rails (1930)

There are a number of authors of our favorite books who were first published when they were in their twenties: Hal Goodwin (*A Microphone for David* when he was 28), Leslie McFarlane (*The Tower Treasure* when he was 25); Capwell Wyckoff (*The Mercer Boys' Cruise in the Lassie* when he was 23); and others. Dean's first book, *Gleaming Rails*, saw print when the author was 26. It launched his writing career with a high standard. Like many of his subsequent tales, this one is about a youth who gets started on a promising career by manifesting heroic courage, high standards, and noteworthy virtue—what books of an earlier era called being “wide awake” and “red blooded” and showing “pluck”.

Young Thomas O'Hanrahan Clancy, known throughout the book as “Towhead” because of his shock of white-yellow hair, is the youngest of three brothers and the youngest of three generations of railroad men. His older brothers, Pat and John, are already respected railroad engineers. Their father was also a railroad engineer who was killed in a train accident some years before our story begins; their mother died soon thereafter. Towhead lives with his salt-of-the-earth grandparents; his grandfather was one of the pioneers of the railroad.

In the first chapter, Towhead finishes his high school career as a basket ball (sic) player in a well-fought game that gives him a chance to show the reader that he is a courageous and honorable competitor in the face of sneering and dirty players from a neighboring town.

Having set the tone, Towhead as a new high school graduate is hired as a lowly assistant in the local railroad station. The rest of the book tells how he advances up the ranks as he demonstrates heroic action in one desperate situation after another. He saves lives through a



terrific blizzard, shows ingenuity when threatened by notorious train robbers, thinks fast when saving a passenger train heading for an old trestle bridge on the verge of collapse, faces danger in a strike manipulated by unscrupulous railroad employees who will not stop even at violence and attempted murder, and even averts certain tragedy caused by a mentally ill engineer.

The inscription on the front endpaper shows that the book was a birthday gift in 1944 from Mary to Colin; Mary wrote, “Colin— Hope you find genuine pleasure in sharing these

harrowing experiences with Clancy.” I hope that Colin found as much pleasure in sharing them as I did when I read his book more than seventy years later.

Tim Murphy Series

Daring Wings (1931)

This is the first entry in the Tim Murphy series of four books, and the second book that Dean published. Tim Murphy is a reporter for the Atkinson News and has just earned his pilot's license. Aviation is an up-and-coming field, and his bosses are determined to be at the forefront of the aviation reporting business. In all of Dean's aviation stories, one plane after another is

introduced as “the newest thing” with ever-advanced technological features. Monoplanes and trimotors replace biplanes, metal hulls replace canvass, and top speed increases from 110 mph to over 200 mph. It’s a thrill when a new plane comes into the story and has retractable landing gear.

The story is a sequence of exciting events in which Tim always comes out on top through skill, luck, and heroism. One ongoing plot element is identifying and stopping the Sky Hawk, a predator of the skies who, in some mysterious manner, is able to cause other planes to stall and crash; he preys on mail planes that are known to be carrying large amounts of cash or bonds. After the crash, he loots the baggage and leaves the wreck and its pilot to be found by others.

In the course of the story Tim trains a fellow reporter named Ralph Graves, who becomes a partner in many of the subsequent adventures. Planes were obviously pretty simple in the early 1930s as Ralph becomes a “crackerjack flyer” after about three weeks of lessons provided by Tim. The planes are mostly simple propeller-driven jobs, and usually biplanes. At first, top speed is a little over a hundred miles an hour, and flying at 5,000 feet is considered a good altitude.

In between times of chasing the Sky Hawk, Tim, sometimes accompanied by Ralph, takes relief to a small village surrounded by flood waters, searches for a missing pilot presumably downed by the Sky Hawk, participates in a good will flying tour of the state, becomes the first to fly from Alaska over the Arctic Sea in bitter cold and through storms to Spitzbergen, and goes undercover to Mexico to infiltrate a ragtag rebel army and take photographs of their leader whose likeness was hitherto unknown. He also maintains his reporting work by writing thrilling accounts of his adventures that please his bosses and expand the paper’s readership.

Being Dean’s second book, it is understandable that the story has flaws. Mostly, though, it’s an enjoyable tale, and gives a good view of aviation in its early years.

Sky Trail (1932)

The second book in the Tim Murphy series picks up where the previous volume left off, and continues the series of heart-pounding adventures in aerial reporting and derring-do deeds that provide relief to people in need. These include taking photographs from the air of an oil factory’s tanks exploding, bombing an enormous ice jam that threatens to burst and wipe a small town off the map, and being deputized by the state police to bring an end to the further nefarious exploits of the Sky Hawk’s gang from the previous book. There is an adventure in which Tim rides a midnight express train, connecting one of Dean’s other interests to this story.

