



Danger Trail #3

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Danger Trail

Issue #3: "The Blood and Dragon Affair, Part Three"

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"So you're sure this is the place?" Speed Saunders asked as the three men cautiously peered around the corner of the building. Speed tipped the brim of his trilby so the hat rested on the back of his head and gave his brow a light scratch of contemplation. "Seems a rather big coincidence to be riding on, don't you think?"

The man called Midnight peered out from under the brim of his fedora, pulled low to add shadow to the dark blue domino mask he wore. His mouth curled up a bit in concern as he listened to the disbelief in Saunders' voice, not used to being doubted. Then again, he wasn't used to working with partners either.

"Hardly a coincidence, Speed," Midnight finally shot back, trying to keep polite. "We heard the chatter on the police squawk-box back at my home base. Some big disturbance down here, with the Orientals all in a tizzy about undead creatures of the night. Like the vampires you two told me about. And one of the writers doing the radio plays of my exploits, he'd already been building a story on a weird Chinatown cult, and done research in the area. Learned about this building being shaped up into some kind of temple. Seems to me to be a bit too coincidental, don't you say?"

"It sounds as legitimate as this whole affair is about to get," Hans Von Hammer admitted as he peered into the gloomy night, eyes sweeping the structure methodically, calculating everything that he possibly could for an attack on the structure. "It's pretty clear that Midnight's had his connections to the city manipulated by this woman we're hunting down. Lured to the docks by his own allies in the law, no doubt signaled by Mary Seward before her arrival. There is more to this than just the books,

too. If the fight is any indication, I'd wager she lured someone else to that temple for some deeper purpose. To do that, she'd need to make sure the temple was an obvious enough target to be found by someone asking the right questions."

Midnight gave a low growl at the way the German was making sense. Having the notorious Hammer from Hell announce being tricked didn't sit well with the mystery man, nor did he like having him be the one agreeing that something strange was afoot. "Yeah. This dame, she's a tricky one. We'd better watch our step, especially if you two are right, and she's a bloodsucker too." He gave a shake of his head, his turn to disbelieve now, but vampire or no, something bad was up and he wasn't going to let it keep going on in his city.

"Okay, okay. Sheesh, I get it. No coincidence. We're at the right spot." Speed crouched and leaned against the cool brick wall, glancing up at his partners. "Now what?"

"We get the books back. It's that simple," Von Hammer stated as he continued to stare at the building, intense dark eyes piercing the night, as if he could see through the walls if only he stared hard enough. "We are not equipped to fight the nosferatu. We can only retrieve the books, the Libram in particular, and retreat."

"Why the Libram?" Midnight asked curiously.

"It's the more dangerous book. The other is of lesser use without the cipher in the Libram," Von Hammer answered.

"The Ineffable Libram has more supposedly forbidden knowledge," Speed added. "You know, real 'information man was not meant to know' kind of things. Like that Lovecraft guy likes to write about."

Midnight and Von Hammer looked at Speed strangely and the young man shrugged. "Hey, he's a scary writer. Check him out. Later. First, let's go get back the book of mind-blasting horror from the legions of the night, okay?"

"Okay." Midnight nodded at the suggestion. "How do we handle this?"

“Main door, roof access, and undoubtedly a rear entrance,” Von Hammer ticked off as he continued to stare intently. “Three ways in, three of us. Here’s what I suggest.”

Inside the temple...

For several long moments, the world was nothing more than an oddly muted roar and a stabbing pain in his temples, over his neck, and down through his shoulders. Then King Faraday pried his eyes open and looked around, trying to focus his vision and get an idea of his surroundings. Everything seemed blurry to the dazed agent, until he realized that it was the heavy layer of incense that filled the large chamber. He tried to sigh, only to have it come out as a heavy groan instead. He was bound to a chair, arms tied tightly behind him, wrists joined together by heavy ropes. He felt the prickly sensation of lost circulation that indicated he’d been out for a while, only made worse by the aching forearms and shins from his fall. He tried to stand, but found his lower limbs were bound to the chair legs as well. He took several deep breaths, closing his eyes and lifting his face upward. When he’d centered himself, and worked to minimize his attention to the pains wracking his body, he returned his gaze to the tableau before him.

“Welcome back, my dear Agent Faraday,” came a sultry, accented voice. His twisted, aching shoulders felt a slim hand slide over them as a woman came into view. A very slim, very lovely Japanese woman with raven-black hair tied up into a tight bun, glittering black eyes raking over the muscled form of her captive. She wore an emerald green kimono bound around her waist with a wide blood-red sash. The sleeves draped low, sweeping the air around her as she moved. Curling around her slender body on her kimono were fierce dragons of black stitching with eyes of blood red and golden flames leaping from their open mouths. She walked in a stately manner, her body ramrod straight as she circled Faraday, her eyes locked on him. “Please offer your insight on our ceremonial preparations. After all, without you, we would never have been able to complete them.” Her lean fingers were tipped in black-polished nails of considerable length, and they circled the agent as she had, starting from his shoulders to scrape over his chest before she turned from him to look and point to the stage.

Andrew Bennett hung upside down, high above the stage, a chain wrapped around his ankles as he lazily spun to the right, then eventually to the left. Faraday felt his own blood run cold when he saw the wooden pole shoved cruelly through Bennett's chest, and his arms dangling down free. Bennett wasn't moving, eyes closed and if Faraday didn't know he was undead, he'd have thought Andrew was now dead.

