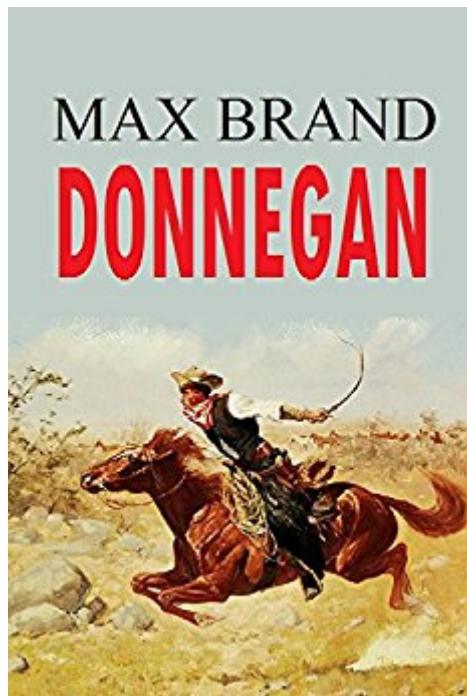


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Donnegan (1921) (Illustrated)



Synopsis

One of the most prolific writers ever, Max Brand (1892 – 1944) is considered the world's most celebrated writer of Westerns---a virtual Shakespeare of the Western Range. For Old West adventure it can't get any better than Max Brand. Max Brand originally published "Donnegan" in Western Story Magazine, April 16-May 21, 1921----effectively and realistically portraying the early struggles encountered in establishing law and order on the Western Range.

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Customer Reviews

Books on tape are so great for traveling and this one was no exception. It was fast paced all through the book and took us several miles before it was done. We are Max Brand fans and as usual, his book had a twist in the ending. Loved it.

If you can read the above lines out loud with a straight face, you just might be able to take Max Brand's Donnegan seriously. The novel has several weaknesses, but the one that turns it into a spectacular failure is its ludicrous framing story. Donnegan, a short red-haired tramp, rides the rails in search of a man named Rusty Dick (please, no snickering). Having discovered that his quarry is

dead, Donnegan jumps off the train, forces his way into a stranger's house, and falls in love with the owner's daughter on the spot. The owner, one Colonel Macon, sends Donnegan with his daughter to the Corner, a mining town, hoping that the girl will win back her lover, Jim Landis, from the shadowy Lord Nick, who has horned in on the Colonel's profitable business arrangements with Landis. Failing that, Donnegan is to kill Landis. This nearly intolerable beginning then gives place to a fairly good second act; the Corner turns out to be an interesting place with interesting characters. Donnegan wins himself an ally, a giant black fighting man named George Washington Green, while the beautiful, scheming Nelly Lebrun proves a formidable obstacle to Donnegan. Jim Landis proves to be no opponent at all, but a mere human football whom the real players are fighting to possess. Donnegan's character gets more fleshed out in the second act. As in *Destry Rides Again*, Max Brand shows a talent for portraying a hero who is severely and obviously flawed - lazy, an almost pathological liar, perpetually needing to prove his manhood - yet nonetheless lovable for that. Indeed, Donnegan is so flawed that the story seems to be inevitably heading for a tragic denouement that might redeem the absurdity of the first act. Unfortunately, there's no such luck. Almost from the minute the shadowy Lord Nick walks on the stage (his true identity should surprise no one), the story careers off into utter absurdity again. The characters' motivations, none too credible to begin with, now contort into self-parody. Don't feel bad if you can make no sense whatsoever out of the last few chapters; everybody, including the characters themselves, is just as confused as you are. Unlike many later Western authors, many of whom preferred to tiptoe around the question of racism, Max Brand places race relations front and center in this novel, even more than in *Destry Rides Again*. This time, we get a clearer picture of what Brand's own racial attitudes were: he wanted to give a friendly and sympathetic view of African Americans, and largely succeeded, but could not entirely free himself of the unconscious prejudices of his era. George Washington Green is a strong, brave, and likeable character, as he is intended to be, and Brand consciously rejects his contemporaries' stereotypes of black people as perpetual children. There is a major scene showing Brand's contempt for racial segregation. However, Brand cannot portray a real friendship between Green and Donnegan; he can conceive no intimate relationship between a white man and a black one other than that of master and servant. At the same time, Brand continues to hint at a much less wholesome racial attitude, not toward blacks, but toward Chinese. His hero, like the other major characters here and in *Destry*, harbors a deep contempt and distrust of the Chinese, and this time, there is also a strong implication that the villainous Colonel Macon's love for things Chinese is a reflection of his cruelty and avarice. While it would be unfair to judge Brand by modern standards, it would also be a mistake to think that he had already won through to the racial

enlightenment of later times..The description of the Corner and the racial attitudes make Brand's work a sort of academically interesting specimen, but not, by the wildest stretch of the imagination, a good novel. It's a shame that, unlike Destry Rides Again, Donnegan was never made into a movie. A good film treatment might have redeemed some of the book's flaws, and it would have been delightful to see Orson Welles play Colonel Macon.

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