

THE PITS

By David T. Wolf

I don't do a lot of corporate work. A skip-tracer like me usually gets the call from a collection agency. This time the company wanted to do it direct and avoid publicity. Hey, it's no skin off my ass.

Client perches his narrow butt on the edge of my dusty visitors chair, opens his briefcase and pulls out a computer form.

"This is how it happened."

I eyeball it. It's a form for issuing a refund check. Name of company, Ex-Lax. Name of recipient, Barry Felix Dingle. 329 West Harrison Street, Seattle, WA, ZIP blank. Amount of check, \$98,119. I read it a second time.

"You skipped the ZIP."

Client blinks a couple times and clears his throat.

"You put the ZIP where the amount should be. Unless this chump paid 98 grand for a box of funny chocolate."

His face turns red. "You tab over for each field. I must have hit the tab twice by mistake."

"Costly mistake. The chump ran off with the change."

"If you track him down, you'll get ten percent."

"Plus expenses. Type me a check for my retainer fee. Five hundred smackers. My zip is 94103. I'll call you in a couple weeks. Unless you make the same mistake, in which case you'll never see me again."

He gives me a horrified look.

A cheap flight to Seattle and a fifteen buck cab ride gets me to West Harrison. I meet Dingle's former landlady, a heavysset dame too old for her red hair, with a glowing ready-to-pop pimple right between her eyebrows that makes me want to duck every time she frowns.