

CRAIG YOE PRESENTS

FICTION HOUSE

FROM PULPS TO PANELS,
FROM JUNGLES TO SPACE

Free Bonus Book Inside:
THE ART OF JOSEPH DOOLIN



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Introduction by
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Foreword by
HAMES WARE

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Followed by *The Art of Joseph Doolin*

BEARCAT AND FRIENDS

The action and adventure DNA of Fiction House comes as no surprise since its founder, John W. Glenister, was himself the embodiment of the late 19th century adventurer. His life reads like a Horatio Alger story and clearly illustrates that Glenister had more in common with Indiana Jones than he did with other publishers.

John William Glenister was born on the Lower East Side of New York on January 11, 1874.

Less than a decade after the end of the Civil War, the Lower East Side was as different from modern New York as Krypton is from Gotham City. This was the era of the Five Points, the Rabbit Riots, and the Gangs of New York. This was the time of Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed, the most corrupt government in the history of the city.

The city was subject to repeated outbreaks of cholera, typhus, yellow fever, and tuberculosis, which claimed thousands of lives every year. The infant mortality rate on the lower East Side was over 10 %. Things weren't much easier up north in Hell's Kitchen or in Brooklyn on Sackett Street, where John Glenister's family moved a year after he was born.

This was also the Gilded Age, when the Metropolitan Opera, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Metropolitan Museum



of Art all opened. It was the era of the Carnegies, the Rockefellers, and the Morgans. This was the time when the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty became permanent landmarks in the most superb city in the world. New York began moving from gas to electric light when the man from Menlo Park, Thomas Edison, and his team installed the first dynamo on Pearl Street in 1882.

Glenister was born into this world, and it was in this world that the man who would become known as "Bearcat" made his mark.

At the age of nine, J.W. started his first business selling papers and, by 14, he was beating a path to Chicago and then to Nebraska by hitching rides on freight trains. In an interview for the magazine section of *The Brooklyn Eagle* (October 18, 1925), Glenister said, "Of course, there's nothing unusual in that, you know. All young boys thirst for adventure."

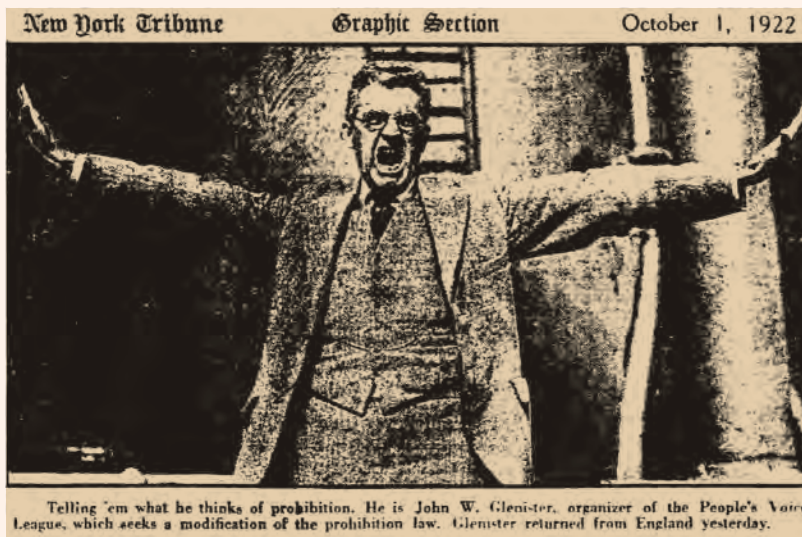
During his early days, Glenister tried his hand at anything that grabbed his fancy. He was a hash slinger, actor, theatrical producer, hobo, cow puncher, and amateur boxer of some note.

But it was swimming that was the young Glenister's real passion.

Long before he became a publisher, J.W. was a world class Olympic level swimmer and one of the first celebrity athletes of the 20th century.

In 1897, Glenister swam the English Channel and, that same year, began swimming competitively. *The Daily Standard Union* (July 22, 1897) reported that he "finished in a dead heat" with Professor J.B. Starck in a race from Narragansett Pier to Newport, for a purse of \$250 per side.

Glenister gained international notoriety on August 18, 1903 for being the first man to "swim" the Niagara Rapids. This stunt was as close to a



suicide attempt as a swimmer could make. No one had ever survived the attempt, which very nearly killed the future owner of Fiction House. In an interview that appeared

in the *St. Louis Republic* on January 10, 1904, Glenister recalled his stunt: "The thoughts I had were that I was going to be famous, that men would wonder at my hardihood, that whatever I wanted now, the world would be mine, won by this single exploit. I was so happy for that brief second, so intoxicated with my own danger, that I could have sung."

Glenister's exultation quickly shifted as the deadly whirlpool made its presence known. "The next moment I was fighting for bare life, and, as I realized, with little or no hope of winning out. I was then in the Whirlpool Rapids, drifted, but I didn't know it, into the American Channel, as I had hoped to be, and the strange, high spirits that I had felt just before had been succeeded by unutterable woe and dread. I felt sure that I was being whirled straight to my death."

In later years, Glenister remembered his bout with the Rapids in somewhat less florid terms. In a piece that appeared in the *Sunday Eagle*¹ on October 18, 1924, some four years after the establishment of Fiction House, "You must realize that it wasn't really swimming, but merely keeping above water and keeping my lungs full of air. The currents swirled me over to the other side. Captain Webb had been killed when his head hit a rock. I just happened to be luckier."