One amazing coincidence occurred as I was reading this book. One eye-popping incident is when Tim is landing his plane at the same time a much larger plane is making an unauthorized landing from the opposite direction. Seconds before the inevitable collision, Tim sees the danger and goes into a sudden dive and shoots under the other plane, missing it by inches.

The coincidence is that at the time I was reading this book, my father (now 94 years old) sent my brothers and me an account of a nearly identical near-miss he experienced on June 28, 1947. My father was 24 at the time, and was an experienced pilot. He had built his own plane, which later became nationally known for its imaginative, innovative design. Its test flight brought a lot of interested people, and captured the attention of everyone on site including the man in the tower. My father’s account says,

I got permission from the tower to make the take off, circled the field a few times for the stockholders to see, then called the tower for permission to land. I was coming in to land, was about 10 feet high above the runway, about to touch ground, when I saw a P-51 fighter plane coming down the runway right at me having just landed. I gunned my engines and flew above

the fighter plane that passed under me and missed me by inches. Turned out that the pilot in the fighter plane was ferrying it from across country and had been given permission to land at the Burbank airfield. That's where he thought he was, but he was at the Van Nuys airport. One of our guys was taking movies of me coming in for a landing and he got the fighter plane passing right under me.

Sky Trail is a fine story, evocative of the interest in the new field of aviation that was strong in the early 1930s. There are numerous occasions when Tim or his pal Ralph set their plane down in farmers' fields or clearings in the woods while running down a story. Couldn't do that today! Other stories from the period, such as the Hardy Boys' *The Great Airport Mystery* (1930) and Wyckoff's *Mercer Boys with the Air Cadets* (1932) also provide worthy adventures of the era.

In one finely-told tale, Tim and Ralph search for a crashed plane and its pilot, lost somewhere in the Great Smokies. With the assistance of the men of a nearby ranch called the Circle 4, they are successful. They make friends with the men there, and are invited down to spend a month's vacation as soon as they can make the arrangements. This is the lead-in to the next volume in this series.

Circle 4 Patrol (1933)

The third book in the Tim Murphy series continues the story of the flying reporter. There are a couple of winceworthy plot items, but they are small—such as Tim's "just happening" to be in the right place at the right time to overhear a certain conversation, or just "having a hunch" that he ought to make a certain decision that is vital for proving his case eighty pages later. One gets used to the "coincidence" in series books and realizes that sometimes they're the best way to tell

a story in the series book genre—and sometimes coincidences do occur in real life.

More than the first half of the book recounts more of the adventuresome episodes in the life of the flying reporter, including the effort to outdo a reporter on the rival newspaper noted for unethical practices. One of the major stories is an account of the "cow war" in which farmers band together to oppose the forced testing by veterinarians of their cattle in a search for infectious tuberculosis; any cow that tests positive is taken away and the farmer is only compensated at two-thirds of its value. This event is repeated with a lot more detail in another of Dean's books, *Jim of the Press*, and I deal with it more fully below. The presentation in *Circle 4 Patrol* is a little more sympathetic with the farmers than the presentation in the later book, even though they are described as a "wild bunch".

In one scene, the sheriff says, "We're only out here to enforce the law." And a farmer retorts, "Some law that takes away a man's cattle."



And later, Tim says to his partner Ralph, “We’ve got the big story, but I feel kind of sorry for the farmers. They think they’re right, or they wouldn’t put up such a stubborn resistance. Maybe if I was fighting with my back to the wall, trying to pay interest on a mortgage and facing foreclosure and loss of my farm, I’d do the same thing.”

Still, it’s an unjust and disturbing story based on real life events, and I find this account of it by Dean to be unsatisfying.

The eponymous adventure only takes up a little less than the last half of the book: instead of Tim and Ralph going together to spend a month on the Circle 4 Ranch as was predicted at the end of the previous book, Ralph goes alone for two weeks; and instead of a vacation, he goes to assist the ranch owner, Hank Cummins, fight a reprehensible band of rustlers. This adventure is thrillingly recounted, a delight to read.

The Treasure Hunt of S-18 (1934)

The dust jacket says that Dean wrote this book because he had “received so many requests from his hundreds of thousands of readers to take Tim Murphy on a ‘real treasure hunt’.” There are three adventures in this volume. In the first, Tim helps take down a stunt flyer who has been discovered to be a “dope smuggler”. In the second, Tim unearths the identity of a strange man who had debarked from a passenger plane and refused to reveal his name; Tim saves him from an attack by an unscrupulous enemy. As a result, the man takes Tim on the treasure hunt for which the book is named. This comprises the third adventure in the book.

With a stalwart crew, they embark on a submarine called the *S-18* to a secret location in the Caribbean which the sole survivor of a shipwreck eleven years earlier has revealed. In the shipwreck is a fortune in gold. The treasure hunters are opposed by the same ruthless opportunist who had attacked the leader of the expedition earlier. He has assembled a scurvy crew of cutthroats, and their steamer dogs them on their journey.

