



Golden Age

WESTERN

Comics

Edited by Steven Brower Foreword by Christopher Irving



This PDF is NOT the entire book

GOLDEN AGE WESTERN COMICS

Edited by Steven Brower

Foreword by Christopher Irving

Published by



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Golden Age Western Comics



Edited by Steven Brower
Foreword by Christopher Irving



powerHouse Books
Brooklyn, NY

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FOREWORD

Christopher Irving

When the Western was at its peak, from about the 1930s–50s, the period of the Old West had only been over for around 50 years, and the craze has since been over for about that length of time. While the current generation of kids embraces the giant robots made popular in the years following the Western's peak, the cowboy is largely forgotten in this politically correct time. Toy guns are generally taboo, and "Cowboys and Indians" just doesn't fly on today's playground.

But once, when being American was a way of life, the cowboy was king, and this collection celebrates that era in an array of spectacular and offbeat comics.

By the late-'40s and through the mid-'50s, as superheroes became less exciting and relevant, the cowboy stepped in with his spurred boots to keep the comics industry afloat. The shrinking comics industry didn't have enough room for both genres, and the cowboy was the quicker draw, beating the long underwear crowd out. The last standby, All-American Comics' *All-Star Comics* (which featured the first major superhero team in the Justice Society of America), gave way to *All-Star Western*.

After reading this assemblage of stories, put together by Steven Brower, you'll see why they were all the rage, whether for story quality or sheer kitsch factor. There were more publishers in the Golden Age of comics than badmen in a saloon, and they produced Westerns of all flavors and levels.

Several of the stories herein were published by Charlton Comics, once one of the largest publishers of comics in the United States. Founded in Seymour, Connecticut by a former Italian bricklayer and a disbarred attorney he'd met in prison, Charlton held the distinction of housing everything from editorial to distribution under one roof. The downside to Charlton is that they paid the worst rates in the business; as a result,



most of their comics were hastily drawn by freelancers anxious to produce enough pages to make a living wage.

There were, however, some real diamonds in the rough, the brightest being Charlton artist, and eventual editor, Dick Giordano. A trio of Giordano's stories is presented here, showing the craftsmanship and pride he put into even the lowest paying work. He later went on to edit at DC Comics, eventually becoming the Managing Editor (his modest title for Editor-in-Chief) and then Vice President/Executive Editor in the mid-'80s. Giordano suffered from hearing loss for most of his adult life and, by the time of his death in 2010, was practically deaf.

Although not credited, chances are the Charlton Westerns were written by Joe Gill, a dyed-in-the-wool Irishman and self-professed "hack" writer. Entering the comics industry with best pal Mickey Spillane (of *Mike Hammer* fame) in the early '40s, Joe became the head writer at Charlton and stayed there until they closed shop in '86. There, he wrote every genre of story from romance to superhero to crime to Western. I was lucky enough to know Gill a few years before he died in 2007; he was a helluva character, always equipped with a wisecrack and sound writing advice.

Charlton was also a last resort for struggling artists in the '50s, which made it possible for them to occasionally score artists like Mike Sekowsky, future *Justice League of America* artist, who contributes the Masked Raider story here. His use of solid blacks and geometric shapes gives his work a kinetic nature that pops off the page. Charlton later boasted a post-*Spider-Man* Steve Ditko in



their ranks, as he returned to his first major home in comics in the mid-'60s to draw *The Question* and *Blue Beetle*.

Although they only have one entry here, Magazine Enterprises produced many of the best and most offbeat Western comics ever made. It wasn't just because of their assemblage of talented, top-level cartoonists; much was undoubtedly owed to the Editor-in-Chief and top man at ME, Vin Sullivan, who was the first to discover Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's *Superman* in the submissions slush pile, and inadvertently helped launch the entire superhero genre. With their flag Western title *Best of the West*, ME Westerns featured stars who were crossed between superhero and cowboy, wearing masks and costumes while also living with alter egos. Their top characters were the first Ghost Rider, who wore a spooky luminescent costume and used magic to spook the baddies; Redmask, the superhero identity of cowboy star Tim Holt; and the masked cowgirl Black Phantom.

Our ME entry here is from *Dan'l Boone*, featuring the legendary frontiersman, with art by Joe Certa. While he was never considered a huge name, Certa dutifully worked in comics from the '40s through the '70s, drawing *Martian Manhunter* for DC Comics, the syndicated *Straight Arrow* strip, and also working at Gold Key comics on TV adaptations, including the *Dark Shadows* comic. While his work has a certain stiffness to it, it is far from lacking in charm. Certa was one of many talented journeymen who was like a character actor, always delivering a solid job yet never considered a star.

Not even a character actor, even though he assisted Will Eisner on *The Spirit*, Manny Stallman's art is so stiff and off-putting that it instantly delves into kitsch territory. His work on the truly bizarre "Little Eagle" story presented here is a great example of a platypus of a character. Another (and even greater) Eisner connection in this book is Jerry Iger, who drew the "Annie Oakley" story for Charlton and is the person most

responsible for giving the legendary Eisner his start in comics. When Eisner met Iger in the late-'30s, the latter was editor of a comics magazine called *Wow, What a Magazine!*, and gave Will his first work. After the mag folded, the two went into business together packaging comics as Universal Phoenix, with Eisner doing all of the art and Iger pounding the pavement to find wannabe comics publishers to sell their stories to.

It's a mighty good thing that the cowboy was around to help keep comics aloft throughout the early '50s. It didn't hurt that the Western was experiencing a wave of popularity through Western characters like The Lone Ranger, Cisco Kid, Zorro, and Hopalong Cassidy, and stars such as Roy Rogers, the King of the Cowboys. Even depictions of his sidekick, Gabby Hayes, had a long-running presence in comics: a former Shakespearean actor, Hayes removed his dentures and played a laughable prospector type, a Little Tramp for the Old West, and we also have him here. Their time was running out, however, as new genres were getting ready to overtake them in Cold War America.

Kids were giving up their six-shooter cap pistols for toy ray guns, or growing up and embracing the new adult Western in the form of the long-running *Gunsmoke* TV and radio programs. Many of them just moved on to rock 'n' roll when exploring the prairies of adolescence. The superhero came back with a vengeance in 1956, as the Flash was revamped for a new generation of National Comics readers, bringing the rest of his superhero buddies back to life in a superhero revival. Pretty soon, the cowboy was replaced with new versions of dusted-off old superheroes at National, and revolutionary angst-ridden ones at Marvel Comics.

But for now, let's pretend there are no power rings or radioactive spider bites, and we'll grab a spot at the saloon bar or around a campfire in the middle of the desert, and parlay with these old-school, print cowboys (and girls). Yeehaw!

