



## The Peddler (Hard Case Crime #27)

*Richard S. Prather , Douglas Ring (Alias)*

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In the cutthroat world of organized crime, Tony Romero was headed straight for the top. His territory: the brothels of San Francisco. But the path was littered with bodies and broken dreams - some of them his. 1952 under alias Douglas Ring. 1963 as self Richard S. Prather.

### The Peddler (Hard Case Crime #27) Details

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Author : Richard S. Prather , Douglas Ring (Alias)

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## From Reader Review The Peddler (Hard Case Crime #27) for online ebook

### David Macpherson says

Wow, this was a major disappointment. The first 150 pages were great mean fun. You see the rise of an unpleasant young man into power in the prostitution racket in 1950s San Francisco. It is a viscous portrayal of the criminal set. Then the last 100 pages were horrible, totally horrible. The main character has to leave SF and becomes a recruiter for brothels in Napa and it gets bad, putting in a sense of morality into a character who never had one. Then the last 20 pages is so unpleasant, so bad I couldn't believe it. I started out loving this book, ended up hating it,

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### Thomas says

Not one of the better HCC books -- there may be a reason Prather published this under a pseudonym (it's also one of the very few times he left Shell Scott in Hollywood.) All of the characters are either unpleasant, unattractive, or unlikeable (with one interesting exception) and the plot is not terribly interesting. But it kept my attention enough to keep me reading... not sure why. Better luck with the next one I guess.

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### Chris says

M'eh. No the worst, but not as snappy as the type of crime fiction I like, probably because the main character is really kind of an idiot. There are no real surprises in the plot either, so it's quite a bit formulaic.

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### Matthew Lipson says

My dedication to the Hardcase Crime imprint can, at times be very trying. This book came to be frustrating with its first use of the word of Frisco when referring to San Francisco. Now, if the characters were non-natives, it would be forgivable. But, they weren't. And, anyone who grows up in SF knows Frisco is a word for out-of-towners who don't know any better. Then there was the geography in which it sounded as if the author was referring to a map and never having been the city. I was ready to give up after the first 50 pages, but I believe in finishing books, even if it takes me years. In the end, I do feel I was rewarded with a book that takes an unexpected turn. A turn the main character completely deserves.

The characters and their dialogue come from a tradition of watching too much Noir. They are to say, uninspiring. But, there is something about the writing that kept me going regardless of the cliches. The author wrote during the time period of the original Film Noir. You could say, he was probably cashing in on a phenomena. Books were allowed more freedoms, though. So, as the characters go to drunken orgies and hang with prostitutes, we get to see the main character spiral out of control to his eventual doom. While the film code did dictate "Crime doesn't pay" in this book the crimes could never have been portrayed as bluntly. In the end the punishment fits the crime/s.

The action scenes are well written. The choices the main character makes, even when offered a way out,

logical and true to who is. So, in the end, I grudgingly enjoyed reading this book and am glad to not have given up on it.

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### **Kemper says**

As the song says, *Pimpin' ain't easy*. Or as the other song says, *It's hard out here for a pimp*. Or as the song I plan to write someday says, *Pimps ain't nothin' but lowlife scum who should be repeatedly beaten about the head and shoulders with steel pipes*. I doubt there will be much demand for my version on iTunes.

If professional criminals voted high-school style awards to themselves then Tony Romero would probably get a Most Likely to Succeed certificate. Young, but bright and manipulative, Tony is ambitious to the point of insanity. When he gets a glimpse at how organized crime runs San Francisco's prostitution rackets Tony starts drooling at all that money and power and desperately sets out to get himself a position in the local pimping power structure.

By manipulating people, Tony obtains a slot in middle management and quickly makes the most of it through hard work and clever pimp innovations. He's doing well, but doing well isn't enough for Tony. He wants it all, and he wants it now.

The first half of the book was a terrific noir story about the rise of an amoral young man who never once considers how what he wants will impact anyone else. In the second half, Tony has to leave San Francisco for a while due to police attention and while recruiting women to the business he meets one girl he can't forget. The book weakens considerably after this.

Tony is the only really fleshed out character in the book. Everyone else is a prostitute or a pimp/gangster, and they are all written as stereotypes. This rates somewhere in the middle of the Hard Case line that I've read.

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### **Tfitoby says**

**Read on plane from Perth to Doha, full review may follow.**

A quick enjoyable pulp read that didn't reach the heights I had hoped for from the premise but with the kind of ending that more than makes up for any disappointment in content.

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### **Craig Childs says**

I'm usually a big fan of the Hard Case Crime imprint, but *The Peddler* is one of its more forgettable entries. Originally published in 1952 under a pseudonym, this story follows the meteoric rise of Tony Romero, an inner city Italian youth, through the ranks of the San Francisco mob. There are two scenes of violence and some innuendo that was probably considered edgy in its day.