As in most of Dean’s tales, there are no females whatever in the story, but on the flyleaf there is an inscription, “To Rose Marie from Bette Mae”. At least a couple of girls seem to have taken an interest in the story. I think that the plot is only so-so, and the recounting of the actual treasure hunt is pretty thin, but like all Dean’s books, it is engagingly written. I hope Rose Marie liked it.

Agent Nine Series

Agent Nine Solves His First Case (1935)

This is the first of two books that feature Bob Houston, whom we meet when he is a clerk in the archives of the War Department. He is eager to become a “federal agent” like his brave and accomplished uncle, Merritt Hughes. The adventures take place in Washington, DC, and their headquarters is described as the Department of Justice, which is run by a near-legendary individual named “Waldo Edgar”. This set-up seems to me to be a thinly-veiled take-off on J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation which was formed in 1935, the same year this book was published.

The story is about a top secret development in radio technology that has significant military applications. Its design is to be taken to the archival department where Bob Houston works; rumors in the department tell something about it but its nature and even the time of the arrival of the document is kept secret. Nonetheless, while Bob is working alone at night, a successful attempt is made to ransack the office in a search for the paper. This scene takes up about the first third of the book; it is unfolded skillfully and interestingly.

The uncle and nephew are in competition with another uncle and nephew combination, the over-confident and occasionally-sneering Condon Adams and his C-average nephew Tully Ross, who is a clerk in the same department as Bob. Edgar appoints both teams to the case, with both young men made provisional federal agents in undercover roles. It is implied that if one or both of the young men do well on this case, they will be accepted as full-time, career “federal agents”; this is Bob’s heartfelt dream.



BOB LUNGED FORWARD, CLUTCHING THE SHEET BEFORE THE OTHER'S HANDS COULD REACH IT

I was somewhat put off by the presentation that “federal agents” are to be regarded with a measure of awe by everyone else. Several times in the story Bob confronts someone with the words, “I am a federal agent!” when he wants something to be done, and expects everyone to kowtow to his demand, and they always do. Well, he does it all in the name of justice, but it’s a short hop from that to throwing one’s weight around and bullying people, which happens all too often in real life. The subsequent real-life attitude and behaviors of J. Edgar Hoover and the rampant allegations of his abuse of power are well known.

Well, overall it’s an enjoyable tale, with some exciting car chases, plenty of gunplay, meetings in the back of dimly lit cafes, and furtive forays by topcoat-clad men on cold rainy nights. It’s not Dean’s best story, but it is a good one. It’s the first Dean story I read, and it led to me collect any of his other tales as I found them.

Agent Nine and the Jewel Mystery (1935)

The second Agent Nine story drops a few notches in quality. The story picks up right where the previous entry left off. Within a day of Bob Houston’s appointment as a full-time, sure-as-shootin’ unqualified “federal agent”, he is assigned to break up a jewel smuggling ring in Florida. It’s a tough case, and Waldo Edgar tells him before his departure that several seasoned agents have been working for months and haven’t been able to make much progress. Bob, boasting that he will have the smugglers rounded up within two months, takes the train down to Jacksonville to begin his work.

The story is rife with bonehead decisions, Nancy Drew-like coincidences, and implausible or impossible events. The plotting is about a three on a scale of ten. One ridiculous scene is when it is stated that anyone who leaps from the train at the speed they were going would be committing “sure suicide”; but when someone is thrown off the train a few pages later, he suffers “a cut on the head but is otherwise fine.”

Nevertheless, the writing is quite good and there are some excellent moments. I particularly liked it when Bob, needing to act as quickly as possible, reaches for his shoulder holster and fired his gun through the holster and his coat rather than take an extra second to pull the gun out. The descriptions are suitably dark as the train speeds through the night in a heavy rain.

Once again, in several occasions Bob whips out his badge to show people that he is a “federal agent”, and they immediately do whatever he says, including taxi drivers who unquestioningly drive erratically and dangerously through a town. I was reminded of a joke I heard several years ago:

A DEA officer stopped at a ranch in Texas, and talked with an old rancher. He told the rancher, “I need to inspect your ranch for illegally grown drugs.” The

rancher said, “Okay, but don’t go in that field over there,” as he pointed out the location.

The DEA officer verbally exploded, saying, “Mister, I have the authority of the Federal Government with me!” Reaching into his rear pants pocket, he removed his badge and proudly displayed it to the rancher.

“See this badge? This badge means I am allowed to go wherever I wish, on any land!! No questions asked or answers given!! Have I made myself clear? Do you understand?”

The rancher nodded politely, apologized, and went about his chores.

A short time later, the old rancher heard loud screams, looked up, and saw the DEA officer running for his life, being chased by the rancher’s big Santa Gertrudis bull. With every step the bull was gaining ground on the officer, and it seemed likely that he’d sure enough get gored before he reached safety. The officer was clearly terrified.