WESTERN COMICS

Steven Brower

No sooner had the era ended than it was romanticized in the arts. Automobiles had barely replaced horse driven wagons when a plethora of cowboy films entertained the masses alongside melodramas and comedies. The earliest silent Westerns appeared as soon as the technology to create them was available. There was the less-than-one-minute-long *Cripple Creek Bar-Room Scene* (literally the prototypical barroom scene), and *Poker at Dawson City*, set during the Alaska gold rush underway at the time, both produced in 1899. In 1903, the first commercial film, *The Great Train Robbery*, written and directed by Edwin S. Porter, gave birth to the genre. D.W. Griffith experimented with the form in the *Twisted Trail* (1910), with Mary Pickford; *The Last Drop of Water* (1911); and *Fighting Blood* (1911).

The first feature-length Western was the six-reel *Arizona* (1913), directed by Augustus E. Thomas. Cecil B. DeMille's first motion picture was *The Squaw Man* (1914). Soon real-life cowboys and legendary Western figures appeared in films, such as Buffalo Bill Cody in *The Adventures of Buffalo Bill* (1914).

This burgeoning genre soon introduced the first Hollywood cowboy star, William S. Hart, who appeared in over three-dozen films from 1914 until 1925. Next up was Gilbert M. "Broncho Billy" Anderson, starting with *Broncho Billy and the Baby* (1915), and ending with *The Son-of-a-Gun* (1919). But by far the best-known and lasting star was Tom Mix. Beginning in 1916 he often produced and directed his own films and bridged the gap between the silent era and "speakies." Sound film ushered in the "singing cowboy," spawning stars such as Gene Autry, Tex Ritter, and Roy Rogers, a member of the singing group the Sons of the Pioneers. Another successful singing cowboy was William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd, who appeared in almost 70 films between 1935



and 1952 and went on to a starring role in a long-running TV series, as did Rogers.

More serious Western fare hit the screen as well, starring non-cowboy actors, such as director John Ford's classic *Stagecoach* (1939) starring John Wayne. Others followed: *Northwest Passage* (1940) with Spencer Tracy; and *Dodge City* (1939), and *Virginia City* (1940), starring English actor Errol Flynn as a cowboy. He then portrayed General Custer in director Raoul Walsh's romanticized biography *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941). Of note as well were director/producer Howard Hawks' collaborations with John Wayne on four films, *Red River* (1948), *Rio Bravo* (1959), *El Dorado* (1966), and *Rio Lobo* (1970). Perhaps the genre reached its zenith with Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* in 1952, starring Gary Cooper in the ultimate shoot out.

Over on radio the genre flourished as well with a wealth of Western shows airing: *The American Trail*, *Death Valley Days*, *Frontier Town*, *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*, *Gunsmoke*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, *The Roy Rogers Show*, *Tales of the Texas Rangers*, *The Cisco Kid*, and *Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters*, to name a few. And with the advent of the new technology of television Western programs flourished, including: *The Adventures of Jim Bowie*, *The Cisco Kid*, *The Adventures of Kit Carson*, *The Lone Ranger*, *The Roy Rogers Show*, *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, *Annie Oakley*, *Death Valley Days*, *Zorro*, *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, *The Rifleman*, *Bat Masterson*, *Have Gun—Will Travel*, and *Wagon Train*, among many others.

Considering their success on film and radio, and later on TV, one would think that Westerns appearing in newspaper comic strips would be natural, but the converse is true. There was *Texas Slim* by Ferd Johnson (later of Frank Willard's *Moon Mullins* fame), which began in 1925, and was revived in 1940 under the new title, *Texas Slim and Dirty Dalton*. And *Broncho Bill* by Harry O'Neill debuted in 1928 as *Young Buffalo Bill* and continued until 1950. But those were the exceptions. It wasn't until the mid-1930s that the genre began to take hold. Zane Grey's *King of the Royal Mounted*, illustrated by Allen Dean, and *Bronc Peeler* both debuted in 1935. *Red Ryder*, created by writer Stephen Slesinger and artist Fred Harman, began in 1938. *Big Chief Wahoo* (which began as *The Great Gusto*) by Elmer Woggon, and *The Lone Ranger*, adapted from the radio show by Fran Stricker and Charles Flanders, soon premiered as well. Also making their debut in the '30s were Garrett Price's *White Boy*, Ed Leffingwell's *Little Joe*, and Vic Forsythe's *Way out West*.

In February 1937, more than a year before Superman's debut in *Action Comics* #1, the first Western comic book premiered, published by the Comics Magazine Company, titled *Western Picture Stories*, featuring art by the legendary Will Eisner. However, this series lasted only four issues. The same month another Western comic book, *Star Ranger* #1, was published by Chesler/Centaur Publications and ran for 12 issues. It later became *Cowboy Comics* and then the title was changed again to *Star Ranger Funnies*, which lasted until October 1939. In April of the same year Dell published *Western Action Thrillers*, but it lasted only one issue. The first Western photo comic cover featured Roy Rogers, Dell's *Four Color Comics* #38 in April 1944. The same year *Cisco Kid Comics*, a one-shot comic book by Baily Publishing appeared.