Then Faraday's gaze dropped several feet to the odd arrangement of five tables, tipped toward a center point at a severe angle. Strapped to each table was one of his team, head down, faces flush with the amount of time they'd been imprisoned in that position. He grew angry at the sight, and tugged at his bonds, sending searing pain through his body to remind himself of the price of losing control at this point.

Beneath them, on the floor of the stage, surrounded by a half-dozen yellowed candles sitting on tall sconces, was a cauldron of black. He could barely see that the edge glinted in silver, maybe some kind of writing though Faraday was too far away to make out what it could be. He turned to look up at the strange woman, struggling to control his temper, eyes glaring at her. "What the hell is all that insanity for? What the hell is that Blood Queen paying you to do this?"

"Language, Agent Faraday," the woman chastised him softly. "There is no need for curses. That insanity will distill the essence of the vampire for my men, my Black Dragons, while leaving the weaknesses behind." She finished walking her circle around Faraday and then rested her fingers on the thick shoulders, sliding up to his neck gingerly. "Mmm. Very nice physique. I will enjoy your interrogation."

Faraday shuddered at her touch, but kept himself still, focusing on other things now. He focused on his fingers, to try and help counter the clumsiness his bondage had induced, while he continued to ask his enemy questions. "You're the head of the Dragons?"

"I am." She stepped back in front of him and bowed to him, low and respectful. "I am the Dragon Queen. It is my honor to see to your capture and to learn all that we can from you. As for your other question, I do not work for the Queen of Blood." She smiled and turned back to the stage. "I work with my beloved."

"Oh geez! You mean you... and she... Okay, I didn't see that one coming," Faraday admitted as he let the image flit through his mind's eye quickly before returning to his work. "I still don't get what you're getting out of this?"

"It's all about power, my dear Andrew," Mary Seward said to her undead husband as she stepped along a catwalk that had been arranged at a level near the height Andrew Bennett hung at. "I know you can hear me, paralyzed as you are. I do apologize for the pain, husband, but after centuries of our warring, I knew there was little chance of bringing you here willingly."

She leaned forward, her pale body clad in a formal gown of darkest black, glittering gold jewelry hanging from her slim neck and slimmer wrists. Flame-red hair topped the milk-white face as she spoke at Andrew. "It's all about power. To escape the shackles that have been binding me for far too long. The shackles of my vampiric weaknesses. The shackles of my feminine status. The shackles of our marital vows. I'm so sorry, Andrew. You were always sweet to me, and I'll always treasure how you wasted three centuries of unlife trying to 'restore' my humanity. But I found a new love. A truer love. And so you must be swept aside. I hope you can forgive me, Andrew." She blew him a kiss and then walked away slowly, a wistful smile on her wicked face. She clutched the battered journal of John Dee tight to her chest. "I hope you can forgive me, as I have forgiven you and your silly allies for all those years of hiding my book."

Switzerland, 1647

"Why, why, why did you have to make this so difficult, Katherine?" Mary Seward asked with what sounded like genuine regret. "The power you could have had, so many years ago, if you'd just worked with me, instead of against me!"

Katherine Dee stared back at the vampire, her heart pounding hard in her chest. The winter wind howled and battered at the school bell tower, icy fingers adding to the woman's shaking as she faced her old foe. She'd

spent fifty years now evading this woman and her growing vampire cult, aided by Andrew Bennett, her father's old friend. She'd done everything the legendary occultist Doctor John Dee had asked of her, done everything in her power to aid Andrew in return. The fact that it all led to this moment was small comfort for the old woman as she felt all fifty-six years of her life weighing heavily on her.

"Why, Katherine? You didn't have to grow old and frail, you didn't have to die, lost and unremembered so that my husband could continue to hate himself and cause me endless woe." Mary Seward stepped closer to her, fangs glinting in the slim moonlight. She felt none of the mountain's cold winds. She took another step closer, and reached out with tremendous speed to clutch Katherine's wrist. "It's not too late. Tell me where the book is? Tell me where you have hidden the Blood Diary, and I can give you a place at my side. Not so great a place now, I have more willing and loyal servants. But it's better than your alternatives."

"Never," Katherine said, her voice small against the roar of the wind and the pounding of her heart. She was sweating now, and her fingertips and toes felt numb. "I will never betray my father, my family, or Andrew. Never."

"How does my husband elicit such loyalty? What has he ever done for you and yours but bring the hunt of the night on your family?" Mary screeched in fury, tugging Katherine close, their bodies now pressed together. Mary paused a moment, and looked at Katherine's lined face, still attractive despite the years, despite the way the sliver of moon seemed to give her temples and the skin around her eyes a greenish cast. She'd never really noticed a woman before, and this intrigued her. Still, she cast the thought from her mind. "I offer you so much more. Power in the new order when the Blood Red Moon rises over humanity. Or you will be tortured for eternity as I turn you and then force you to betray your husband, and your children and all your family. Choose!"

Katherine gasped in shock at the woman's strength, and saw the hungry gaze in her eyes. She continued to shake, and felt herself growing more numb as she stared up into Mary's face. She summoned up all the courage remaining in her body. "It's too late, Queen of Blood. The book is gone, my children have fled into the deepest shadows with it, and I'll never betray them!"

