

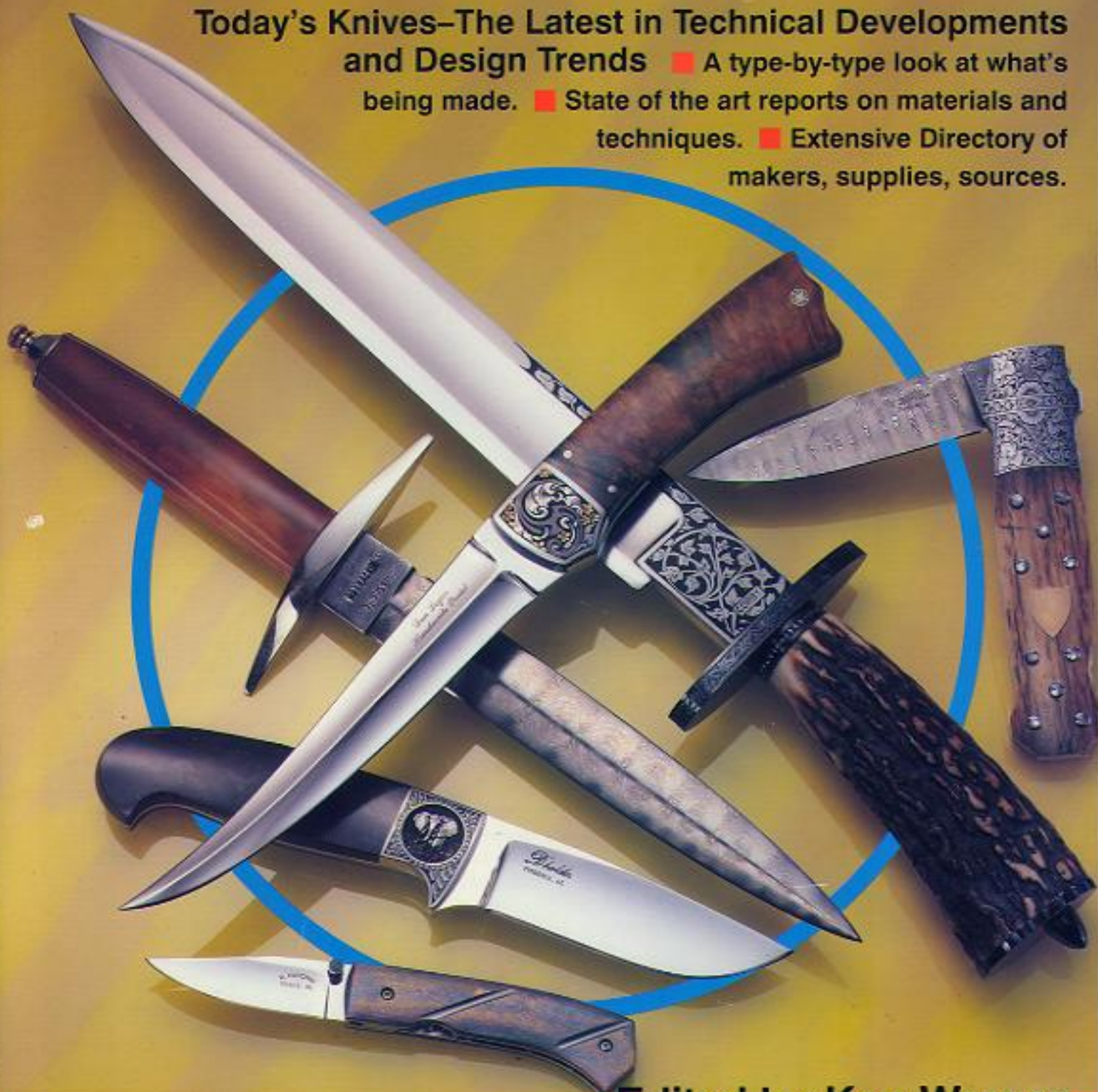
16th Annual Edition

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KNIVES '96

Today's Knives—The Latest in Technical Developments and Design Trends

■ A type-by-type look at what's being made. ■ State of the art reports on materials and techniques. ■ Extensive Directory of makers, supplies, sources.