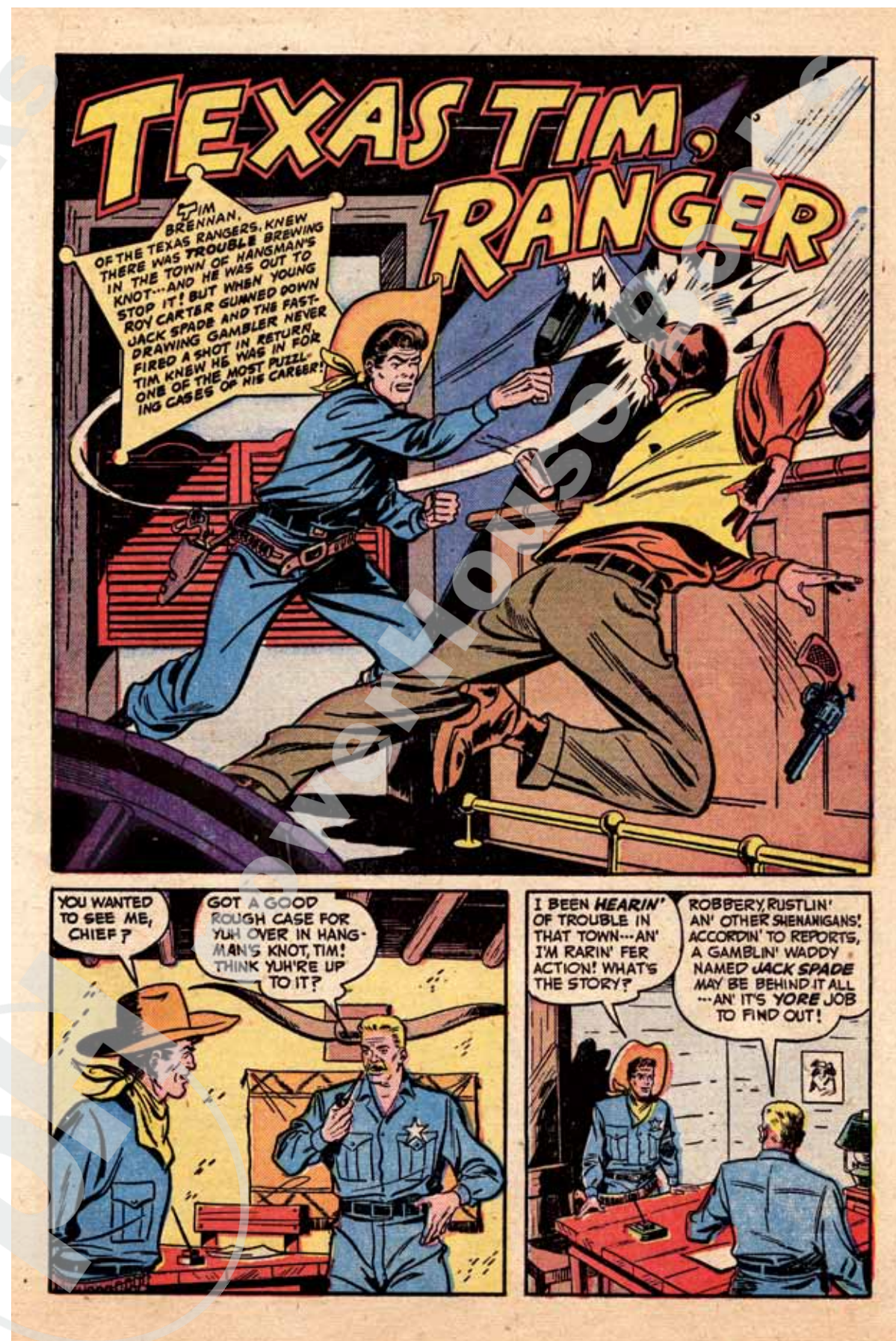
But it wasn't until 1948 that Western comic books came into their own. After the war, interest in superheroes diminished as real heroes returned home, and publishers were

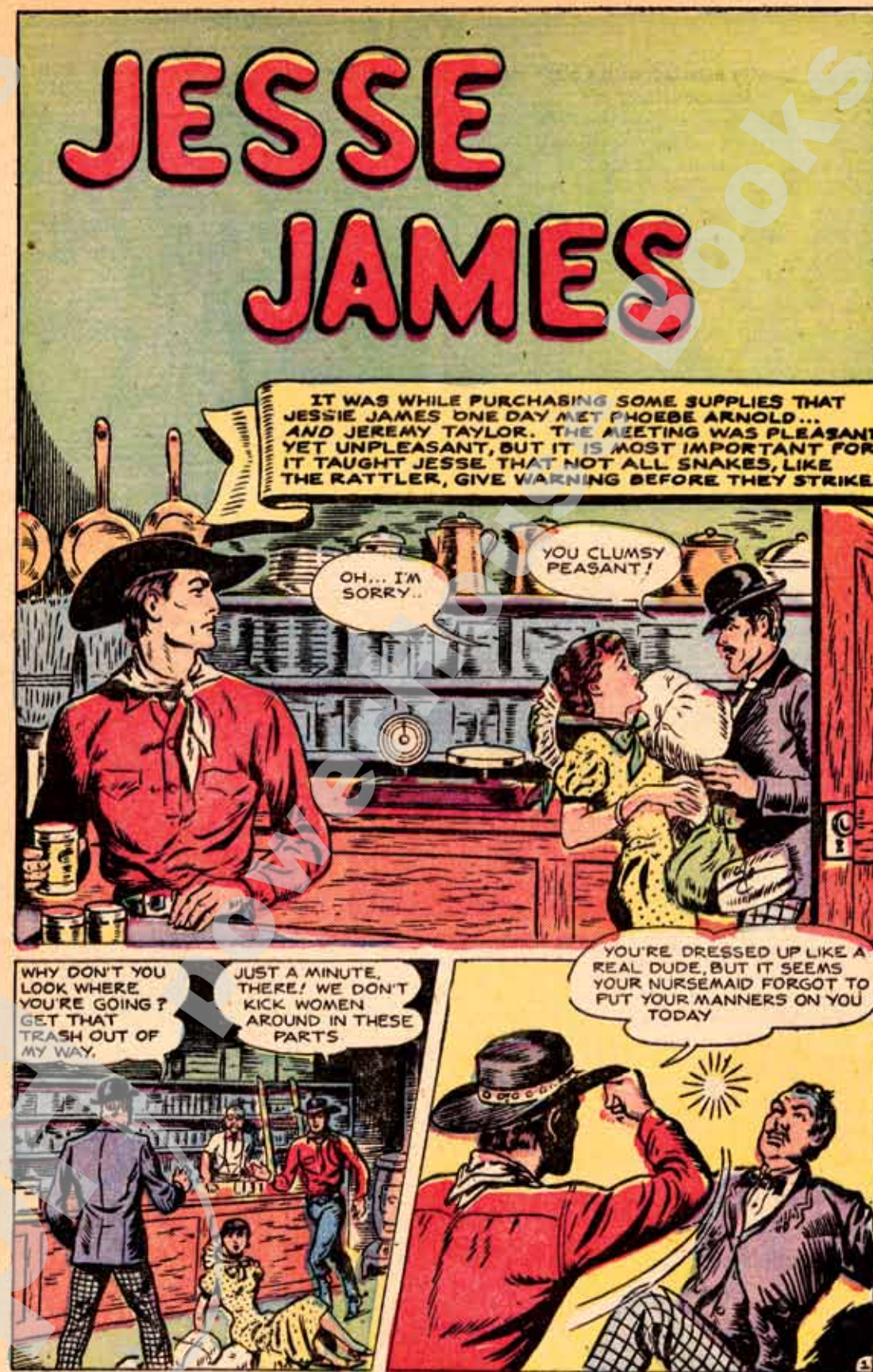
scrambling for new material. Soon, matinee Western stars had comic series based on them: Gene Autry, Monte Hale, Gabby Hayes, Tim Holt, Lash LaRue, Tom Mix, Tex Ritter, Roy Rogers, John Wayne, et al, all had their own titles. Historical and mythological figures were also well represented: Annie Oakley, Buffalo Bill, the Cisco Kid, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Jesse James, Kit Carson, the Lone Ranger, Wild Bill Hickcock. In addition, new Western characters and titles were created, such as: *Bullseye* and *Boy's Ranch* by Simon and Kirby; Mort Weisinger and Mort Meskin's *Vigilante* at DC; *The Hawk* at Ziff-Davis; and the *Two-Gun Kid*, *Kid Colt Outlaw*, and *Rawhide Kid* over at Atlas.