The rancher threw down his tools, ran to the fence and yelled at the top of his lungs, “Your badge, show him your BADGE!!”

Well, Dean’s excellent writing makes these books enjoyable, but I think that the “federal agent” stories are his weakest.

Herb Kent Series

Herb Kent, West Point Cadet (1936)

As I looked over the Dean books on my shelf, I have to say that I put off reading the Herb Kent series. It looked like a couple of books about a young man in a military school, and that just doesn’t appeal to me. But although that is indeed its theme, there is much more to it than that, and the books were actually quite satisfying.

As in all of the books by Dean, the protagonist is a clean-living, honest, hard-working, honorable young man who is opposed by Ralph Moon, a jealous, unscrupulous, namby-pamby weasel. Herb’s good friend is Ted Crosby, as virtuous a young man as Herb himself. Herb is the only child of simple-but-honest parents without too much money; he is an outstanding football player in his high school, located somewhere in the heartland; in the second book he identifies his home state as Iowa, Dean’s own home state.

The writing in the Herb Kents, while clearly characteristic of Graham M. Dean, is also highly suggestive of Capwell Wyckoff. This is a good thing. Wyckoff’s Mercer Boys books are also about a military school in which the boys have adventures while opposed by an unprincipled fellow student and, like all Wyckoff’s stories, convey the sense of the age they were written with almost painful exquisiteness. Dean achieves the same in this book. His style of writing in this Herb Kent tale even emulates one particular Wyckoffian idiosyncrasy: Instead of writing something like, “It was a long day,” Wyckoff has a habit of writing “the day was a long one.” Dean uses the same technique several times in this book. One may wonder whether Dean was familiar with Wyckoff; Cappy’s writing career was 1929-1936, and the bulk of Dean’s writing was 1930-1936. Moreover, in the second book of this series, one of the schools mentioned is called “Mercer”.

As Herb plays his last high school football game, a scout from West Point is in the stands; he has heard of Herb’s skill and wants to recruit him for the Army academy. Sixty out of 250 pages of the book is about the game; the account is skillfully written, keeping the reader’s attention even if he has only a rudimentary understanding of the game.

Ralph's dastardly deeds, aimed at either discrediting, disabling, or disposing of Herb, are numerous and damaging but ultimately not successful. Ralph's rich father manipulates people large and small to ensure his son's success, but never manages to convince people, including Ralph, that his son can actually make good on his own. Ralph is not only disgraceful but pathetic. One can feel sorry for him as well as feeling scorn.

Well, Herb and Ted get appointments to West Point after rigorous study, and Ralph gets in on his father's undue influence with politicians. After Herb and Ted enjoy a post-high school job in a summer camp (reminiscent of the Tom Slade books), all three young men arrive at West Point. They go through their first year with things just about as they were in high school: Herb and Ted doing beautifully and Ralph showing himself to be a contemptible jerk but never quite provable enough to get him expelled.

The book leaves off at a point that makes the reader want to go right on to the sequel, so that's just what I did.

Herb Kent, West Point Fullback (1936)

This book picks up a few months after the previous book left off, and continues the same story: Herb and his pal Ted first of all participate in a tennis tournament and make a spectacular showing after having picked the game up fairly quickly, and then go on to the football season. Ralph Moon continues to serve as their loathsome opponent, stooping to several skullduggerical schemes to make Herb look bad and to keep him from playing so that he can show himself as the star fullback in Herb's place. At first it feels as though the feud between the men is a bit overdone, but toward the end of the book you find something out about the reason for it, and Ralph's enmity begins to be more plausible.

One thing that bothered me, though, is how quickly and easily the authorities at West Point believe the outrageous accusations against Herb made by Ralph, whom everyone knows is odious. The same thing had happened more than once in the previous book as well, when the boys were still in high school. Ralph accuses Herb of some infraction or dishonorable deed, and before Herb even learns about it he is as good as tried and judged guilty until he proves his innocence. The injustice of this, especially in an institution that claims to prize "honor" and "upright behavior", etc., made me fume. And the fact that Herb is justified and cleared each time does not help matters much.

Except for that, it's a good and well told story, even for a reader who is antipathetic toward military schools and who has only moderate interest in football. Perhaps that is evidence of the high quality of the storytelling skill of the author.

Westerns

Slim Evans and His Horse Lightning (1934)

There is a bit of confusion about this title. There is a book listed on the dust jackets of several of Dean's other books, including this one, merely as *Slim Evans*. Further, on the spine of this book it is described as part of a "Cowboy Detective Series". However, none of my searches or research turned up any book by Dean called *Slim Evans*. I conclude that there is only the one book whose title may have started out as *Slim Evans* but had its title extended while it was under production. If there is a "Cowboy Detective Series", it may be a set of books written by several authors, but I think that this book is simply a single volume that Dean intended to be the first in a series that never went any farther. Just guesswork on my part, but whatever the truth is, as far as

I can tell, in the books by Dean there is no book called simply *Slim Evans*; there is just this single title, *Slim Evans and His Horse Lightning*.