Why would a man throw himself willingly into the Niagara Rapids to almost certain death? According to Glenister, "Well, there was money in it. They were taking pictures of the event, and it meant vaudeville contracts as well. I toured the big time giving a little talk and showing the pictures. I even played old Hammerstein's Victoria [Theatre] with that act."

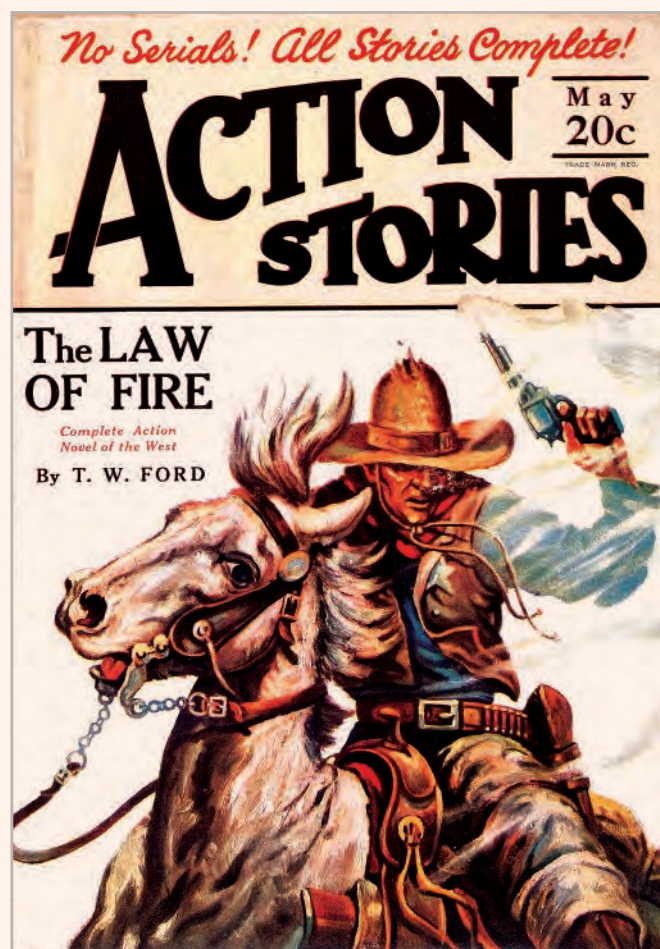
Regardless of his motivation, Glenister's Niagara adventure and striking good looks made him a celebrity. He even endorsed products such as nerve tonics.

By the time the United States entered World War I in April of 1917, J.W. had started a family and was well established as a businessman to be

reckoned with. As historian David Saunders notes, by 1919, Glenister was the Vice President of Warner Publications in New York (producers of pulp maga-

zines, no relation to the Warner Bros. movie studio). It was in April of 1921 that Glenister with his partner, John Byrnes "Jack" Kelly (1886 - 1932), incorporated Fiction House into existence and released their first pulp magazine, *Action Stories*, to very healthy sales. In another quote from his *Sunday Eagle* interview, Glenister explained his entry into pulp magazine publishing: "Finally, I drifted into publishing magazines. In association with J.B. Kelly, I put out our first fiction magazine devoted to adventure stories." From the beginning, Fiction House had been a successful enterprise for the 47-year-old Glenister.

Most people would have been very much contented with their lives at that point and would have been quietly waiting on the grandkids to show up.



TOP JOHN W. GLENISTER WAS A FIERY ANTI-PROHIBITIONIST, *NEW-YORK TRIBUNE*, OCTOBER 1, 1922.

RIGHT FICTION HOUSE'S FIRST PUBLICATION WAS THE PULP *ACTION STORIES* (MAY 1927).

FAR RIGHT A MAN AND HIS PULPS. COURTESY OF DAVID SAUNDERS.

SHEENA

Queen of the Jungle

BY W. MORGAN THOMAS

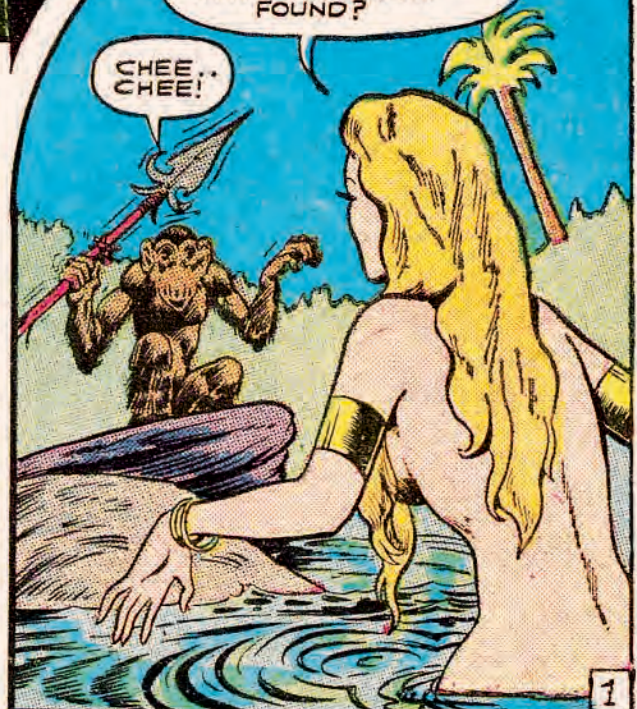


SUDDENLY...

CHIM! STOP JABBERING
AND HOPPING ABOUT!
OHH, WHAT STRANGE
THING HAVE YOU
FOUND?

CHEE..
CHEE!

THE EVER HOT JUNGLE SUN BEATS
DOWN UNMERCIFULLY, AND SHEENA
COOLS OFF IN A NEARBY STREAM...



1