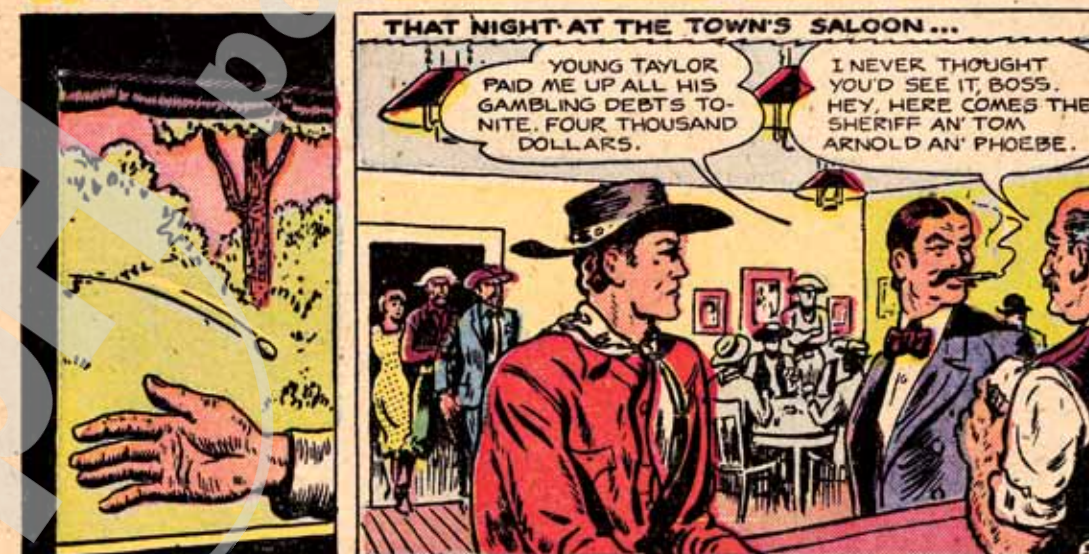
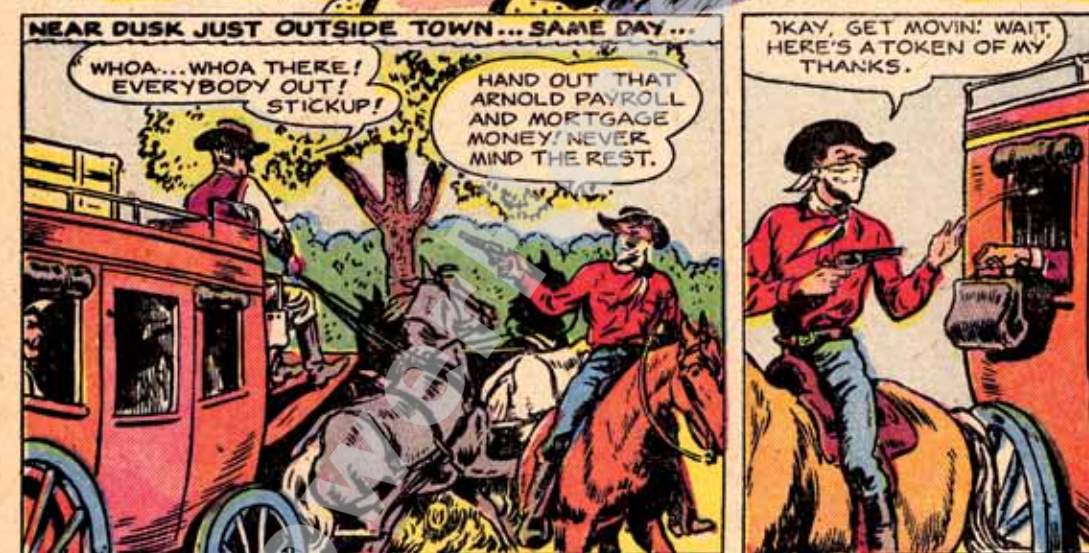
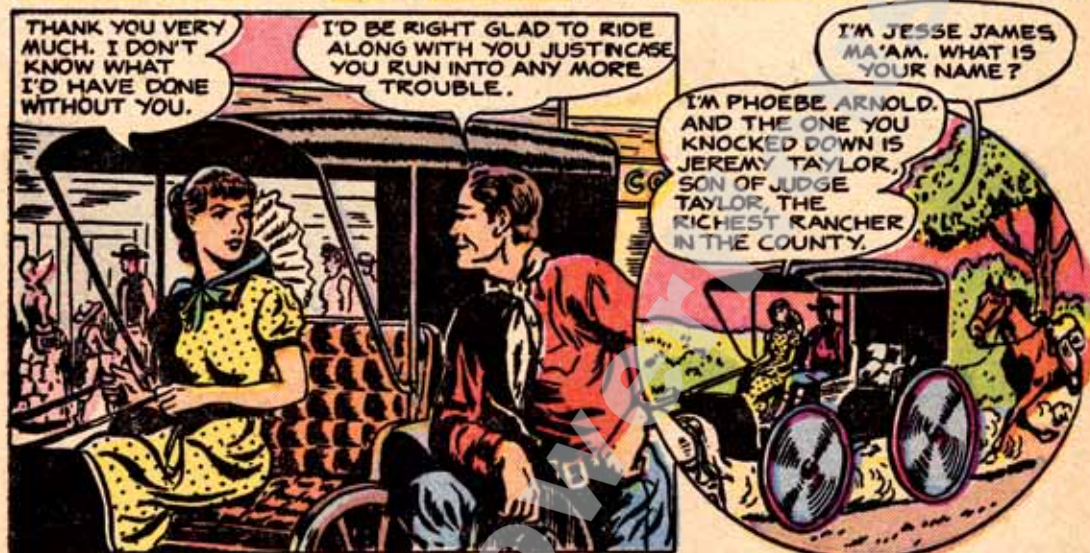
Within the stories of this anthology the usual Western tropes appear—the sharpshooter, the kid, the gunslinger, the city slicker, the posse, the pony express, the jailbreak, the stagecoach holdup, barrooms aplenty—but there are many surprises in store as well. And while the portrayal of Native Americans belies the mindset of the time in which these comics were created, there's actually quite a variety of how their story is told. There are “good” Indians (usually those who assist the white man), peaceful tribes, and warring factions. Treaties are in threat of being broken and peace is laid claim to.