It's Dean's first western/cowboy story. Like all his stories, it reads well. The narrative catches the reader's interest with its descriptions of mountain passes, the loosening of revolvers in their holsters, and the smell of bacon frying and strong coffee brewing. But the tale itself is not one of Dean's best. The villains are pretty obvious from the get-go, and the action is a little contrived.

Slim Evans, a friend of Bill Needham, the Secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, has been invited by Bill to come to Creeping Shadows. Another cowboy named Chuck Meade has also been invited. They're asked to serve as undercover agents, i.e. Cowboy Detectives, to identify who's been rustling large numbers of prime beef in a large ranch. Creeping Shadows is a remote but beautiful terrain surrounded by mountains, and suffers from the absence of lawmen.

The adventure is enjoyable but just a little two-dimensional. At the end there is a hint that further escapades are in store for Slim Evans, but as I wrote above, I'm pretty sure this is the only story about him.

Riders of the Gabilans (1944)

Before I opened the pages of this book, I was a little dismayed, thinking, "Here's another juvenile western about rustling, ho hum." It was the theme of Dean's previous western story, too.



Nearly all the "western" series I have include a story or two or more about rustling: Bret King, Linda Craig, X Bar X Boys, Troy Nesbit's Wilderness series, etc. Well, I guess ranchers have to deal with rustlers a lot, or so the stories would have us believe.

But even in the first chapter, I knew that this tale would be in the top echelon of such stories. *Slim Evans and His Horse Lightning* was an okay tale, but this one is first-rate. Jimmie Burgess is the youngest of the cowboys on the Double Springs Ranch, located in the

Gabilan Range of California. Even though I lived nearly all my life in southern California, I had never heard of this range, not far from the central coast, but it is a real place.

If one likes western tales, this one is more than satisfying. Its descriptions evoke the choke of the dust on the trail, inch-thick steaks and strong coffee provided at the chuck wagon, and the smell of leather.

Here's a sample of the writing, which also gives a feel for what the author thinks is important. Even in the early 1940s he is longing for the "old days" of the West.

" 'Course the boys could bring their horses in trailers and drive their cars home at night, but this is what they like. It's a part of the old West that you and I knew so well when we were youngsters. I don't like to see it go."



“Maybe we’re a little old-fashioned to do it this way, but it’s the way it was done when California was young. It was good enough then; it’s good enough now.”

They were speaking of an era which Jimmie knew only through stories told around campfires like the ones during the Tres Pinos roundup; of a lusty, brawling time when men grew old beyond their years.

[from pages 53-54]

It’s a good story overall, but the resolution, although satisfying, was a little too easy. But since, like so many of Dean’s stories, the book was really a bunch of stories within the overall plot, it was fine.

Dusty of the Double Seven (1948)

This story is set on an enormous ranch in the north of Nevada shortly after the end of World War II—that is, just about three years before the book was published. It’s the story of Bob Rhodes, an ex-marine cowboy from Wyoming who gets a job on the Double Seven, the ranch owned by the brother of a friend Bob had met on active duty during the war. Early in the book Bob gets the nickname “Dusty”—becoming thereby one of the many characters in books and movies named “Dusty Rhodes”.

It’s a story about—watch out, here it comes—rustling. But this third western story by Dean stands out from the crowd of similar tales in its genre. This tale is excellent.

The Double Seven is bounded on the east by Al Minton’s ranch, the MR. Throughout the book the MR crew use fraud, theft, subterfuge, and violence with knives and guns threatened and actual. They are presented as a despicable outfit from top to bottom. By contrast, the Double Seven is manned by “aw shucks” cowboys who are brave, humble, honest, hard-working, and generally above board in every way. It is easy to imagine that one side wears black hats and the other white. In these days of moral ambiguity in our culture, this story comes across as simplistic, but it is also refreshing.

But it’s a good story, well told. Once again, Dean shows that he is very familiar with the terms and the work of ranching and horsemanship. The wrap-up is satisfying. As one of his later books, we can see that Dean’s skill as a plotter and writer has improved over the years, from noteworthy to excellent.

I’ve saved the Young Reporter series for last, since they are about Dean’s specialty—journalism—and they excel in story-telling and in the level of excitement.