"We shall see about that when you're feasting on their blood at my side!" Mary replied and opened her mouth, sinking her fangs deep into Katherine's neck, piercing her jugular. Warm blood splashed up into Mary's mouth as she savored the taste. *So warm, so empowering, like drinking directly from Nike's cup*, Mary thought initially. *So sweet, so... so... thick...*

Mary staggered back in shock, fangs tearing flesh as she ripped her mouth away from the poisoned blood. She wiped her lips and stared at Katherine in fury as the woman dropped to her knees, precious life pouring from her torn neck. "What have you done to me, you witch?"

"King's... silver," Katherine answered with a weak, fading smile. "Blessed... silver from recognized... rule..." Katherine collapsed to the floor, shaking, feeling the cold sweep over her body, but she lost her fear. She'd won her gambit, and would rest in peace. "Only one... in this tower will... betray her family."

Mary screeched in fury as she watched her enemy slip her grasp into death's embrace, the book gone and the blessed metal flooding her own veins, causing her tremendous pain. It would be months before she recovered, she realized. She raced from the tower, her body refusing to shift forms, her veins burning inside her body. Months where that witch's bastard children would get to operate with complete impunity. She staggered into the cold snow, clutched her stomach and howled into the roaring wind.

Looking down from above, 1935

The aristocratic Englishwoman stalked off from her one-sided talk with her husband, a momentary frown crossing her face. She passed underneath a second figure, unseen in the shadows above as she walked away to join the activity down below. Steel-blue eyes watched her depart and then shifted attentions back on the hanging Bennett. He carefully picked his way across the highest of rafters until he reached where the vampire was shackled into place. Hans Von Hammer almost permitted the briefest of smiles now that he was back in his element. His whole body was a coiled spring, just waiting for the trigger to set him off. As he

waited, he watched the figures scurrying below, picking out future targets, his brain categorizing all present. A dozen Black Dragons, a half-dozen gaunt and pale people he decided must be members of the Blood Red Moon; the Oriental taunting the captured American, and the Queen of Blood now gracefully gliding across the stage and signaling the allied cultists to begin the operations.

He clenched his hands tightly on the edge of the beam, blood coursing through his body, singing the hymn of battle as he waited for the signal. It was all in the hands of Cyril Saunders, and he could only wait on the brash young American. *Is that to be my first error in judgment, my first miscalculation?* His brain was tormented by the thought. A college boy, all vim and vigor but smooth-faced, lacking all the experiences that now lined the Enemy Ace's appearance. *No. I didn't misjudge him. I refuse to believe that. He'll come through.*

A loud roar and a terrible crash thundered through the large chamber, rattling the building as a chorus of gasps and cries mingled with shattered glass, torn metal and broken wood. Without missing a beat, Hans Von Hammer leaped onto the chain and began the slide down the cool metal, allowing the corner of his mouth to creep into a satisfied grin at faith affirmed.

Elsewhere

The two guards lay unconscious on the floor, gaping holes revealing the false walls that had hidden them as they watched the main door. Midnight stalked down the hall toward the main room, dusting his gloved hands as he smiled smugly. As he swiftly marched down the hall, he shucked off his heavy trench coat and hung it on a hook he passed, then readjusted the fedora on his head.

Gotta remember to give Wu a raise at the next opportunity, he mentally noted as he thought of the writing team for 'The Hour of Midnight' radio program. *With all he got right on this one, he's earned it. Hidden guard rooms.* He shook his head incredulously as he reached the heavy, ornate double-doors. Coiled brass dragons served as door handles, and all manner of strange shapes and wicked-looking spirits were carved into the heavy

black wood.

Do I barge in now, and get a jump on them, or wait for the signal? He paused as he rested his hands on the door. He took a deep breath, pursed his lips and debated his choices. It's the German's plan, but Saunders speaks highly of him. And it is Hans Von Hammer. But it's Hammer from Hell and I've no clue what's waiting inside. He let out his breath in a long, low, frustrated sigh. This is why I work alone. Okay, make your choice, Dave! Stop—

A loud roar and a terrible crash thundered through the large chamber, rattling the building as a chorus of gasps and cries mingled with shattered glass, torn metal and broken wood. Without missing a beat, the man called Midnight laughed, smiled and yanked wide the double doors, charging into the temple.

Always stick with the plan! Good choice, Dave!

Earlier. Bound inside

"What are they doing?" King Faraday asked as he saw a strange, evocative woman stride across the main stage and signal to the assembled cultists. He had never thought a person could use the word exotic to describe a British aristocrat, but this woman, who he had to assume was Mary Seward, was in her way as exotic as the Japanese woman that continued to circle him like a shark circling bleeding prey. "What are you doing to my men?" He had to keep this woman talking, he was so close now.

"In order to allow my men to gain the powers of the vampire without the crippling weaknesses, we will filter his blood," she pointed up toward the bound Bennett, "through the five of them," she lowered her hand to direct Faraday's gaze at the government agents. "According to the process my beloved has unearthed, this will capture his impurities in the vessels of lordship, and allow the regal might to flow into the cauldron where my men will drink."

Faraday froze for a moment at the description. He shook his head, blinked and felt the rage bubble up again, mixed with a nausea in his

gut. "That's... sick. Twisted!" He stared up at the Dragon Queen, who was giving him that irritating, arrogant grin of hers. "When I get free..."