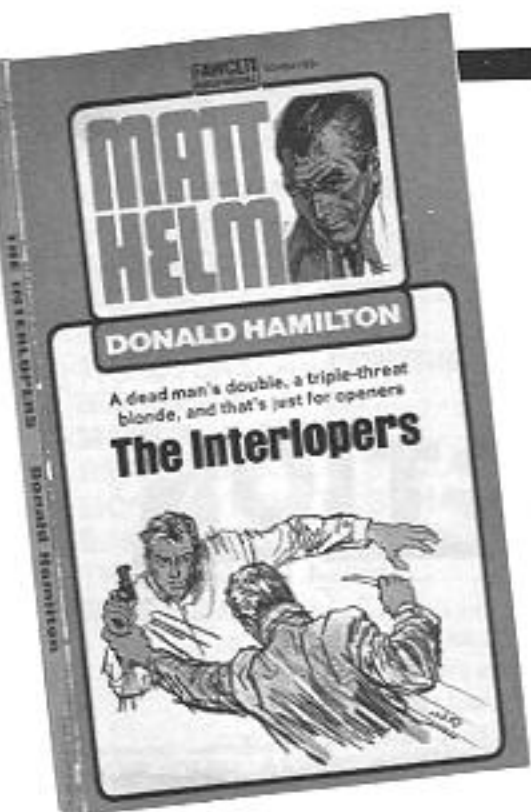
Edited by Ken Warner

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In *The Interlopers*, lead character Helm gets into knife work big-time. He started with a pocket-sized lockblade, switched to a Buck 110, and finally wound up with a Boy Scout knife—and did permanent things with all of them.

The Devastators was early on when Helm used a small lockblade, but "I always had it in my hand in my pocket." He uses it twice in this book, and once only to cut a lady out of some rope.



MATT KNIVES

by DONALD HAMILTON

UNLIKE HIS FIREARMS, the knives carried by my fictional character, Matt Helm, are mostly the knives I carry myself. Granted, I don't often wear a belt that uses a knuckle-knife as a buckle—although I own one—and I don't strap cutlery to my arms or legs except to check it out for fictional purposes, but I always do carry some kind of an edged implement. With modern packaging the way it is, I can't see how anybody can get along without one. These days, it practically takes an ax or saber to get into a box of dog food.

Frankly, I can't remember just what knife Matt Helm was wearing at any given time in any given book; except for the few occasions when something truly lethal was required (all knives are, of course, lethal to some extent), what he carried in his pocket was probably what I was carrying when I wrote the book. So a history of my own knives seems appropriate.

Of course, Matt Helm, as I wrote him, was born in this country, although his parents came from overseas. So he was never, like me, a little Swedish immigrant boy heading off for his first day in an American public school. I suppose my clothes were kind of odd, and I may have been a little concerned about them, but I felt basically well-dressed because I had the one essential item that every Swedish schoolboy carried at that time—he'd sooner go to school without his trousers than leave his sheath

HELM'S & MINE

knife at home. So I had mine on my left hip. As I recall, it had a slim blade of about 4 inches—kept sharp, of course—and the grip was birch with an ornate pommel of some kind. It was the standard Scandinavian knife, and it can, I believe, still be found in any tourist shop over there.

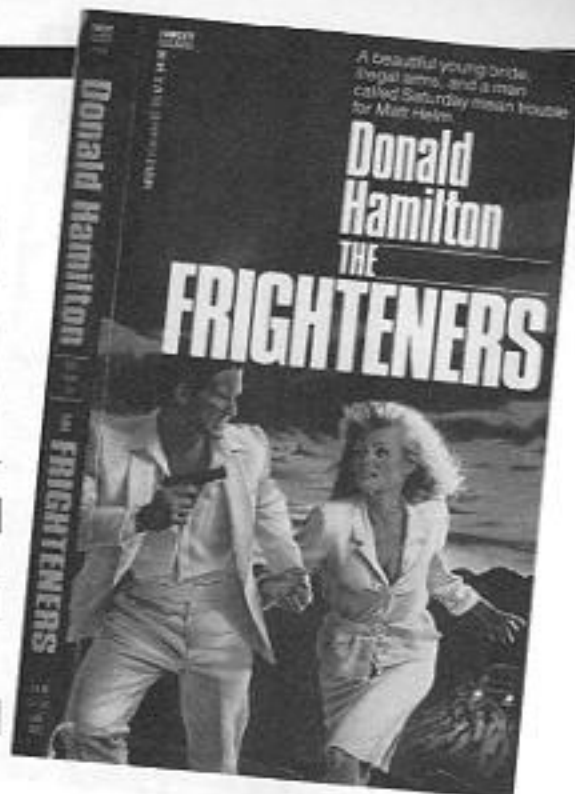
Well, I needn't have worried about my foreign clothes. Nobody even noticed my clothes; what they saw was the knife. The first teacher who spotted it called up reinforcements, just in case I proved truly homicidal, and they whipped me into the principal's office faster than you can say "Dagger." I couldn't understand what all the uproar was about—remember that at the time I didn't understand much English.