The Young Reporter Series **Front Page Mystery (1931)**

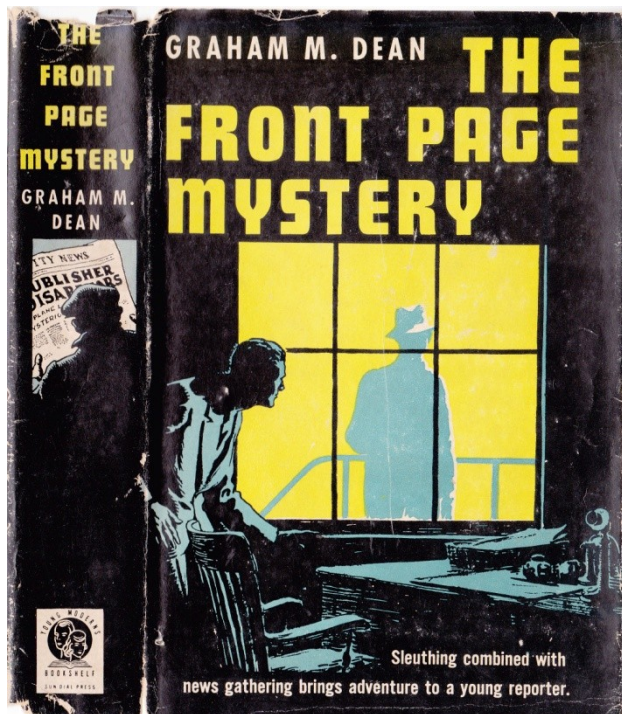
This is the first of five entries in Dean’s “Young Reporter” series, although the characters in the books are not the same. The first three entries in this set were published in the early 1930s, while the last two came years later. *Front Page Mystery* was Dean’s second book, published when he was just 27. It is a pretty thrilling tale although it has some flaws.

Bob Merritt, a young fellow (probably in his twenties), is managing editor of *Gate City News*, a newspaper owned by his uncle. The story opens when his uncle’s house is destroyed by arson and the uncle himself disappears on a plane flight home from a business trip. We learn that twenty years earlier the Merritt family of newspapermen was instrumental in removing a corrupt political boss from office and sending him to prison, thereby cleaning up Gate City from a horrendous state. This boss, Martin Lawson, has recently been released on parole and his release

was “hushed up”; moreover, in prison he has been able to change his appearance and mannerisms to the point that he is no longer immediately recognizable by sight. Young Bob, with his crack team of newspapermen and the cooperation of a sharp police chief, sets out to

track Lawson down and thwart his wicked plans to take over the city again as well as the newspaper while he exacts a long-simmering revenge against the Merritt family.

The plot is improbable and the identity of Lawson is pretty obvious to the reader from the beginning, though not to the good guys. There are two or three instances in which the good guys make bonehead decisions, such as blurting out their plans in public so that Lawson finds out what they’re doing, or moving into dangerous situations under the guise of courage when anyone else might call them foolhardy and unnecessary. Yet even with these flaws, the story is well-written, and there are also some very fine plot points. The tension ratchets up when it is supposed to, and the resolution still holds a satisfying surprise or two.



Newspaper work in the 1930s apparently

had high pressure deadlines—or at least it is presented as so in Dean’s “young reporter” stories. Lightning-fast typing, ripping out of copy paragraph by paragraph so that it can be sent to the linotype operator, the setup of headlines in frames that are “locked up”, the smell of ink, the deafening roar of presses appear several times in this story. Dean clearly loved newspaper work, and loved writing about it too.

Jim of the Press (1933)

On the inside front board of my copy of this book there is a note written in the hand of a young girl. It says,

This book belongs to
 Blanche Baltzer + is a
 good good good
 " " "
 " " "
 " " "
 " " "
 " " "
 " " "
 " " "

good
 book!

Her assessment which rates this book with twenty-five “goods” is not dated, but my copy is a first edition of a book published in 1933, so I assume that Blanche is either in her nineties now or is long gone—probably long gone or her treasured book wouldn’t be mine. But I agree with her review, with one glaring exception which I explain below. One interesting bit of trivia is that the protagonist has a sister named Ruthe, which was Dean’s wife’s name. Moreover, as a smile-inducing satisfaction of nostalgia (though it wouldn’t have been in 1933), Jim’s father is a hardworking blacksmith; even in those days, the work of a blacksmith was experiencing a decline, and Jim’s income is needed to help support the family.

This is the story of young Jim Morse, a high school senior who works part time for a local paper in an unnamed Midwestern town and state. He shows “pluck” and “gumption”, a humble but complete dedication to doing good work in a proper ethical way—unlike Ted Palmer, an unscrupulous rival reporter who appears several times throughout the story. The book has one episode after another in which Jim does his stellar work, told in an absorbing way that catches the reader’s attention. Here are tales of a small town on fire, a basketball team whose two star players must quit because of an “eight semester” rule but which still commits to overcoming its long-time rivals, and a train accident in which the mayor’s reckless son loses his life. There are other adventures in which Jim has to prove his mettle as a reporter, and shows a lot of ingenuity as he does so. Jim Morse’s noteworthy achievements as a high schooler get him a job with the Associated Press upon his graduation, and he must move to the state capitol to begin life “on his own”. He is given as quite suitable \$22.50 a week.

