



# The Menacers

*Donald Hamilton*

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## **The Menacers** Donald Hamilton

In a little town on the Mexican coast a young American woman is under heavy guard by U.S. agents--and under heavy surveillance by Soviet operatives, including Matt Helm's old mistress Vadya. The captive woman claims not only to have witnessed a flying saucer, but to be the only survivor of its attack on her boat. Helm is to accompany her back to the States--or to kill her instantly if it looks like the Russians are even getting close to a snatch.

## **The Menacers Details**

Date : Published 1968 by Fawcett Gold Medal

ISBN : 9780402271727

Author : Donald Hamilton

Format : Mass Market Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Spy Thriller, Espionage, Action, Mystery, Thriller, Crime

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## From Reader Review *The Menacers* for online ebook

### Jim says

This is not my first or even fifth time reading this book, although it is the first as an audio book. It's very well narrated by Stefan Rudnicki. No surprise there, he always does a great job. It's Matt Helm, perhaps my favorite action hero since he's so believable & Hamilton does his research well.

This book was first published in 1968, so that's not too surprising that several things date it. Cars, border crossing, & some other items can't be helped. Helm's use of 'doll' & 'sweetheart' aren't as bad in print as they are in audio. I don't recall hearing 'doll' used by actual people, only TV tough guys. 'Sweetheart' was fairly common, although now I mostly hear & use 'sweetie'. (No, it's not sexist. I hear more women using it than men.)

Helm is a bit of a sexist, though. He likes women in skirts, but that doesn't mean he doesn't think that some aren't every bit as deadly as the men he faces. The bits on homosexuality might make people cringe today (He refers to a gay guy as a fairy once.) but Helm doesn't really care. As he points out, he's not sleeping with him, but it is one more piece of data that doesn't fit given the mores of the day.

The basic plot really dates this & might seem unbelievable to anyone who doesn't remember those days. This was during the Cold War & we were in a race for space plus nasty maneuvering (both sides & all over) against the Communist menace. There were more than a few traces of McCarthyism around, but I think we'd quit having bomb alert practices where we had to hide under our desks. We hadn't yet reached the moon & the outer space craze was strong. So were UFO sightings, although they were winding down.

A study found that UFOs were a Cold War craze & while that might sound silly, take a look at some of the crazy things governments were doing then. It's no wonder UFOs were a very popular topic & so easily fueled by conspiracy theorists. They had a lot of help from blundering government coverups & laughable explanations. Sightings were often front page news & not just in the tabloids & small town papers, but more in the 50s than the 60s, IIRC. Still, the point here is that the plot of this novel was believable for the time. If nothing else, this should give the reader some hope that we'll survive the current crisis.

Hamilton handled it well & wrapped everything up in a fantastic way.

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### James says

American agent Matt Helm is sent to Mexico to escort back a surviving witness to a supposed sighting of a UFO that 'seemingly' destroyed and crashed into a fishing vessel she was aboard. A very strange case for Helm and one in which he is dubious of his American associates he is to contact, his old enemy agent love/hate acquaintance, the Mexican authorities and a shooting at a hotel that he appears to be 'set-up' as a patsy. This time Washington DC's other secret agencies are the thorn in his side, as well as foreign government hijinks involving a scheme to cause some nastiness between the United States and Mexico. AS usual, these short, leanly written Helm adventures build up to a lot of killing, sex, 60s political incorrectness and tricky situations for the hero to escape from. Great sequence near conclusion involving Helm and three others in a small plane when grappling leads to gunfire and lots of dead bodies in a tight space in a mode of transportation that starts to plummet.

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## Dennis says

One of the best Matt Helm stories yet. I know I have said it before and I know Sony is supposed to own the rights, but this series would make such great movies if done right. I will be reading more of the series soon.

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## George K. says

"Επιχείρηση UFO", εκδόσεις ΒΙΠΕΡ.

Πάντε και βέλε μνες πρσσαν απ την τελευταία φορ που διβασα ιστορτα με ρωα τον Ματ Χελμ και ο μπαγσας μου λειψε. Αλλ? καλ?τερα ?τσι, γιατ? αν τα διβάζα ?λα μαζεμ?να, θα μου τελε?ωναν γρ?γορα. Και τι θα ?κανα μετ?;

Μια κοπ?λα ?γινε μ?ρτυρας φονικ?ς επ?θεσης εν?ς αγν?στου ταυτ?τητας ιπτ?μενου αντικειμ?νου, σε μια μικρ? π?λη του Μεξικο?. Δυο χαμηλ?βαθμοι Αμερικανο? πρ?κτορες βρ?θηκαν εκε? για να φυλ?ξουν την κοπ?λα, μ?χρι να ?ρθει ο Χελμ για να την παραλ?βει. Αποστολ? του Χελμ ε?ναι να φ?ρει ζωνταν? την κοπ?λα στο Λος ?λαμος ? να την σκοτ?σει, σε περ?πτωση που Σοβιετικο? πρ?κτορες, οι οπο?οι καραδοκο?ν τριγ?ρω, την πλησι?σουν επικ?νδυνα. Το θ?μα ε?ναι ?τι μ?νο με διαστημ?πλοια και εξωγ?ινους δεν ?χει να κ?νει ο Χελμ, μιας και απ? π?σω κρ?βεται κ?τι πιο γ?ινο και εξ?σου επικ?νδυνο. Μ?χρι το τ?λος της ιστορ?ας θα γ?νουν ?να κ?ρο φ?νοι και δεν θα ξ?ρει ποιον να εμπιστευτε?...