Well, my parents were summoned and were just as surprised by the commotion as I. Fortunately, they spoke good English, and they explained that I was carrying the weapon, as the principal called it, with their full permission because all schoolboys carried such knives in Sweden. (I'd be interested to hear if they still do.) My parents said they hadn't realized that customs were different here. Were they to understand that knives were totally forbidden? How in the world did a boy get along without some kind of a knife?

The principal said, well, ha, hum, a small pocketknife, perhaps, or a Boy Scout knife....

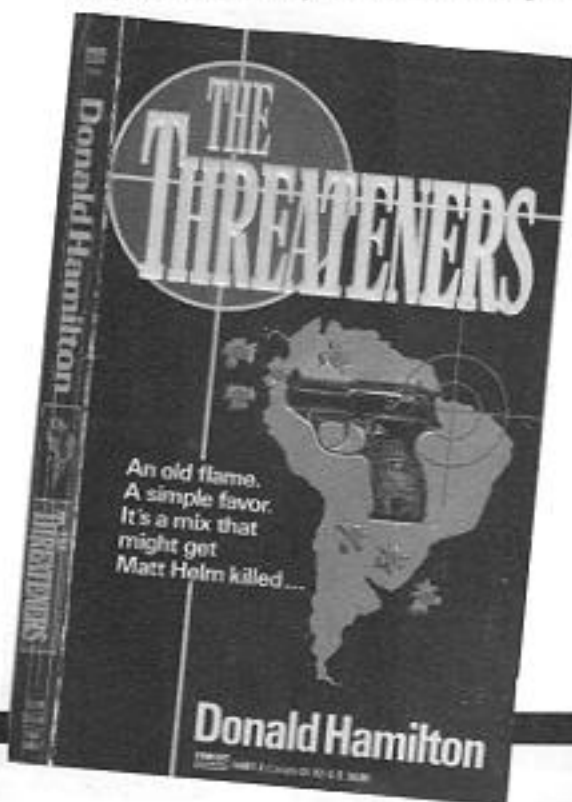
(Today, as the school systems have improved, even the small pocketknife is forbidden—Editor.)

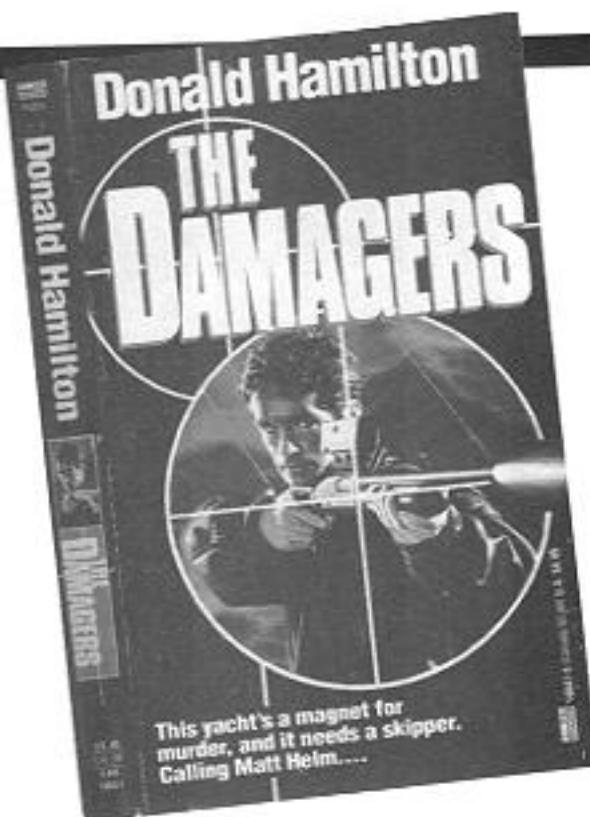
So I spent my boyhood in the company of various Scout knives. They kept getting lost, of course, as boys'