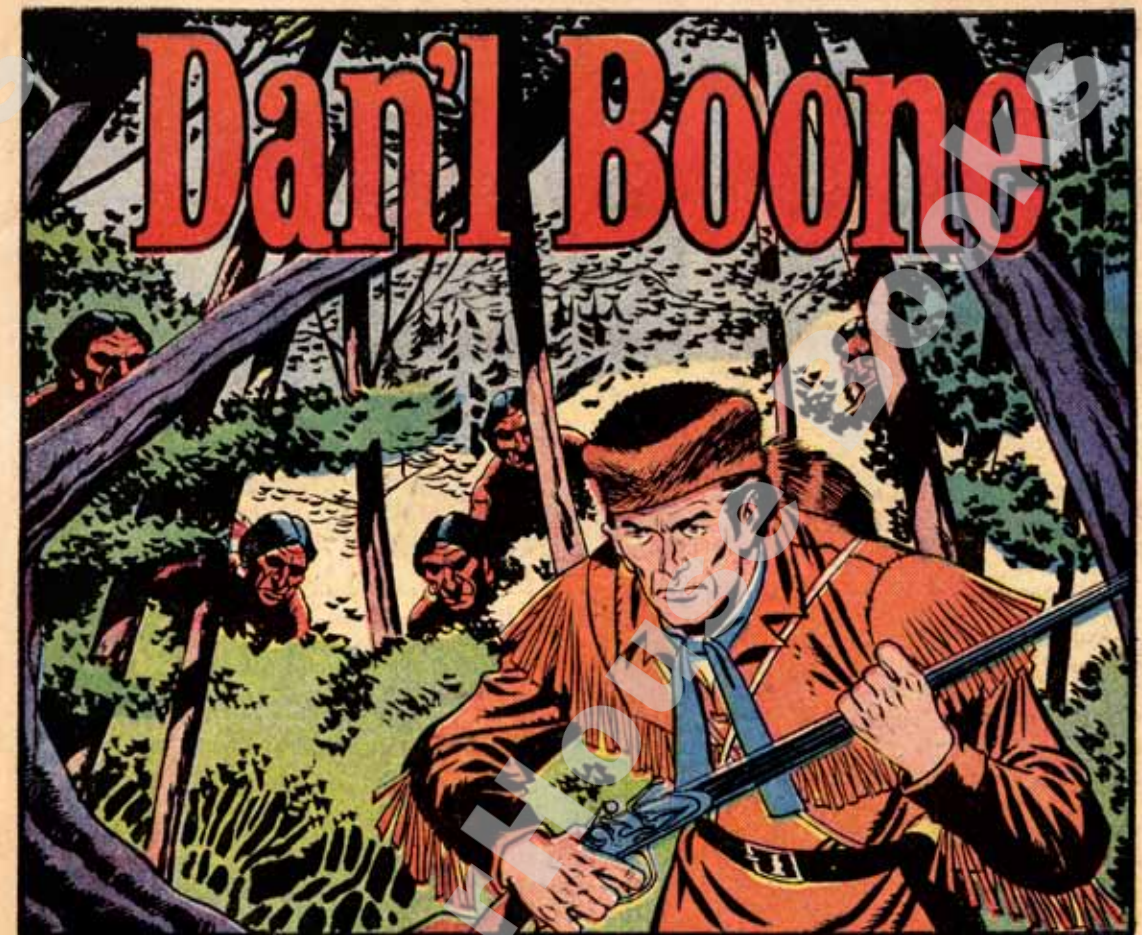
Another subgenre of the Western comic was a combination of two disparate ones that became popular after the war: Romance and Cowboys. I would be remiss not to include one here, the familiar tale of the “sassy” gal in need of taming. Still, although several of these stories contain familiar clichés, these tales are imbued with charm and surprises. Often these stories display excellent art and dynamic page design as well.

Created mostly by men working in crowded New York offices, or cramped apartments throughout the city, the tales of the range, barroom brawls, shoot outs, wagon trains, campfires, bank robberies, are all collected here for us to enjoy once again, preserved before they fade into the sunset.









NO ONE KNOWS BETTER THAN **DAN'L BOONE** HOW CAREFUL A MAN HAS TO BE WHILE TRAIPSING THROUGH THE FOREST. NO ONE KNOWS BETTER THAN THE GREATEST FRONTIERSMAN OF THEM ALL THAT

"PERIL SHADOWS THE FOREST TRAIL"

OUT OF THE FOREST THEY COME CHARGING—SHADOWS THAT SHOW THEMSELVES TO BE FIERCE SHAWNEES ON THE WAR TRAIL!



AND BEFORE THEY MELT BACK INTO THE FORESTS...



IT LOOKS AS IF ONE OF THE SETTLEMENT FOLK HAS SLIPPED THROUGH! BUT THAT'S THE FOREST TRAIL HE'S RUNNING ON --



— AND MORE SHADOWS ARE WAITING!

PALEFACE COMES! HU— HE WILL SOON STOP RUNNING!



BUT JUST THEN— IT IS WIDE-MOUTH* WITH HIS LONG-STICK!



* INDIAN NAME FOR DAN'L BOONE.

LUCKY I HAPPENED BY JUST NOW, STRANGER! I'D HEARD-TELL THE SHAWNEES WERE ON THE WAR TRAIL HEREABOUTS...



...SO I CUT SHORT MY HUNTIN' TRIP, AND CAME BACK AS FAST AS I COULD!



WIDE-MOUTH THINKS ALL OF US HAVE RUN AWAY! HE DOES NOT SEE ME UP HERE!

HEY—THAT SHADOW!...SOMEBODY'S JUMPIN' AT ME!



QUICK AS A CAT, BOONE TURNS AND GIVES FIGHT TO THE SHAWNEE WARRIOR! BUT THEN...



MORE OF THEM!... MORE OF THEM OVER HERE!!

TOO BAD I CAN'T STAY TO FIGHT YE TO THE FINISH— BUT IT SOUNDS LIKE THAT STRANGER'S IN NEED OF MORE HELP!



I— I THOUGHT I SAW MORE OF THEM COMING! BUT THEY MUST HAVE BEEN ONLY SHADOWS... AND NOW BECAUSE OF ME, THE ONE YOU WERE FIGHTING HAS MANAGED TO GET AWAY!



I CAN'T BLAME YE FOR BEIN' SHADOW-SHY, STRANGER...

IN THESE-HERE KAINUCK' FORESTS NOWADAYS, IT'S RIGHT HARD TO TELL A PROPER SHADOW APART FROM A TOMAHAWK-BEARIN' SHAWNEE!



THANK YOU, SIR. DR. MORTELL IS MY NAME. I'VE BEEN TRAVELLING THROUGH THESE PARTS, SELLING MY MEDICINES AND ENTERTAINING PEOPLE WITH MY MAGIC TRICKS!