It was refreshing to read the words of Jim’s boss when he starts work at Associated Press: “Above all, remember that we demand accuracy. Speed is essential, but accuracy always comes first... We want our stories written in a simple straightforward manner. Don’t try any fancy writing. The plainer and clearer the English, the better you’ll get along.” I remember being told that same thing when I took journalism classes fifty years ago. Those standards were dropped like hot potatoes decades ago to the point that news now is hardly readable and so slanted and sensationalistic that one can hardly know what is really going on in the world.

There was one jarring and troublesome episode—the last of Jim’s newspaper adventures. The incident is also a part of the story in the third of the Tim Murphy books, *Circle 4 Patrol*, although it is a relatively minor account in that book. The state had passed a law mandating tuberculosis testing on cattle in the fear that humans have contracted the disease through them. Any cow that has a positive reaction to the test will be sent to the butcher and the farmer will be paid only two-thirds of the value of the animal. It is pointed out that the fear of human infection is unproven and that the veterinary test is not reliable; nevertheless, it is “the law”. The farmers, understandably, are outraged. Remember that both this book and *Circle 4 Patrol* were published in 1933, the worst time of the Great Depression, and the farmers are barely subsisting as it is. Jim is sent down to see what happens when the first vets show up to carry out the testing. The farmers rise up as a body and when pressed by the local dutiful but good-hearted sheriff and his men, respond with brick-throwing, shotguns in hand, electrified fences, and the like. Eventually the governor calls out the National Guard, and 1,800 troops are sent in with machine guns mounted on their trucks. They also carry hand grenades, which they use to blow up the farmers’ electrified fences. Eventually, of course, the farmers are cowed and back down, and the tests are run. This is big news for Jim and the other reporters who have gathered by the dozens.

A little research shows that, as the reader might guess, this account is based on fact. Forced bovine tuberculosis testing took place in 1931, 1932, and 1933. On September 21, 1931, 450 farmers at Wilton Junction, Iowa (the author’s home state) drove off deputies trying to enforce

the test on a dairy herd. Farmers' resistance took place in Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and other states. In May 1933 Wisconsin dairy men fought several pitched battles with the National Guard, who arrested hundreds of the farmers. So when *Jim of the Press* appeared, the memory was quite raw.



In the book, while the news is factually reported, the sympathy is clearly with “the government”, and it is stated that “the law must be upheld”. A much better response from the newspapers would have been a scathing editorial excoriating the injustice of the law in the first place and the abuse of power to enforce it. The image of a group of poor farmers gathering together to protest the forced exacerbation of their poverty by the enforcement of a law of dubious value is highly disturbing. The picture of machine guns and hand grenades set against rural farmers armed with pitchforks and shotguns is more suggestive of Nazi Germany of that time than so-called American “respect for the law”. Nowadays one hopes that the farmers would have a bevy of attorneys and “friends of the court” to put a stop to the outrageous overuse of force and demand that the tests for tuberculosis be accurate, with perhaps a court-appointed advocate to ensure due process and proper compensation of the farmers if that were proven necessary. The newspaper’s role

would be to provide all of “the facts” including the farmers’ point of view and to make sure that the issue was kept before the public and not just ignored. In *Jim of the Press*, not one farmer is interviewed.

Well. Maybe a few “verys” should be removed from Blanche Baltzer’s assessment. But overall, in *Jim of the Press*, Graham M. Dean shows once again the thrill and importance of reporting and the excitement of the mechanics of producing a paper.

Bob Gordon, Cub Reporter (1935)

As the reader begins this third entry in Dean’s “Young Reporter” set, he sees once again a high schooler who is head over heels in love with the work of a newspaper reporter. Bob Gordon, a high school senior, is responsible for putting out the *Red and White*, the newspaper for his high school. The budget for the paper, however, is well into the red and is not able to continue for lack of funds. This book was published in the middle years of the Depression, so it is not hard to put this calamity into context.

Bob’s brilliant suggestion is to ask the local newspaper, the *Times*, to publish the paper as an insert once a week. The jacket on the book informs the reader that this ploy was based on a true-to-life situation that Dean himself had used successfully. Gordon proves himself so competent that he is taken on for the summer as a “glorified office boy” and cub reporter.

His work is given a lot of challenge when the rival paper, the *Gazette*, tries to undermine and even sabotage not only his work but eventually the work of the *Times* itself. The *Gazette* is known for underhanded and unscrupulous methods while the *Times* is noted for aboveboard and highly ethical behavior and reporting.