"Yes, yes. You will have your revenge. Agent Faraday, you are bound and helpless, and can't hope to slice your hands free before the ritual begins. And even if you can, how can you get through all of us to reach them?" She waved her hand at the scene unfolding before him, the Black Dragons clambering up to the platform of tables holding his agents and preparing to hook the various tubes into place that will draw Bennett's blood into their bodies. "You can't. But please, do continue to try, however you are doing so. Continue to convince me that I was right to leave you alive for my enjoyment."

Faraday hesitated a moment again. She knew. Not details perhaps, but she knew. *Of course, damn you! She has to expect a trained agent to try and escape at every opportunity. Why else would I be trying to keep her talking? She has to know! To hell with her, keep working! There's got to be a chance to—*

A loud roar and a terrible crash thundered through the large chamber, rattling the building as a chorus of gasps and cries mingled with shattered glass, torn metal and broken wood. Without missing a beat, King Faraday now allowed the anger to surge through his aching limbs. The ragged rope, having been frayed by the small razor he'd pulled from inside his belt, couldn't resist his strength. He gave a roar of pain and anger and tore up from the chair as it broke apart under the sudden surge of action. He used one of the wooden arms as a club, battering the Dragon Queen across the temple as she turned to see the large truck's sudden appearance in a cloud of dust and cacophony of destruction.

"A chance," he grunted with furrowed brow and feral grin.

Moments earlier

Speed Saunders had easily jimmed the lock to the back door and moved through the darkened, quiet room. It was a large room, and his hand felt along the wall as he moved slowly, cautiously. He glanced around and through grimy windows that offered slivers of dull yellow light; he noticed it was a garage of some kind. A loading dock perhaps, with a pair

of trucks. The dust of the room hung heavy in the air, and he fought off the sneeze that teased him, and the prickly cough lurking deep in his throat. He felt a cold metal disc enter his grip and he smiled. The doorknob turned without resistance, and he opened the door. He peered inside and saw no one down the short hallway. A door to the left, a door to the right, and one on the far end, perhaps ten, fifteen feet away. He eased into the hall and let himself think over his situation. *Which door, which door?* He glanced over each slowly as he stepped further into the hall, trying to avoid the creaking of old, weakening floorboards. *I could just flip a coin. Well no, three doors, two sides of a coin. Eenie-meenie? God no. That would get back to my friends and I'd never hear the end of it.* He thought he heard a noise from the door at the far end and crept up to it. He pressed his ear very close and he held his breath.

“What are they doing? What are you doing to my men?”

Speed backed off after the questions and the response. *People in danger and gloating villain. Certainly sounds like the right room. Now how do I get a signal off to the other two.* He grinned ear to ear and crept back quickly to the garage. He stepped into one truck and quickly hot-wired the vehicle, the engine roaring to life loud and angry in the darkness.

He slammed his foot into the accelerator and cranked the gearstick of the heavy vehicle, sending it lumbering forward, a powerful, jerking lurch that battered through the thin wood and plaster walls.

“Whoo-hoo!” Speed cried out as he bounced in the cab and watched the dark world explode around him. A loud roar and a terrible crash thundered through the large chamber, rattling the building as a chorus of gasps and cries mingled with shattered glass, torn metal and broken wood. Speed struggled to control the metal beast as it continued its rampage. His head smacked against the top of the cab, and he saw stars as the truck ran directly into the heavy iron cauldron, tipping it over, driving the truck up onto the two left wheels and then crashing on its side.

Von Hammer wrapped his legs tightly around Bennett and clutched the wooden pole in both hands. He struggled, pulling as hard as he could until the length finally surrendered its death grip on the vampire and was pulled from his body. Bennett's eyes flew open and he gave a harsh gasp of pain as he stared at the Enemy Ace.

"The battle is below, vampire!" Von Hammer said without hesitating. "Your enemy, your wife, she waits below!"

Bennett gave a most ungentlemanly roar and used his strength to tear his legs free of the chain, dropping down toward the stage like the unleashed monster he was. Hans was unable to hold on and had leaped at a tall tapestry of blood red, clutching the silk as it ripped under the weight and momentum. He plummeted to the platform below, barely in control, and crashed hard.

"You dare lay a hand on the Dragon Queen?" screamed the Japanese woman as she pulled herself back to her feet, a dark bruise welling up on her head. "How dare you? Who do you think you are, gaijin?"

"Faraday!" the agent answered with a body block, putting all of his weight into his shoulder and roughly hurling her back into a stack of folding chairs. "King Faraday!" he followed up as he stepped in close and threw another punch at her.

This one she managed to dodge though and he felt the skin of his knuckles tear on the splintering wood as her legs swung in a scissors motion, bringing him down onto his back.

"Oh no, you don't!" Midnight declared as he waded into the three Black Dragons who were racing to their Queen's aid. A powerful uppercut stunned one as Midnight charged into a second one, sending the enemy sprawling over the floor. The third one turned on the masked man, hitting him in the lower back and then kicking him in the back of the head. Midnight staggered away from his attacker and spun around as fast as he could, the backhand catching his opponent in the neck, adding a third limp body to the floor.