The story suffers from by-the-numbers plotting and dull characters that are really just paper-thin stereotypes. Tony's initiation into organized crime is just too easy to swallow, the female characters all fit into the

Madonna-or-whore dichotomy, and pacing is uneven. I enjoyed the stark brutality of the final two scenes even though they were very predictable. I realize these flaws are not uncommon in pulp fiction, but the better authors bring something new and fresh to the genre.

At no time did this feel like a "real" mob story (just as West Side Story never felt like a real street gang movie). There was no sense of Italian-American subculture, no realistic depiction of how power is gained or kept, and just a few glimmers of the effects of corruption. In short, don't expect anything on par with The Godfather or The Sopranos.

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### **Jake says**

It was about a 3.5. 3 for the story, which was "eh" and an extra half star for the ending, which was wonderful. I was just kind of indifferent to Tony Romero's sociopathic rise to the top of the San Francisco underworld as he was simply climbing on the backs of men no less slimy than himself. And the middle part, the diversion, just seemed too random to really fit well with the story (or maybe the whole bit with Betty was just to show that Romero had no conscience? Idk). But the end, which I won't spoil, was fantastic and made reading this book worth it.

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### **David says**

Unremarkable story of an up-and-comer in organized crime in San Francisco. Tony Romero is young, ambitious, and misogynistic. If you read this novel, you will learn nothing about him more interesting than this.

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### **Regan Sharp says**

This was a nothing special crime story about a wannabe crook who does whatever it takes to get to the top of the garbage heap, but not without consequences. Everything was lackluster from the cardboard cutout characters to the flat dialogue to the goofy ending. "Breaking Bad" it is not. However, there might be a connection. The creator of that show, Vince Gillian, says he wanted to tell the tale of a meek guy who turns into Scarface. This book, written in the 1950's, had elements (including a dopey main character named "Tony") that reminded me of the Al Pacino film from the 1980's. If indeed this crummy little tale was a source of inspiration, it might deserve another star. But probably not.

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### **Dan Schwent says**

Tony Romero rises from being a poor unwanted Italian kid to being a big player in the rackets, specifically, pimping. Tony kills and schemes his way up the ranks until he meets the one woman he doesn't want to put to work. Will he leave pimping behind for her or is he already too deep in his life's work as a **Peddler**?

Richard S. Prather has a rare talent, one that's seldom seen outside of Richard Stark and Max Allan Collins: he made me care about a lowlife douche like Tony Romero. Romero's a liar, a user, and a woman-beater, in addition to being a pimp, but I still wanted him to rise to the top of the rackets. Not that I wasn't happy with

the ending...

There's a good amount of action and a fair amount of titillation in *The Peddler*, enough to keep anyone interested.

**"What about the three rating? What kept it from being ranked higher?"** you ask. I'll tell you. Nearly all of the female characters were exactly the same apart from physical descriptions. I didn't buy Tony falling for Betty, considering she didn't have much in the way of personality to distinguish her from the others. Other than that, I may have subtracted a half star or so because the dialogue is a bit outdated. Tony says God and Jesus in the same sentence and people are acting like he's the Demon God of Vulgar Language.

All things considered, *The Peddler* is worth a read. It's quick and, as part of the Hard Case Crime Series, is quite affordable.

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## Mike says

"*The Peddler*," by Richard S. Prather, seems like a novel from a much earlier time. It was published in 1952, but the San Francisco it depicts seems very different than how the city is in more "modern" times.

"*The Peddler*" is very much a story about a ruthless young man determined to take the world for everything he can. It reminds me of gritty 1930's films like "Public Enemy" and "Scarface" (yes, it reminds me of the 1980s version as well), where the lawless world depicted is all about criminals doing what they do. If any police are present, they're just another group of criminals or a hazard to be easily avoided with enough cash or skill.

Tony Romero is an anti-hero, to be sure. He's a young and hungry crook on his way to making himself an outright villain. A chance meeting with an old flame (euphemism) leads him into the world of San Francisco's prostitution trade. Through an old contact, Tony gets in with the mob. He starts out helping to run the thriving business of the sex trade. But, of course, that is not enough for Tony. He always wants MORE. And he's willing to do anything to get it.

Tony does evolve--or more precisely, devolve--through the course of *The Peddler*. He starts out with a lot of brass and little experience. He's shocked when another mobster's wife wants him at what could be described as an old-timey "swingers party." But, later on, he's sent out into the countryside to seduce virgins (and non-virgins) to go back to San Francisco to become whores. There are some fairly risqué sections of the book. Nothing too exciting, but what is implied is often just as interesting as what is said.