"MY MEDICINES CURE BODILY ILLS, SIR— BUT MY MAGIC TRICKS CURE DESPAIR...THEY PROVIDE RELIEF FROM THE BARE MONOTONY OF HARD FRONTIER LIVING! AND AS A RESULT, I AM WELCOMED WHERE-EVER I COME!"



"BUT JUST NOW, SIR, AT HOGAN'S STATION WHERE I WAS PERFORMING SOME MAGIC TRICKS—"



TO THE WALLS, EVERYBODY— THE SHAWNEES ARE ATTACKIN'!

"I— I AM NOT MUCH OF A FIGHTER, SIR. THE NEXT THING I KNEW... I WAS RUNNING FOR MY LIFE!"



BUT SUDDENLY—
KRAK! KRAK! KRAK!



AT 'EM, ALL YE ABLE-BODIED FRONTIERSMEN! GIVE 'EM SALT AND PEPPER!

THE WAY WE AIM TO FLUSTERATE 'EM, DAN'L—IT'LL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE THEY EVEN THINK OF THE WAR TRAIL AGAIN!



WH-WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE?

STAND FAST, DOCTOR—DAN'L BOONE SUSPECTED YE! SO HE HAD ALL US OLDSTERS STAND IN FRONT, AND THOSE WHO STOOD BEHIND US WERE **WOMEN-FOLK DRESSED IN MEN'S CLOTHIN'!**



—LEAVIN' ALL THE ABLE-BODIED MEN TO STAND GUARD AGAINST THE RAID DAN'L RECKONED WAS COMIN'!



AFTER THE RUCKUS— I HAD A HUNCH THINGS WEREN'T RIGHT WHEN YE SHOWED UP HERE INSTEAD OF CLEARIN' OUT OF KAINTEKUK. SO I BACKTRAILED YE FROM BOONESBOROUGH TILL I FOUND WHERE YOUR TRACKS MINGLED WITH A PASSEL OF MOCCASIN TRACKS. THAT SPELLED OUT THAT YE WERE IN LEAGUE WITH THE SHAWNEES—SO BEFORE YE COULD HOLD YOUR SHOW, WE COOKED UP ONE OF OUR OWN...



THERE'LL BE NO MAGIC TRICKS WHERE YOU'RE GOIN', MORTELL—JUST THE FAIR JUDGEMENT OF TWELVE HONEST ANGRY MEN IN A JURY BOX.



LATER— WHERE'RE YE HEADIN' FOR, DAN'L? RECKON I'LL TRAIPE IN THE FORESTS FOR A SPELL. WITH ALL ITS SHADOWS... AT LEAST THERE, A MAN HAS ELBOW ROOM...!



The End

Buffalo Belle

ACCORDIN' TUH REPORTS... MOOSE MADDEN IS ORGANIZIN' A NEW PASSEL O' OUTLAWS! WISH I COULD HAVE FOUND WHAR HE'S HOLIN' IN... BECAUSE HE'S THE ONLY ONE O' THE GANG I KIN RECOGNIZE!

OUTLAWS AND RUSTLERS... BADMEN AND GAMBLERS... THE LAW FACED ALL COMERS WITH READY SIX-GUNS BACK IN THE DAYS OF THE CHEROKEE STRIP! THIS WAS THE TIME OF BUFFALO BELLE... THE ROPE-TWIRLING, ROUGHRIDING REDHEAD WHO BROUGHT JUSTICE TO THE RANGE!



SUDDENLY... CRIMPIN' CATAMOUNTS...THAT'S SOME KIND O' RUCKUS OVER AT ABIGAIL SCUDDER'S HOUSE!

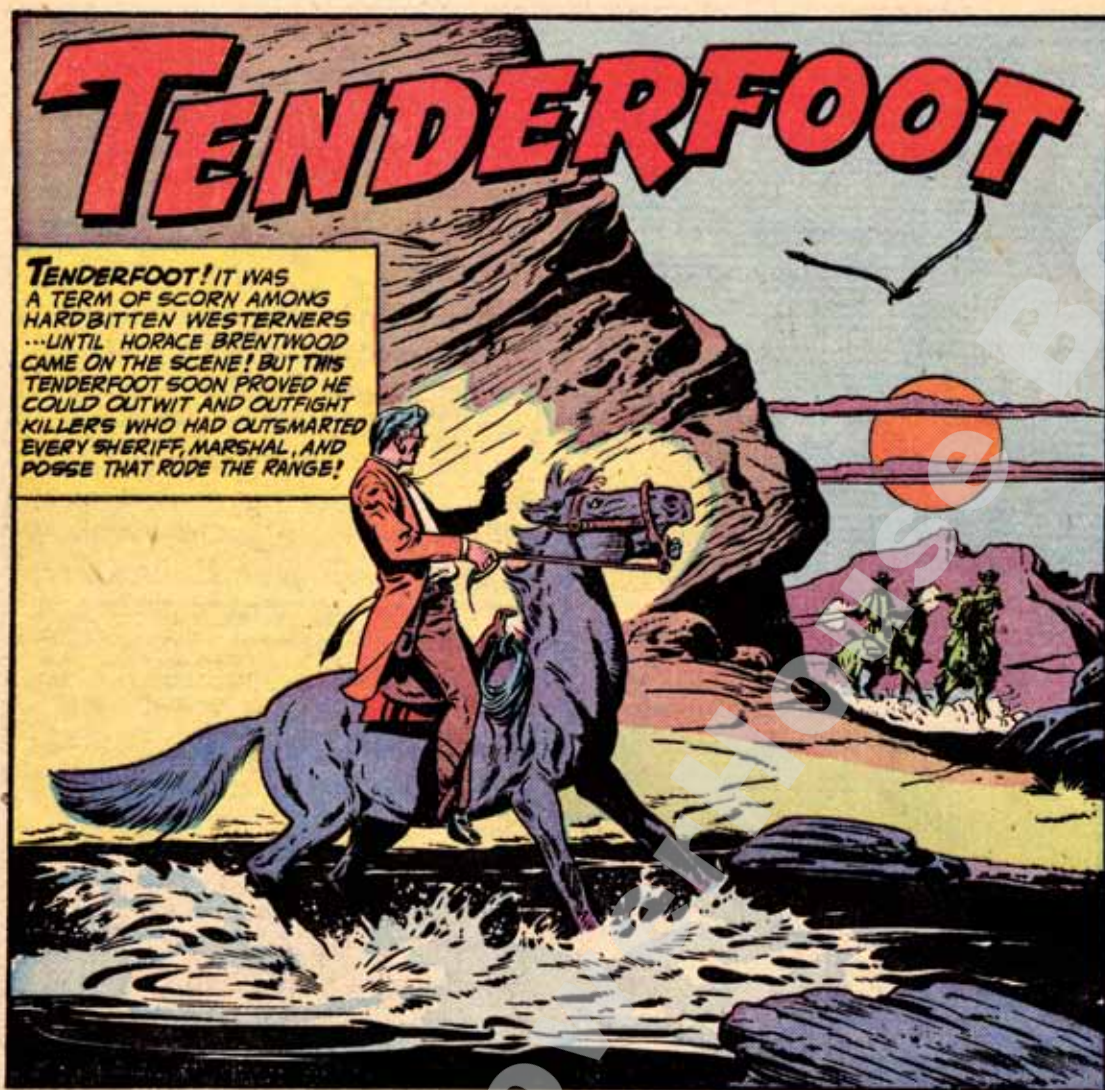


IF THAR'S ANYTHING WORSE'N A SQUAWKIN' SPINSTER—I WANT TUH KNOW IT!