In *The Frighteners*, Helm has his Russell One-Hand knife and a Latina colleague has her cuchillo, and they're both good stalkers. Helm observes that a One-Hand knife gets all bloody sometimes, because it's so small.

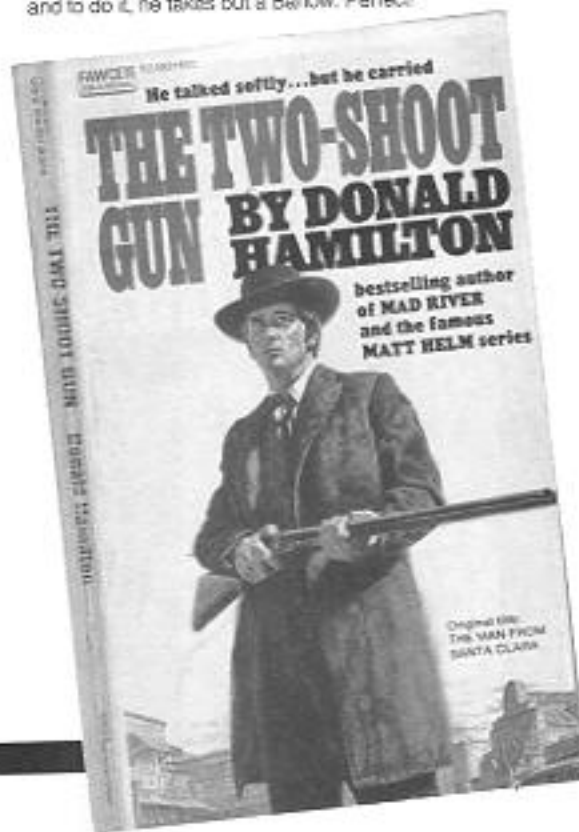
The Threateners goes to the wall in the knife department, starting with a "wall-hanger" Bowie pressed into service, then a Swiss army knife in a hotel room, a carving knife in a big hacienda, and finally a machete out in the night.





The Damagers takes place mostly on boats, and the action starts with a Chef's knife, then switches to Swiss army knives and Russells hidden all over the boat and used as tools and as weapons. Fun stuff.

The Two-Shoot Gun is a great Western about an 1870s Eastern quail shooter with a Purdey. The only time he uses a knife is to clean a mess of desert quail, and to do it, he takes out a Barlow. Perfect!



belongings do, although some lasted long enough for the staghorn to be worn fairly smooth. I would mourn my old friend, then go out and get another just like it, until one Christmas my father gave me a lovely little pearl-handled pocketknife with two spring-loaded blades. I looked at it with some doubt. For one thing it looked kind of, well, sissy, and for another it lacked the features I'd come to consider essential: It didn't have a screwdriver, can opener, leather punch or bottle opener. However, the push-button, click-open feature was intriguing, so I gave it a try anyway.

I found it a revelation. It seemed that I was always getting into a spot where a knife that could be opened one-handed was practically a lifesaver, whether I was hanging onto a plunging boat to cut some snarled fishing line or climbing a tall tree to free a tangled kite. I grew to love that pretty little knife, and it broke my heart when my father asked for it back, apologetically. He explained that a law had just been passed making spring-operated "switch-blade" knives illegal, and he was afraid that my little knife (largest blade 2 inches!) fell under this prohibition.

I went back to my Scout knives—well, actually, I got fancy, or my father did. By way of making amends for taking my spring-knife away, he got me a glorified version of the knives I'd been carrying: a bright red Swiss army knife with every gadget in the world. I carried this and its successors (my knives still had that knack of disappearing occasionally) well out of boyhood and on into middle age.