Yes, Tony is thoroughly repulsive. But it is interesting to watch him tear up the landscape on his rise to the top. The writing is as blunt and heedless as Tony himself. Any preserved sense of decorum is probably the fault of the publishers--who likely objected to some explicit parts of the novel--and not the author.

As someone who lives near San Francisco, I can say the author, through Tony, loves the City by the Bay. When the story is not all about Tony, it's about San Francisco. I did laugh when they sent Tony "to the country" to recruit girls after a bad dust-up that got headlines. Why? The "countryside" they sent him to was Napa. That's kinda priceless.

But there's one weird slip in the book that makes me wonder if it was originally set in New York and if it was supposed to be about "real" gangsters. Why? There's a brief reference to Tony helping out "Charlie Lucky" (as in Charlie "Lucky" Luciano) instead of a character named Leo Castiglio (whom Tony actually helps) early on in the book that may have slipped through the editing process.

I would have liked the writing better if it was a step or two removed from Tony. I think the author felt the prose had to match the protagonist. To a certain extent, that's true. In this case, though, it makes for a grim read of paranoia, betrayal, lust, and ruthless ambition. Tony is not much for nuance and neither is "The Peddler."

The people around Tony know what he is and what he's capable of, yet they all stand by and do nothing about him until it's far too late. Like the old gangster movies that prompted the Hays Code, the plot of "The Peddler" presents Tony with opportunities for redemption. Since Tony is a total gangster, you can guess how all that goes.

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## Dave says

In some ways, the story of Tony Romero, the protagonist of *The Peddler*, is similar to the later story of Tony Montana of the *Scarface* movie. It is the story of a nobody from a nowhere background determined to rise up in the ranks of criminal organized crime with a quickness that demonstrates his keen determination. Here, the criminal organization is not peddling drugs, but human flesh.

Here, Romero meets Maria Casino, who had known from high school days, and finds that she is working in one of the houses in San Francisco and is amazed by how much dough flows through the houses to the crime bosses. He saw her as she hurried out of the Green Room and "Something about her stirred memory in his brain and he walked slowly after her, watching the black skirt swirl above her rounded calves, the slow, liquid ripple of her hips." After having dinner, he queries about why she only got half the dough from her tricks and finds out that there were guys who ran the show, Sharkey and Angelo.

Romero finds that Maria is working a party later that night and he knows some of the players there and finagles an introduction. When he gets to the party (after spending the evening sweating about whether she would come through with his invite), he thinks that it was one of those places that smelled like money. "It made him think of fat guys getting their pink faces patted in barber shops, and slant-eyed women with gold douche bags." He also meets a slinky brunette, Ginny, Sharkey's wife. "[S]he was a hot one. She couldn't be more than twenty-five or twenty-six, and she was built like a burlesque stripper."

Soon, Romero meets the boss (Sharkey) and works his way into the organization. He sets up an argument with one of the chieftains and soon takes over his district and eventually Romero takes on the boss himself and ousts him to take over and run all the houses in the city. No one is fooled that Romero is anything but ambitious and that anything he does is by accident. He is moving up the ladder. He wants the money and the power.

Of course, there is always another boss (Angelo) and, in taking over so quickly, Romero finds himself blackmailed and then eventually forced to leave the city and ousted from power. Angelo is a snake in the grass and the real power no matter who is running the houses.

Although the plot itself is not terribly complicated, it is a well-written and engrossing story that captures the reader immediately. It is a story of blind ambition that knows no bounds and Prather does an excellent job of capturing the psyche of Romero.

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### **Chris says**

Long-lost crime paperback about Tony Romero, impoverished Italian kid from San Fransisco with dreams of striking it rich. After hearing how much money prostitutes make in a night, and that pimps take half of their earnings, he decides that pimping is the life path for him. The book chronicles his rise, gaining more power and more money; Tony eyes every position above his like a hungry wolf, because the grass is always greener, and he is never satisfied.

Another tired and predictable "crime as a moral fable" novel. Protagonist is an amoral louse who manipulates his friends and allies, rises to his position of power on the backs of his prostitution ring, and eventually his character erodes so badly that the only way he can get any lower is to fall into his grave. Prather's writing was okay, but didn't impress me; his biggest strength is making you sympathize with Tony long after you should hate him. The finale is worth it.

Something for Hard Case Crime completists, or crime readers who like the "morality play," self-destructive-protagonist subgenre. I'm not a fan of that subgenre, so if you are, add an extra star or so.

Full review found [here](#).

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### **Paige Ellen Stone says**

Pure pulp and fun. Dated, it is clear, but still fun. If you haven't read any of the Hard Case Crime books and like a rest from what you usually read, try one.

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