YUH WILL! HERE COMES THAT REDHEADED DEPUTY—AN' SHE'S A WILDCAT!







TENDERFOOT! IT WAS A TERM OF SCORN AMONG HARD BITTEN WESTERNERS...UNTIL HORACE BRENTWOOD CAME ON THE SCENE! BUT THIS TENDERFOOT SOON PROVED HE COULD OUTWIT AND OUTFIGHT KILLERS WHO HAD OUTSMARTED EVERY SHERIFF, MARSHAL, AND POSSE THAT RODE THE RANGE!



MARGE CARTER AND THE TENDERFOOT RIDE INTO LAREDO...

SAY, THAT CHAP SEEMS TO BE IN A MIGHTY BIG HURRY ABOUT SOMETHING!

SOMETHING MUST BE WRONG, HORACE! THAT'S THE MARSHAL!



WHAT'S UP, MARSHAL?

THE LARSON TWINS! THEY KILLED THREE MORE RANCHERS UP IN THE HILLS! WHERE'S THE SHERIFF?



RIGHT HERE, MARSHAL!

LISTEN, SHERIFF! I KNOW WHERE THE LARSON KILLERS ARE! THEY MUST HAVE SEPARATED UP IN THE HILLS, 'CAUSE EACH ONE WAS SEEN ABOUT EIGHT MILES APART! WE'LL CORNER 'EM THIS TIME, ONE BY ONE!

RIGHT! I'LL GO ROUND UP A POSSE!

WE'LL NEED EVERY MAN IN TOWN THAT CAN RIDE A HORSE! WE'LL MAKE SURE WE GET THOSE KILLERS THIS TIME!



YOU CAN COUNT ME IN, MARSHAL!

YOU! A TENDERFOOT! HAW! A TENDERFOOT, WANTIN' TO GO OUT AN' SLING LEAD WITH THE LARSON TWINS! WHAT A LAUGH!

YOU'RE MAKING A MISTAKE! YOU SAID YOU NEED EVERY MAN YOU CAN GET, AND I'D...

HOLD ON THAR HORACE! SOMEONE'S GOTTA STAY BEHIND AN' WATCH THE JAIL! I'LL MAKE YUH A TEMPORARY DEPUTY AN' GIVE YUH THE JAIL KEYS! HOW ABOUT IT?

THAT'LL RELEASE ONE MORE MAN FER THE POSSE! I GUESS EVEN A TENDERFOOT KIN WATCH THE KIDS AN' WOMEN-FOLK AN' AN EMPTY JAIL!

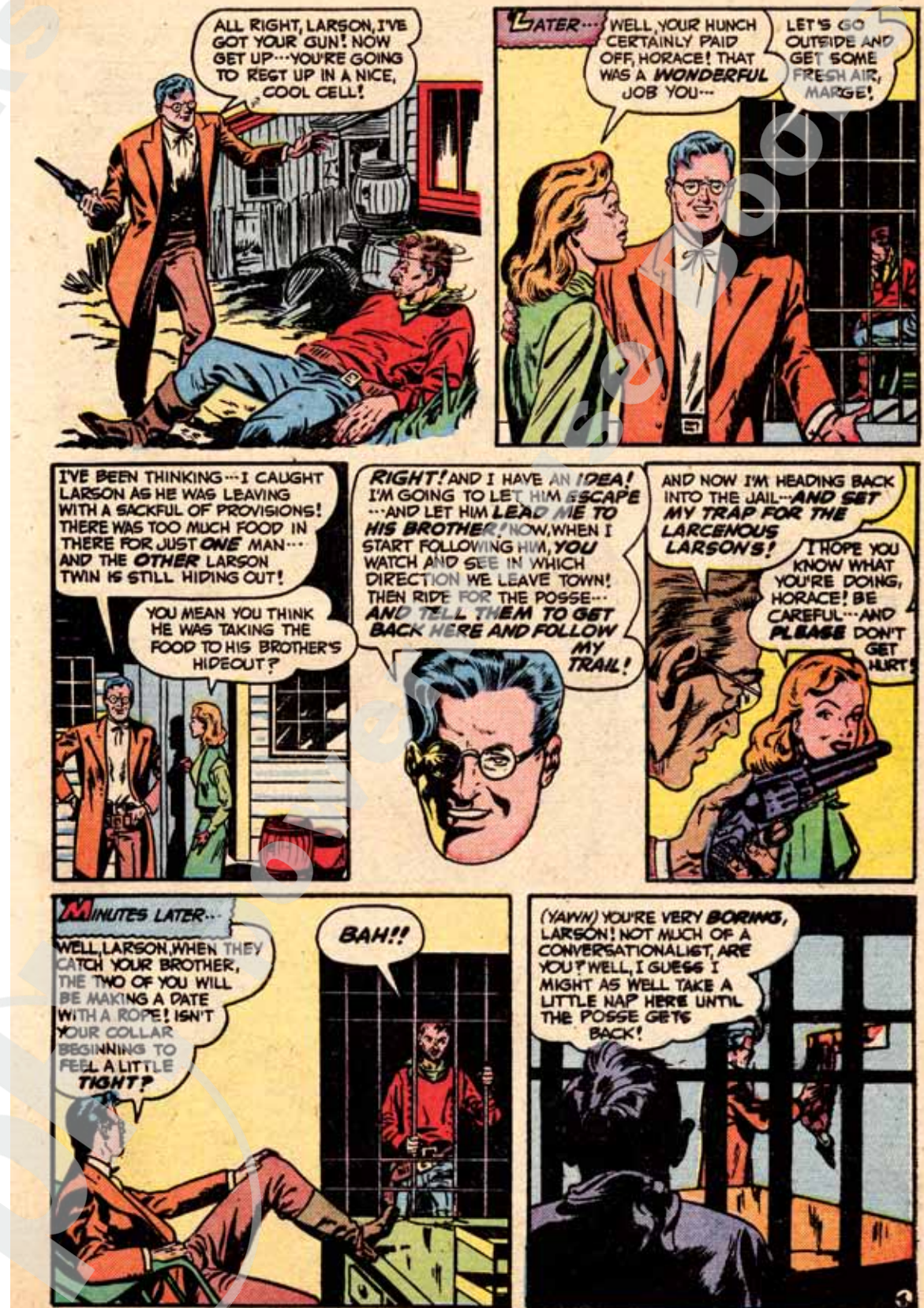
HMM! WELL, ALL RIGHT, SHERIFF! I'LL STAY BEHIND FOR YOU!