In that context, a number of exciting events such as a bank robbery, a fire in a nearby town, and a train accident provide the grist for the story. As in the previous two “young reporter” stories, there is plenty of pressure as the staff works to meet deadlines, scoop their rivals, and get

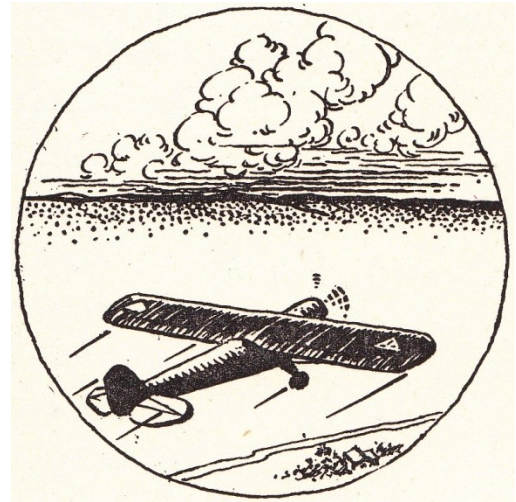
extras out on the street. Although well written and full of excitement, the ending of the book is a little unconvincing.

Wings Over the Desert (1945)

This story, published in the year that the second World War ended, begins on the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked, December 7, 1941, and goes through the summer of 1942. It is essentially the story of the formation of the Civil Air Patrol in Nevada. The protagonist is Andy Hughes. Like other protagonists in stories by Dean, he is a student who works at a newspaper; however, this is not foremost a newspaper story; it has components of several of Dean's interests: newspaper reporting, flying, espionage, and horsemanship. It only lacks an element of football. I've included this story at this place in the article because it seems to fit here better than anywhere else I could put it.

Andy's newspaper, the *Chronicle*, purchases a plane and ensures that Andy is given flying lessons. While this will help him get stories for the paper, the real story is about how other private pilots come together to assist the military in fighting saboteurs as well as provide extra assistance when the military needs it—such as finding planes that crash in the Sierras.

Although, as is Dean's style, the book recounts a number of disconnected adventures, the main storyline is how the Civil Air Patrol tracks down a cadre of saboteurs who have dynamited an ammunition dump in the Nevada desert and are planning other activities to impede the American war effort such as burning down forests in the height of a dry summer. The military forces desperately need wood for their building projects. The Nevada Civil Air Patrol includes a partnership with horsemen who assist with their searches in the mountains.



The author wrote on the endflaps, "The activity of the CAP—its searches, and so on—are based upon incidents that have taken place and in which I have participated. The sabotage angle is, of course, fiction." *Wings Over the Desert* is a mystery and adventure story all in one, very well crafted and skillfully written.

Deadline for Jim (1961)

As far as I can tell, this is the last book that Dean wrote, and thirteen years had passed since his previous book. Yet he hadn't lost his touch. This is another crackerjack of a story, capturing the reader's interest from the get-go; in fact, I think Dean's writing skills had picked up over the years. The thrill of publishing a newspaper is just as intense as in his other stories. This novel, being written thirty years after his first newspaper story, describes some advances in the printing methods; a linotype is run by a tape with punched holes that rolls off a telegraphic station. This method allows the linotype to run at about twice the rate than an operator could produce by hand.

Deadline for Jim, like the other newspaper stories, is about a young man of high school age in a hectically busy newspaper office. As before, standards of behavior and integrity are high. In that atmosphere, the book recounts several major news events in which Jim Drummond, the protagonist, must learn his trade. For a third time we see a train wreck. As we have seen before

in Dean's newspaper stories, an unscrupulous competitor comes on the scene and appeals to people's predilection for comfort and economy over telling the truth.

Even though several of the plot elements of this story have been used in his previous journalism books, that doesn't reduce the effectiveness of Dean's storytelling. Each account has its own details and each time they are told in an exciting fashion. The plotting is more complex than his previous entries and the characters more engaging. The last events of the book which lead to a superb conclusion are recounted with first-rate skill and detail that shows that, once again, Dean knows his topic thoroughly and knows how to write about it.



Graham M. Dean lived another thirteen years, but if he published any other books, I'm not aware of them. If *Deadline for Jim* was his last book, he ends on a praiseworthy high note.

Conclusion

Well, those are the seventeen books. When I learned that Dean had spent his last years in Porterville, California, I shook my head. I could have driven to Porterville in half a day from where I spent most of my life, and I just had a feeling that Dean would have been pleased to have had a visit from a reader of his books. If one can draw conclusions about the author from his books, I expect that he was a friendly, honorable, accessible, hard-working man—with near-unquestioned commitment to officialdom, like the police and federal government, that comes across as overstrong today but was surely common among those of his generation. Sadly, he died fourteen years before I began to collect series books, and well before I found any of his stories or sought to learn about their author. Like just about all of the authors of our favorite books, he has passed on, leaving his once popular stories for the enjoyment of a few people like us. I found most of them scattered across the dozens of used bookstores I have visited over many years of collecting. I commend these books to you. None of them is hard to find, nor expensive when you do. How often do you hear that in the series book world?

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