Κλασικ? ωρα?α κατασκοπευτικ? περιπ?τεια, με ενδιαφ?ρουσα πλοκ? γεμ?τη μυστ?ριο, ανατροπ?ς και δρ?ση. Η γραφ? στο ?διο επ?πεδο ποι?τητας με τα προηγ?μενα βιβλ?α, στρωτ?, χωρ?ς εξ?ρσεις και φιοριτο?ρες, με ακριβε?ς περιγραφ?ς τοπ?ων και καταστ?σεων. Φυσικ? το σαρκαστικ? χιο?μορ του Χελμ κ?νει αισθητ? την παρουσ?α του και σ'αυτ? την ιστορ?α.

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## Ardee-El says

1968 was an interesting time for Donald Hamilton to be writing this . . . three of the four Matt Helm films had come out, turning his lethal assassin into a boozing playboy, and it\_\_s just beyond the apex of the 60s spy craze (which I would say was punctured by the **Batman** television series, when non-**Get Smart** espionage shows started spoofing themselves\_\_always an incipient sign of early demise).

(Sidenote: This is the first\_\_and as far as I know, the *only* one of the Matt Helm titles to see print in hardcover. Undoubtedly to take advantage of the increased high profile caused by the then-current films.)

It\_\_s not surprising, then, that Helm comments on how movies and television always get silencers wrong (they\_\_re ineffective on revolvers) and how locking people in the back of cars and gassing them still gives them time for mischief (like shooting the driver in the back of the head). In other words, Helm is aware of the spy craze and how they get things wrong. It adds to the fun. (All the while still using the clich\_\_ of getting caught by the baddies to find out their plans or infiltrate their organization!)

The immediately prior Helm film was their adaptation of **The Ambushers** which had Helm\_\_instead of pursuing an ex-Nazi in Central America who\_\_s gotten his hands on a nuclear missile left over from the Cuban Missile Crisis as he does in the book\_\_pursuing the exiled leader from an outlaw nation in Mexico who\_\_s gotten his hands on a U.S.-made flying saucer whose motive power somehow has some connection to the Y chromosome (it kills only male pilots). I can only imagine Donald Hamilton laughing\_\_or fuming\_\_at this and saying to himself, \_\_Okay, you want a Matt Helm adventure set in Mexico with U.F.O.s, I\_\_ll give you one.\_\_ And so he does.

I\_\_ve come to the conclusion that women are the movers and shakers in the Helm novels. Oh sure, they die\_\_anyone except for Helm and his boss, Mac, are sure to survive to the last page\_\_but they\_\_re the ones who really matter. The men are window dressing\_\_targets or assassins or both\_\_but it\_\_s the women who are fleshed out, who change sides as often as they change their clothes, who Helm spends his time trying to second-guess, protect, kill or coddle.

(Additional sidenote: I can\_\_t take credit for this observation\_\_I actually stumbled across it on a board discussing the book, but I can\_\_t resist mentioning it here\_\_but over the course of these novels Helm continually complains about how terrible women look in pants. In this book, one may argue that Helm actually *kills* a woman for wearing pants. Yes, it helps explain how he could mistake her for a man, and she *is* there to kill him, but I find this an ironic way of looking at it.)

My only real complaint about the Helm series is that they\_\_re such fun reads\_\_even with my occasional carping\_\_that they don\_\_t last long.

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## **John Wilson says**

Even if I weren't a fan of the Matt Helm series, I think I would've picked up this book for the sheer blue-ness of the cover. "BLUE!," it screams.

Also, bonus points for the phrase "flying saucer scare".

Yes. In this "new Matt Helm suspense novel", there's some UFO hysteria floating about. Specifically around the area of Mazatlan, Mexico. An American eyewitness needs to be guard-dogged by Helm for her return journey to the US. There's a problem, though. She's already being chaperoned by two agents of another US agency. They've been ordered to cooperate with Matt and they're not too happy about it. Because they play things too close to the vest (and through no fault of his own), Matt Helm winds up killing another US agent in seeming self defense.

There's an added wrinkle to this installment: Helm has a girlfriend! Specifically, a woman from his previous civilian existence who happened to re-enter his life shortly before the novel begins. And, of course, she gets swept along in the adventure.

I don't know if it was because of her presence, or maybe it was the influence of the Dean Martin movies, but he's quite the quipster in this. Not that he didn't already have a sense of humor before. But the humor usually confined itself to one or two dry one-liners. Here, Helm seems to be having a ball from cover to cover. But at the same time, he's no less deadly or effective than ever.

