

How The West Was Won

by Stephen Heger

I looked through the window of my shop here in Laredo and saw him standing there with his six-shooters drawn as I sized him up from his head to his toes. A ten-gallon, weathered black hat sat atop his head and a worn pock-marked and sun-bleached, denim shirt criss-crossed with a bandoleer belt missing half it's ammunition sat on his thin frame as well as it would a coat-hanger. The cracked cow-hide chaps and jeans both looked as if worms had been crawling through them for years and the black snake-skin boots were covered in dust from the shuffling of his feet from his grave to the center of town. Everywhere there was a hole in the clothes or boots or hat, bone-white shone through. Though all the flesh was gone from him and his head, I swear I could see a sinister grin somewhere on his bony face. I've never gotten used to the undead coming back like this and I suppose I never will. I'm just happy as a jimmy-cat that he's not gunning for me. I could hear his teeth colliding together as he tried to speak, no words coming out, just a horrible morse code of clicking. I looked around and saw everyone in their windows peering out as I was, whispering amongst each other and waiting for the shoot-out. I'm not sure, but the gun-fighters clothing resembled the Wertham Kid. If that was the case, we might as well clear out because the town would be razed to the ground before the duel was done. Even if it will happen at the pace of a snail. Across the street, the saloon doors swung open in slow motion and out came the kids killer swathed in yellowed bandages, a tin star and a gun-belt. The Egyptian mummy had come to town about six-months ago to clean it up and he's done a fine job since then. The only problem with coming into a place and cleaning it up is there are usually a few folks that don't take that kindly to it. People like things the way they are and change is not something they are apt to accept. Just like the Wertham Kid. In his mind, I'm sure the Kid thinks he was done wrong but, like most, he wasn't. He just couldn't adapt.

Well, that and his penchant for killing the local ranchers chickens and having his way with them. In the biblical sense. Although I'm not sure the phrase 'biblical sense' exactly applies to him cornholing chickens. Spent many a day in jail and never felt sorry for what he did. When he was released he would walk right up to the ranchers with the most wicked of grins and say, "I'm gonna fuck them chickens of yours. Just you wait and see." and, that night, he would. Half a bottle of whiskey and he could be found in ol' Jacksons henhouse choking the chicken. I'm quite sure that's a double entendre'. But I digress. On one fateful night though, the Sherriff had been waiting and gunned him down after vowing to bring an end to his insidious deeds. They buried him up in the East Wood Cemetary not knowing whether he would join the ranks of the undead one day. Well, today we got our answer.

So he has to return from the grave to seek his vengeance and all that dime-novel gobbledy-gook that fills the heads of youngsters with thoughts of monsters, happy endings and god. Course, this is vengeance coming from the Kid who used to look for a burrow owl in a tree, so that tends to and can explain a lot. Never was much going on up in that kids head and I'm sure there's not much now.

Just the burning flame of vengeance.

I stepped away from the window, put on the kettle, rolled a cigarette, and had a steaming cup of coffee by the time the sheriff got to the center of the street. For what seemed like eternity, they stood there staring each other down and sizing each other up. What started off as a shoot-out at high noon became a much later affair and got started roughly about quarter 'til one. With the speed and intensity of a hungover sloth, the Sheriff drew first and unleashed his deadly shot. The bullet hit the Wertham kid square in the chest, adding a new hole to the denim shirt and causing a cloud of disintegrated bone to waft into the breeze. Seconds later, the Wertham kid fired his shot with more accuracy than I thought he

was able and the round went into the papery, shriveled up gut of the sheriff, through it and, rather ironically, blew the head off of a ranchers chicken fifty yards away.

Half an hour and twelve shots later we had lost another chicken, a townsperson, and a three-legged, deaf-mute dog added in for effect. Every shot had hit a target of some sort and each gunfighter had unloaded his six-shooter, there was silence as they began to reload. Citizens of the town took to running errands between the gun battle and I was able to squeeze in a shave at the barber and quick nip at the saloon before things started up again.

Reloaded, two hours, and a lot more hyperbole about the gunfight later, the Sherriff fired his fourth shot as the ground began to rumble. Within scant seconds, a giant, lizard-like creature rose up through the ground showering the town in debris and a dust-cloud. People and buildings toppled over like cardboard cutouts as the earth shimmied and shook. The creature crawled out of a hole the size of a city and intently rose up several hundred feet above the town and looked contemplatively down at our microcosm. With a deafening roar and one giant step, the monstrous brute decimated the entire thing. Every man, child and whore was crushed under the monsters massive appendage. As I lay here dying, my body broken and bleeding, my last thought is the echo of the words my momma told me before I left home; "Takashi, you moving to Laredo, Japan is gonna get you killed."