Speed pulled himself out from the cab of the truck to see he'd knocked over three of the candles. Now fire was taking hold of the dry wood and starting to spread, adding to the panic and smoke. He noticed a limp arm stuck out awkwardly from under the tipped truck and turned away. "Poor bugger." He saw Mary Seward facing off with a man who looked dressed from the same period, both flashing fangs and hissing. "Right, he's got that one." He looked up to see Von Hammer dueling with four

of the Black Dragons as some of the rising flames licked the edge of the platform. With the aid of the truck, he leaped up and caught the edge of the platform, pulling himself up and looking at the captured men.

“Help them,” Von Hammer said without even sparing Speed a glance. His hands had caught a downward strike from one Black Dragon, and directed the man’s sword to strike the wooden floor, burying the tip deep. The opponent lost several precious seconds of focus trying to tug the sword back out before the Hammer from Hell smashed his elbow into the man’s throat. Hans spun to the other side of the blade to avoid one of the other attackers and then freed the blade for his own use.

He moved into the middle of the three remaining Black Dragons, and gripped the sword in both hands, one on the hilt, the other gripping the top of the blade. He twisted his torso perpendicular with two of the Dragons, and used his own steadied blade to direct the thrust aimed at him into the enemy at his back. He then drove the hilt of his sword into the face of the first attacker, blood spraying from the broken nose.

The third Dragon felt a rush and a smile as he drove his sword into Von Hammer’s back, but the German’s sideways lunge at the first attacker allowed him to direct the thrust through mere meat at his hip. He saw the sword point appear and spun again, as hard as he could, disarming the third attacker. The Hammer from Hell pulled the weapon away, now clattering on the far side of him from unsupported weight and the ferocity of the spin. Then the third Dragon saw nothing further as Von Hammer neatly separated head from body.

“This ends here and now, twisted one,” Andrew snarled as he confronted his wife. “There is no way you are leaving here, and there is no way the Diary of Blood is leaving here! You have pushed our love too far this time!”

“No!” Mary cried as she clutched the book to her bosom in both hands. “You pushed it too far! You’re the one who refuses to see what we are, what we’re meant to be, and what we should mean to each other!” She stopped retreating and smiled, a mean, angry smile. “And you have no idea the power of my new love, foolish little man! But you’ll learn!” Her form started to shift, shrinking and darkening, and suddenly the book was clutched in strong clawed feet as large bat-wings beat at the heated

updrafts in the smoke-filled temple.

“No! Not this time, Mary!” Bennett swore as he watched her shape start to waver. He turned and snatched up one of the standing candle sconces and as she started to fly away, used its extra length to swat her hard to the stage floor with all of his might.

As she crumpled to the ground and bounced, the book slid from her claws. She attempted to right herself, but Bennett was on her already. “I loved Mary Seward with all my heart, but you, O abomination, must die at last! And if I have to die to ensure that, I will!” He heaved the sconce through her body, forcing a ferocious screech from her as her body shifted back into human form, though twisted and racked with pain. Her body caught fire from the lit candle thrust through it, and Bennett stayed on her, keeping her pinned in place.

The cultists had fled when the fires began, and when Von Hammer and Midnight tore through half their ranks, the remaining Black Dragons did likewise. Midnight and Faraday now flanked the Dragon Queen, who looked furious as the fires spread and the heat and smoke in the building grew harsh and oppressive.

“You have both made a grave mistake this day,” the Dragon Queen snarled as nails lengthened further, a foot long each, razor sharp and glittering black. She swiped at each of the men, Faraday ducking underneath to try and tackle her as Midnight blocked and tried to step in with a punch to her head. She leaped over Faraday’s clumsy attack and spun around to kick Midnight hard in the jaw, sending him spinning off in a different direction.

Both men stared at their opponent as she failed to land on the floor from her kick. “I am not just the Dragon Queen, ruler of the Black Dragon Society and lover of the Blood Red Moon and its Queen!” the woman roared as her skin turned a dark green and shimmering scales slipped out from under her skin, peeling the visage of the lovely woman away piece by piece. “I am the Queen of Dragons, and I will not be stopped by the likes of you!” Leathery bat-like wings tore from her back as she seemed to double in size and yellowing eyes glared at her enemies.

“Won’t you need this?” Speed called out as he held up the Ineffable

Libram from the now-empty platform. The Dragon Queen spun her head in his direction and baleful eyes stared at him. "Of course, you'll need the diary too, right?" He pointed down at the stage, past the fiery pillar that was once the two married vampires. "Better get it quick!"

She roared again, and charged for the Blood Diary, swooping down to snatch it up in her talons. She looked at the funeral pyre and let out a wailing cry of grief at the sight. "I will avenge you, beloved!" she roared out as Speed merely shook his head.

"We can not let you do that!" Hans Von Hammer called out as he and Speed quickly lashed out at the rope supports of the platform. She shot a look up at the two men as the large wooden structure plunged to the stage, tearing through the fire-ravaged floor and pulling her down into its fiery grip as well.

Speed and Hans had already leaped away with the last of their efforts, hitting the overturned truck with hard thuds and rolling to the far end as they felt the world lurch beneath them. The entire floor was caving in now as they made a second leap across the hole, running the risk of plunging into the fiery inferno below.

Faraday and Midnight had already begun their retreat when they saw what the other two had planned, and, in the cool night air, turned to watch the conflagration. Both were pensive as they waited to see who made it out, Faraday feeling relief when he saw his five men at last walk around the street corner, and both himself and Midnight feeling better when Saunders and Von Hammer staggered out from another alley.