At one point, he recruits a civilian into the agency in one very short "job interview":

*"I have a new assignment coming up," I said. "For this assignment I need a good-looking, bloodthirsty, conscienceless little bitch who'll slit a man's throat and then kick him in the crotch for bleeding on her shoes."*

*Her eyes watched me steadily. "Well," she said, "well, I'm not very pretty, Helm."*

*"You'll do," I said.*

Matthew, you old charmer, you.

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## **Mike (the Paladin) says**

I've read these up to #11 now...and I've ordered the next 5 from ABE Books.

So, what's this one like?

First have you read them in order and are you up on "who Matt Helm is"? The books probably don't demand to be read in order but I'd suggest you do. Helm was in the OSS and then thought he had retired. But he gets called back (I mean we wouldn't have a series of novels if he hadn't been). Most people when they hear of Matt Helm "now-a-days" think of the ridiculous movies of the 1960s starring Dean Maritain. Thankfully most have forgotten the short lived TV series. If either of these is your take or picture of Matt Helm...you simply don't know who or what he is.

Helm was not some urbane nattily dressed 007 knock-off. Helm was an original, a gritty no nonsense agent who was generally called out when one thing was needed.

Helm was an assassin. It wasn't all he did but that's his specialty. The books have some dark humor but they are not played for laughs.

Here Helm is sent into a situation that makes little sense to him...but he does his job.

Now let me give a warning. This book was written in 1968. Some of the characters are what/who would be called LGBT. Now while Helm says their life style choices are none of his business there are/is some very non-PC language used here. Some hard line feminists will also resent some of Helm's attitudes (though he gives female agents their due he's still a man of the time so to speak).

So good actin, good story and so on, if the dated part of the story doesn't get to you.

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## **Dave says**

Helm is an agent for a super-secret agency that operates in the shadows and does the tough work no one wants to admit needs doing. Not only does he have a license to kill, but he knows intimately that feelings and emotions have no place in this business and if you are too cautious and too moralistic that agent you only wounded might come back up firing at you. This one involves UFOs and strange ray guns and other mysterious sightings. It involves another espionage agency out to do Helm wrong. It involves his early

nemesis the gorgeous Nayda. It takes the reader deep into Mexico and into the Sea of Cortez. Gritty, fast paced, unsentimental, and simply a damn good read.

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### **Jim says**

Helm is given the job of escorting a US citizen, a witness, from a small Mexican town back to the US. The witness seems to be wanted by the Russians who have brought out one of their big guns, Vadya, a player in a couple of other books. Helm is not a bodyguard. The witness will either make it back to the proper authorities in the US or be killed by Helm.

It was a fine book in so many ways. UFO's are the major theme & so well done, that it is fantastic. It's not SF, just pure trickery, murder & mayhem. Helm at his best. There are several scenes, especially one in a plane, that epitomize the hero. Several other things happen & a couple of new characters are introduced that are used later on in the series, so this is a must read.

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### **Harv Griffin says**

[Sadly, Vadya is ki

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### **Vikas Datta says**

Spell-binding as usual... and some great scenes to boot

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### **Ralph says**

Those who know super spy Matt Helm only through the cinematic buffoonery of Dean Martin really do not know Matt Helm at all. As written by Donald Hamilton, Matt Helm is a nice guy who kills people for a living, not maliciously or through any hatred, but coolly, efficiently and without hesitation, except when he doesn't kill at all, but even that choice is made because it furthers his purpose or helps him to complete his assigned task, not because of any weakness or sentimentality.

In "The Menacers," 11th book in the series, Matt is sent to investigate a flying saucer attack which resulted in a burning boat, five dead people and a lone survivor with a fantastic story to tell that could embarrass the United States. The assignment may involve the fantastic and unbelievable, but not of that is of any interest to Helm. His only concern is to escort the witness to Los Alamos...or to kill her if he cannot. Along with flying saucers on the attack, we have also communist agents, turncoats, bureaucratic knuckleheads, inept American spies and the Mexican Secret Service.

Nowadays, communist agents are the baddies of another age and flying saucers have morphed into slick documentaries on the History Channel (which never uses the term "flying saucers"), but back when this novel was published (1968), but were front and center in the news and were the focus of intense cultural paranoia. The country was then experiencing violent riots often coordinated by Soviet agents as well as a

UFO "flap," when flying saucer sightings were reported on the nightly news and scattered across the pages of "Life" magazine. While the villains of the book have gone the way of the dodo and the plot device has lost much of its lurid nature, the power of Hamilton's storytelling has lost none of its power or immediacy. Matt Helm remains a believable action figure, alternately hard-bitten and introspective, and well worth following from start to finish.

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### **David Makepeace says**

As usual. A really fun read.

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### **Beauregard Shagnasty says**

This is the first Matt helm book I've ever read. It was enjoyably hard-headed and unsentimental, much more realistic than Nick Carter or James Bond.

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