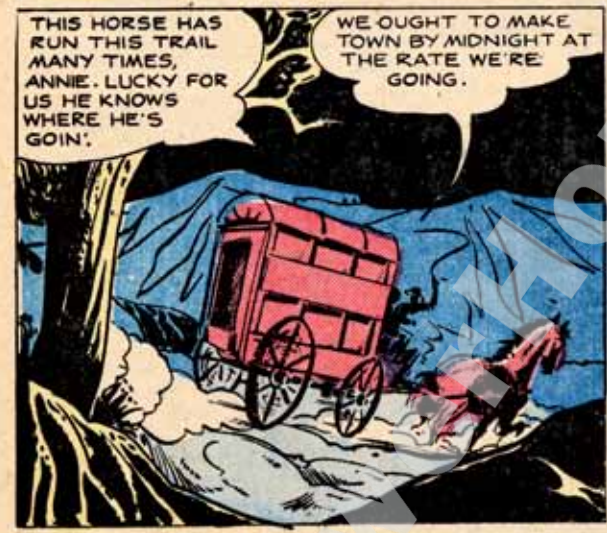
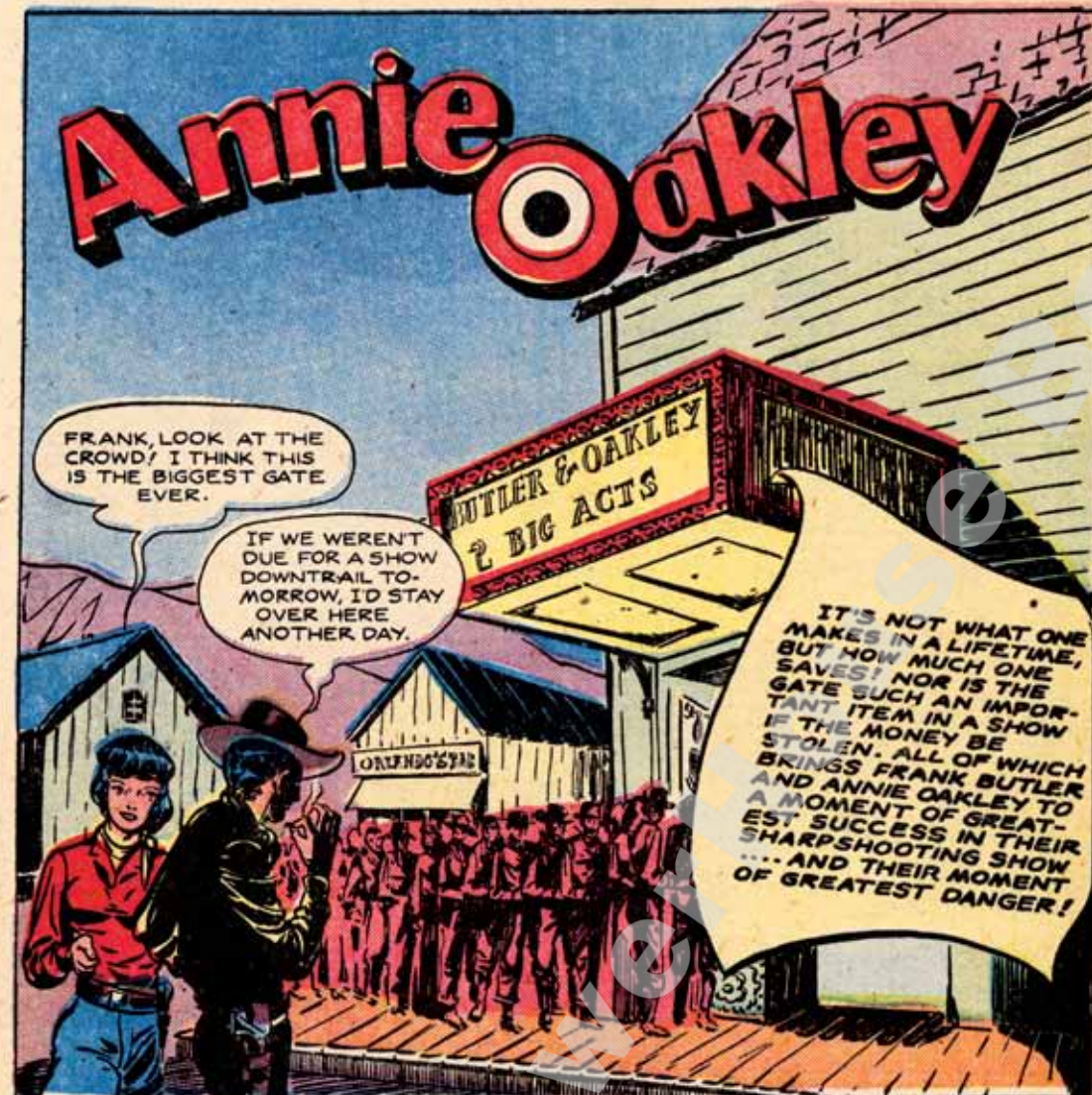


AS THE POSSE RIDES OFF... WHY DID YOU BACK OUT, HORACE? YOU WEREN'T AFRAID TO GO, WERE YOU?

HARDLY, MARGE! I JUST HAD A HUNCH IN TOWN! THOSE LARSON TWINS ARE CUNNING... THEY MIGHT HAVE WANTED TO GET ALL THE MEN IN TOWN OUT IN THE HILLS, SO THE TOWN WOULD BE WIDE OPEN FOR THEM!

AND MAYBE THERE WAS ONLY ONE LARSON SEEN IN THE HILLS! THEY BOTH LOOK ALIKE, AND ONE OF THEM MIGHT HAVE LET HIMSELF BE SEEN IN TWO DIFFERENT PLACES, TO MAKE EVERYONE THINK THEY WERE BOTH OUT THERE!...WELL, I'LL JUST HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE IF MY HUNCH IS RIGHT!







This PDF is NOT the entire book

GOLDEN AGE WESTERN COMICS

Edited by Steven Brower

Foreword by Christopher Irving

Published by



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