Thirty minutes later

As the fire fighters battled the blaze, medics worked on Hans Von Hammer and King Faraday as they and Speed Saunders talked.

"Bennett begged me to make sure the diary would be destroyed," Hans said softly as he maintained his stoic demeanor as the hole in his body was stitched up. "John Dee had written all manner of alchemical formulae in the book on vampirism and various ways of altering the potency of

the blood. It was Dee's hope he could cure his friend. It was the Queen of Blood's hope that she could use the diary to rid her people of vampiric weaknesses and spread her Blood Red Moon. All of it was ciphered though, with information derived from the Ineffable Libram, which Dee was able to read in his youth. Without the Diary, my interest in the Libram is at an end, and I would not have it in my estate."

"I'll give it a good home, don't worry, Hans," Speed said flashing that warm smile. "Count on it. And if you want to come and check it out for some reason, well... you're always welcome to come and visit."

"If you like, I could talk to people, make arrangements for you to stay in the country," Faraday offered the German as he tested the sling that was holding his sprained right arm. "We could use a guy like you in the service."

"Thank you, no. I am loyal to my homeland. I am German, and I will live and die in its service," Von Hammer replied. "Especially now, I can not abandon it. I am one of its nobility, and I must see it through the hard times to come."

"Well, I can respect a fellow patriot," Faraday answered. "Good luck. And thanks with all your help here. Now I just have to figure out how I'm going to write up this report. Vampires and dragon women... that's not going to do my career any good."

"I could go back with you," Saunders offered. "Midnight's faded into the woodwork, and I don't think he'd be very helpful with my looking into the Libram anyway, but you have contacts that could help me, I got contacts that can help you, so what do you say?"

"Okay. Let's give it a try. Why is this Libram so damned important to you, anyway?" Faraday looked over the battered tome in Saunders's arms.

"It can tell me how to find something I've been searching for, all over," Saunders said with an excited look in his eyes. "I've traipsed the globe over trying to dig it up, and this book, this is gonna give me the directions."

“Directions? For what?”

“The Danger Trail.” He clapped Faraday on his good shoulder and his grin got wider. “We’re gonna find the Danger Trail, King, old bean!”

THE END

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From the same author on Feedbooks

Danger Trail #1 (2007)

Danger Trail: The Blood & Dragon Affair, Part 1 (of 3)

Danger Trail #2 (2007)

Danger Trail: The Blood and Dragon Affair, Part 2 (of 3).

Ninjas and vampires and diabolical plots, oh my! King Faraday, Speed Saunders and the Enemy Ace are joined by a masked crime-fighter as they face two secret societies with a monstrous agenda! Pulp action at its finest as we seek out...the Danger Trail!

Danger Trail #4 (2007)

Danger Trail: The Verdant Darkness Affair, Part 1 (of 2)

Mightiest Mortals #1 (2007)

Mightiest Mortals: With a Stroke of Lightning!

Mightiest Mortals #2 (2007)

Mightiest Mortals: In a Crash of Thunder

Mightiest Mortals #3 (2007)

Captain Marvel: Under a Seal of Six Gods!

Justice League #8 (2007)

Justice League: Lucky Number 7.

What are the chances that a rash of good fortune across the globe could be the League's next case? Pretty good when this luck starts rewriting the laws of the universe and threatening the existence of ages-old mystic defenses keeping ancient, primordial forces at bay!

Justice League #9 (2007)

Justice League: To See Tomorrow.

Why are there hawk soldiers of Thanagar on Earth? Who are the strange new superhumans appearing around the globe, testing and probing local governments? What exactly is the Justice League facing when a quartet of self-proclaimed heroes declares Earth "their last stand?" It's the beginning of an epic threat

wrapped inside two strange mysteries that will leave the Justice League hoping that Earth survives "To See Tomorrow!"

Justice League #10 (2007)

Justice League: To See Tomorrow, Part Two (of Four).

"To See Tomorrow" continues as the stakes only get higher and secrets slowly start to unravel. Hawkman and the Martian Manhunter are caught between the Thanagarian invaders and their own satellite! The rest of the League is caught between Mon-El and Wandjina! And in the big picture, it's all symbolic of the Earth being caught between the enigmatic Overmaster and a still-hidden mastermind with dreadful intent!

Danger Trail #5 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Verdant Darkness Affair, Part 2 (of 2).

What connection lies between la Llorona's kidnapped children and Nyola's captured heroine Rima? What is drawing the natives of Central America and Mexico together? Speed Saunders, King Faraday and Midnight are joined by Doctor Occult to learn the truth before an Empire of Blood washes over the land!

Weird Western Quarterly #11 (2008)

Johnny Thunder: Steel Heart Iron Soul.

As Johnny Thunder, John Tane has evaded the deathbed oath to his mother never to do violence, and become Mesa City's great protector. Now he's about to be challenged on a whole new level when a powerful land baron makes a grab for greater wealth and glory, and the enigmatic renegade, Madame .44, has Johnny Thunder's heart in her sights! What might be his most dangerous mission yet will also be the first chapter in a ballad of love and gunslinging like the Wild West has yet to see!

Danger Trail #6 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Man in Stitches Affair, Part 1 (of 2)

Danger Trail #7 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Man in Stitches Affair, Part 2 (of 2).