Then I read an article describing how to open a folding knife one-handed. I still remembered the ancient hurt inflicted upon me by those legislators; now I was going to show them how little their law really meant. I dug out a folding Buck hunting knife I'd picked up somewhere and got to work. There was nothing to it, with a knife that size. Grab the back of the blade and snap the wrist, and the heavy handle flipped open of its own weight. It worked better, of course, after the knife had been well oiled and broken in. It was a big knife to carry in the pocket, and it may even have been illegal, but it made me happy to thumb my nose at Washington. I wore out a number of pockets lugging that big Buck around, discovering once more that when I needed to drive a screw or open a bottle there was generally a suitable implement around; I didn't really need one on my knife. The blade was the important thing, and the Buck had plenty of that.

But one day a small package arrived in the mail. Opening it, I found a letter from the well-known knifemaker, A.G. Russell, who said he'd read and enjoyed my Matt Helm books, which was nice to hear. In return for the pleasure they'd given him, he went on, he was sending me



On a pronghorn hunt some years ago, author Hamilton settled in for some long-range shooting of his own.

one of his knives. Opening the box, I found a handsome little single-bladed folding knife, quite flat since it was made entirely of stainless steel except for a brass stud set into the base of the blade. The instructions described how that stud should be used to open the knife one-handed. This was a much simpler and more efficient system than the violent flip-open method I'd been using. (I wondered if, perhaps, Mr. Russell had read the book in which Matt Helm describes that technique and decided to show me how it could be improved upon.)

The knife even had my name engraved on it; how could I reject such a thoughtful present? The Buck was retired to hunting duty, and the Russell—much more comfortable to carry—took its place in my pocket, where it still resides.

Strangely enough, in my latest book, Matt Helm seems to have found a nice little stainless Russell knife somewhere, I can't imagine where.

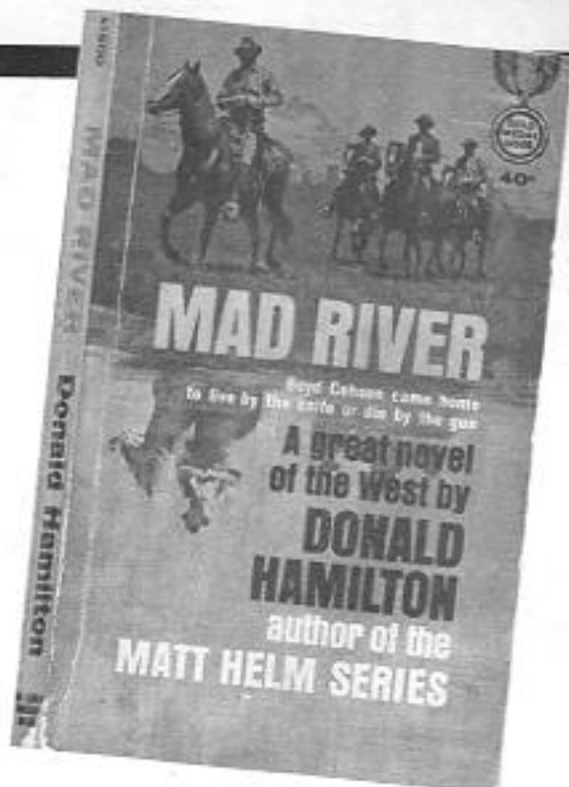
Editor's Note

Serious Hamilton readers, such as this writer and A.G. Russell—those who save the books so they may read each several times—will miss several knives from this account. Never fear; they are still in the books; I checked.

The Solingen folding hunter that came back from World War II; the "specially ordered" gift from a rich lady, made in Florida; the borrowed machete used in a saber-style duel—all are safely and permanently there.

In fact, there are a lot of knives in Don Hamilton's novels, even those that don't involve Matt Helm. There are a lot of guns, too—specific guns, used specifically. But those are another story for another DBI book.

Ken Warner



On *Mad River's* cover, it says "He came back to live by the knife or die by the gun," and so it proved. The knife was his mountain man Dad's, ranch-made from a file, and he uses it like his Daddy taught him.

Assassins Have Starry Eyes' finale turns on the fact that the un-Helm-like hero has the stuff to stash a hunting knife in his boot and then finds the nerve to use it when it counts. He also gets the girl—and deserves her.