The Revenant Program proceeds apace as Saunders and Midnight must struggle with former ally King Faraday to find the evidence

that can shut down Doctor Zero for good! Maybe, just maybe, newcomer Argent St. Cloud can help out!

Speeding Bullet #4 (2008)

Bulletman: The Birth of Bulletman, Part 4 (of 4): Man Made Gods. This is it! The mystery is revealed and the gloves come off as Bulletman duking it out with the Murder Prophet and his god of murder, the Nihilist! Can he come through his baptism of fire and blood intact? And even if he wins, does the Prophet truly get the last laugh?

Danger Trail #9 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Nation of Murder Affair, Part 2 (of 2). As Speed Saunders and King Faraday join Argent St. Cloud to search for Michael Gallant, a wave of murders leaves the city of New York reeling as the heat rises, tempers flare, and Rue Morgue revels in the bloodbath!

Danger Trail #8 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Nation of Murder Affair, Part 1 (of 2). Gangsters want Thomas Dewey dead at all costs, bringing Michael Gallant onto the case, Argent St. Cloud at his side! But when Murder, Inc. steps up to the challenge, can even he call on enough reinforcements to save the day?

Danger Trail #10 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Stolen Myth Affair, Part 1 (of 3). It begins here! Threads woven from the start of the series, put into play centuries beforehand, all start to come together in this issue, as familiar faces return to the scene, dark forces gather for the attack, and the secrets of the Trail yawn wide and threatening! All this and a special guest-star...the Queen of the Amazons!

Danger Trail #11 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Stolen Myth Affair, Part 2 (of 3). Things heat up for our heroes as the Dragon Queen and the Queen of Blood unite to betray Vandal Savage; Savage raids Washington, D.C. to acquire the Ineffable Libram; and King Faraday and Speed Saunders face off with Queen Hippolyta and Rima the Jungle Woman! Things couldn't get any worse than this, could they?

Danger Trail Annual #1 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Savage Sins Affair.

As the Stolen Myth Affair heats up, as a covert war rages on the Danger Trail, take a peek inside the history of the man who has set this all into motion...Vandal Savage! Balloon Buster Steven Savage is doing just that as he uncovers threads and connections surrounding the many figures of the age that all lead back to this diabolical mastermind, some stretching back centuries! If the truth about him can't be unraveled soon, those threads will choke the present day and continue into the future!

Danger Trail #12 (2008)

Danger Trail: The Stolen Myth Affair, Part 3 (of 3).

Vandal Savage begins his plan to bring the world into his control! King Faraday, Speed Saunders and Midnight, along with their assembled allies, make their bid to stop him, but there are three queens in this game, and each one has their own vision for how the endgame should play out! It's the end of the first year on the Danger Trail...is it also just the end?

Speeding Bullet #1 (2008)

Speeding Bullet, Part 1 (of 4): Modern Gods.

James Barr has developed a special device that allows him tremendous powers! Now he steps into a new world of masked men and heroic deeds, but is he really ready to take his place among the world's newest gods? Will the Murder Prophet usher in an age of blood first?

Speeding Bullet #2 (2008)

Speeding Bullet: The Birth of Bulletman, Part 2 (of 4): Deepest Secrets.

James Barr steps into costume for the first time, and Bulletman is on the case of the Obermyer murders. But so is another person...the actual killer, a mysterious being called the Murder Prophet, who is paving the way for his master, and the police and the rookie hero struggle to catch up and stop him!

Speeding Bullet #3 (2008)

Speeding Bullet: The Birth of Bulletman, Part 3 (of 4): Bleeding Truths.

The race is on to uncover the real killer as Detectives Farley and Doherty try to dig through the murder mystery, Martin Obermyer meets the killer and Bulletman stumbles in a critical way, leaving him to face the fury of his wife!

Mightiest Mortals #4 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: Wielding Fists of Virtue.

Captain Marvel is caught between a throwdown with Ibac and Sivana launching an all-out assault on our hero and the Fawcett itself! As bad as that is, though, it gets worse for Kit Freeman...much worse! Meet Sabbac!

Mightiest Mortals #5 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: Scenes of a Day

Mightiest Mortals #6 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: Between Opposing Forces.

Freddy finds himself having the most startlingly worst day of anyone's life! Can it be worse than losing a close relative? What about the dark secret within another relative? Or the secrets being held by his best friend? It all comes crashing down on him in a terrible avalanche of revelations! All this while the city moves on without him!

Mightiest Mortals #7 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: From the Shadows of Twisted Minds.

Get ready for action and excitement! Freddy buries his cousin, Christopher Freeman, and has another showdown with his step-brother Tim Karnes. And we discover just how fiendish Sivana can be when he pushes Captain Marvel's every attribute in an issue in which the World's Wickedest Scientist...doesn't even appear! All this, and the fate of Beautia!

Mightiest Mortals #8 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: To the Truth of the Matter.

Billy and Freddy have their confrontations on secrets kept, power hoarded and relations hidden, all the while the forces of the law

struggle to keep Lady Justice apart from her new champion and Miss Minerva asserts her innocence!

Mightiest Mortals #9 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: The Abyss of Blood Relations

Fawcett City goes on despite the gang war, despite the debut of new heroes, despite it all, Fawcett City goes on. Come and see how it does, as Chief Kitchens deals with the presence of Captain Marvel and what it means for his police force! And has Miss Minerva over-played her hand?

Mightiest Mortals #11 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: The Tide of Heroism.

The beginning of the stunning two-part finale to Captain Marvel's first year! Sabbac has gone on a rampage, and Ibac is taking advantage of the chaos! Bulletman struggles to intervene, but everyone wants to know where Captain Marvel is! All this and more (and boy, do I really mean it this time)!

Mightiest Mortals #10 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: The Punishment of Good Deeds.

Amazing origins issue as we discover the secret behind the magic words, and the history of Sabbac and Ibac! Freddy walks into a deathtrap, Victor Craize starts to feel the power of the people, and the police make a startling discovery about Miss Minerva!

Mightiest Mortals #12 (2008)

Mightiest Mortals: By an Act of Love.

This is it! Sabbac is on a rampage! Ibac sends his men out against the leaderless forces of his gangland opponent! Into the middle of this stands Captain Marvel and his allies! When the smoke clears, who will stand triumphant?

Nightwing #30 (2008)

Nightwing: The Riddle of the Sphinx.

Just when you'd think Dick's got enough trouble juggling Titans duties as Nightwing, solo duties as the Batman, and mentoring duties with Tim, things get harder. There's a new villain hitting the streets, one with a dangerous delusion, and Dick's not happy

to see that Nightwing is apparently on the case, without Dick's permission! Come and join us for "The Riddle of the Sphinx!"

Nightwing #31 (2008)

Nightwing: Riddle of the Sphinx, Part 2 (of 2)

Dick must try to get to the bottom of the crazed King Tut and foil his rampages, but he also needs to figure out how to deal with the new Nightwing! As he digs up more information on both, all three men spiral into a collision course of tragic proportions, and Professor McElroy might just be the ultimate victim in all of this!

Justice League #11 (2008)

Justice League: To See Tomorrow, Part Three (of Four).

Things are falling into place at a rapid pace now... for the villains! With the League stretched thin across the globe, friends come racing to the rescue and the action only heats up! Watch Hawkgirl lead the storming of the JL satellite; witness Superman confront Mon-El over his mysterious mission; and thrill to the throwdown between Wonder Woman and the Persuader, as the master villain behind it all draws closer to his goal! All this and more!

Danger Trail Vol. 1 (2009)

This volume collects Danger Trail #1-12 as well as Danger Trail Annual #1. This is the complete first story arc in which our pulp heroes confront the treachery of the Blood Queen, the Dragon Queen and their mysterious backer. Stay tuned for Danger Trail #13 coming soon!

Danger Trail #13 (2009)

Danger Trail: The Brown Lady Affair, Part 1.

In the wake of the battle with Vandal Savage, Speed Saunders has set his sights on finding the Sigil of Seven; that quest being his only remaining link to the missing (and treacherous) Harriet Cooper! His friends Argent St. Cloud and Michael Gallant, along with ally Doctor Occult, want to know what his intentions are, but first they must untangle a dark scheme involving the ghosts of Great Britain!

Mightiest Mortals #13 (2009)

Mightiest Mortals: Opening Passages.

As Fawcett City recovers from the fall of Ibac and Sabbac, our heroes find more things to be worried about. Susan Barr must prosecute the bloodthirsty Tim Karnes while reassessing her stance on costumed crime-fighters; Dudley must wrestle with what he should reveal to Billy, and Billy must deal with the fact that Freddy refuses to return to his crippled body!

Danger Trail #14 (2009)

Danger Trail: The Brown Lady Affair, Part 2 (of 2).

Speed Saunders must deal with the fact that the artifact Harriet had been searching for, the Sigil of Seven, is Doctor Occult's primary weapon against supernatural evil! In the wake of her treachery, what can that mean? And none of our heroes can take the time to figure it out now, as they struggle to save Michael Gallant from the Dagger of Koth!

Danger Trail #15 (2009)

Danger Trail: The Falkenstein Affair.

Once rivals of the air and enemies at war, now the Enemy Ace and the Balloon Buster must work together to penetrate the secrets of Castle Falkenstein and the strange mad scientist ready to bring two worlds together to fuel his rise to power!

Danger Trail #16 (2009)

Danger Trail: The Blood of Templars Affair.

Danger Trail #17 (2009)

Danger Trail: The Blood of Templars Affair, Part Two.

Things heat up for our heroes as they head into an ancient Knights Templar castle as one of three groups desperate to unlock its secrets and find a powerful relic that will decide the victor in the opening battles of a far greater war, one that has the attention of the enigmatic Sanguine Father! A far greater war that echoes across the decades!

Danger Trail #18 (2009)

Danger Trail: Affairs of Blood and Fate, Part Two: The Angel of Death!

The strangest crossover of all times continues here, as Rose Psychic, Eel O'Brien, Speed Saunders, Midnight, Trin Dee and Andrew

Bennett find themselves caught in a holy war between the forces of the Order of St. Dumas and the Sanguine Father, who offers a glimpse into a terrifying future for the world!

Danger Trail #20 (2010)

Danger Trail: Affairs of Blood and State, Part 6 (of 6).

Danger Trail #19 (2010)

Danger Trail: Affairs of Blood and State, Part 4.

Weird Western Quarterly #18 (2010)

Weird Western Quarterly: Lust Faith Love Treachery.



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