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SEP 08

JONAH HEX

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COLD WINTER LAY HEAVILY ACROSS THE CANADIAN ROUGH COUNTRY THE YEAR MY FATHER DIED. OVER IT, THE MOON WAS RISING LIKE A PALE GLOBE, ILLUMINATING THE VAST WHITE HUSH OF THE NIGHT WITH AN IRIDESCENT SHINE.

SUCH AS I REMEMBER IT, NOT A SOUND BROKE THE STILLNESS BURDENED BY THE SNOW. LIKE THE STAGE OF A GREAT AMPHITHEATER, THE FROZEN LAKE SET SOFTLY UNDER THE COOL STARS ABOVE. BEYOND THAT LAY THE SPRUCE FOREST, A BLACK AND FORBIDDING ENTITY, ASCENDING UPWARD LIKE A WALL OF IMPENETRABLE DARKNESS.

THE DAY'S SNOW ABATED, HARDLY A BREATH OF AIR STIRRED THE ICE-COATED TREES. IT WAS BITTER COLD... SO COLD, IN FACT, THAT A MAN DARE NOT STAND STILL OR FACE THE PROSPECT OF FREEZING TO DEATH IN THE VERY PLACE HE LINGERED. IT IS IN THAT NOTION I TELL OF THIS MAN...THE MAN WHO SAVED MY LIFE.

THE HUNTING TRIP

JUSTIN GRAY & JIMMY PALMIOTTI story DARWYN COOKE art and cover
DAVE STEWART colors ROB LEIGH letters TOM PALMER Jr. editor

THE IDEAL MOUNTAIN HORSE BE OF MEDIUM SIZE, FOURTEEN HANDS, STRONG BUILT, SHORT-COUPLED, WITH NONE OF THE LANK OF THE PLAINS ANIMAL.

YA WANT ONE WIT' A WIDE, FULL FOREHEAD, INDICATIN' INTELLIGENCE. LOW IN THE WITHERS, SO'S THE SADDLE TENDS NOT TA GALL HIM...

SAVED IS PERHAPS THE WRONG WORD TO USE, SINCE I'VE NO DOUBT HE'D HAVE LEFT ME THERE IF CIRCUMSTANCES HAD BEEN DIFFERENT. AS IT WERE, THE HUNTING TRIP BEGAN PLEASANTLY ENOUGH WITH NO OBVIOUS SIGNS OF FOREBODING.

HIS SURENESS OF FOOT SHOULD BE BEYOND QUESTION, AND A COURSE HE MUST BE EXPERT AT FORAGIN'.

A HORSE THAT DON'T KNOW BUT ONE OR TWO KINDS OF FEED WILL STARVE UNLESS HE CAN'T FIND JUST THEM KINDS HE LIKES.

SO FULL OF LAKES AND RIVERS IS THE COUNTRY THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO GO ALMOST ANYWHERE IN A SUMMER CANOE, BUT WHEN THE COLD FREEZES UP, THOSE STRETCHES OF WATER AND THE SNOW LIES THICK... YOU'LL FIND NO SIGNS OF ROAD NOR TRAIL.

IN THE DAY'S MARCH, A GOOD HORSE FOLLOWS LIKE A DOG WITHOUT THE PROMPT OF A LEAD-ROPE, NOR DO HE STRAY FAR WHEN TURNED LOOSE AT NIGHT.

BY TWIST OF FATE, THAT WINTER-WHILE HADSH- WASN'T NEAR AS BAD AS SOME I'D KNOW.

HANK RODE A HORSE WE CALLED CROSSBONES ON ACCOUNT A' HIM KILLIN' ONE BOY IN OUR CREW WITH A KICK TA THE HEAD. OLD CROSSBONES NEVER DID LIKE FOLK CREEPIN' ON HIS HINDQUARTERS.

HANK WAS A COMPANION WORTHY OF NOTE. HE HAD DONE EVERYTHING. SEAL-HUNTING, BEAR AND BOAR-HUNTING, ALL KINDS OF SHOOTING, COW-PUNCHING AND ALL OTHER OUTLANDISH VOCATIONS BY WHICH A FELLER CAN MAKE HIS LIVIN'.

OUR WORK CENTERED ON THE HUNTING OF ELK, BUT MOSTLY I BELIEVE MY FATHER CHOSE SUCH TRIPS AS A MEANS OF EDUCATING ME ON VARIOUS TOPICS AS WELL AS THE MEANS OF SURVIVAL I WOULD CARRY WITH ME INTO OLD AGE.

HE WERE A BEAR OF A MAN, AN' THE BEST SHOT I EVER SAW.

HANK AN' CROSSBONES WAS WITH US ON A STEEP TRAIL HEADIN' DOWN INTO OURAY, COLORADO.

AS A BOY'S LIFE TRANSPIRES WITH MYSTERY AND DISCOVERY, MINE WAS A HAPPY ONE. THE TALES MY FATHER TOLD ME OF THE SOUTH AND HIS OWN YOUTH WERE THRILLING TO PERHAPS ONLY ME, BUT I LOVED THEM NONETHELESS.

I SWEAR THEY BUILT THAT TOWN AT THE BASIN OF CLIFFS THAT WOULD MAKE THE DEVIL PICKLE HIS GUTS. GIT SOME SLEEP NOW AND I'LL CONTINUE THE TALE COME MORNIN'.





IN HIS YOUNGER DAYS, MY FATHER HAD THE REPUTATION OF BEING ONE OF THE MOST VIGOROUS OFFICERS IN THE SERVICE OF THE HUDSON BAY COMPANY.

AS A VALUED MEMBER IN THE COMPANY'S SERVICE, HIS ABILITY IN MANAGING PECULIAR INDIANS AND OPENING NEW TRADING POSTS AMONG THEM WAS THAT OF LEGEND.



SO REGULARLY EMPLOYED IN ADVANCING THE INTERESTS OF THIS FUR-TRADING CORPORATION, HE TRAVELED THOUSANDS OF MILES WITH HIS DOGS AND EXOTIC GUIDES WHO HE GREW TO CALL FRIENDS.

IN HIS WANDERINGS, MY FATHER HAD MET WITH SOME STRANGE ADVENTURES, AND HAD PASSED THROUGH SOME TRYING ORDEALS... SO HOW SAD WAS IT THAT IN HIS OWN LAND, ON FAMILIAR GROUND, HE SHOULD FALL PREY TO A SIMPLE HIDDEN BEAR TRAP.

SY...
STOP...
SON...



I AMT...GONNA...
MAKE...IT... BUT
I'LL HOLD ON SO'S...
SO'S YA CAN USE ME
TA KEEP WARM PER
THE NIGHT...



COME ON, SON...
LAY BESIDE ME...
REAL CLOSE...



TAKE MY RIFLE...
GATHER MEAT FROM CAMP
AN' HEAD TA...SHONNA
VALLEY...SOMEBONE WILL
HELP...

LEARNING IN ARITHMETIC, GRAMMAR, AND GEOGRAPHY WAS RATHER LIMITED FOR ME AS A YOUTH. IT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN OTHERWISE IN THE PLACE WHERE WE LIVED. I WAS, HOWEVER, DELIGHTED WITH THE EXAMINATION OF BIBLE HISTORY.



I KNEW I FACED DEATH THAT MORNING, BUT THE SOLACE OF THE LORD CAME TO ME, FOR IF I WERE TO PASS THROUGH THE GULLET OF THOSE WOLVES I'D SOON JOIN MY FATHER BEYOND THE GATES OF HEAVEN.



ODDLY ENOUGH, IT WAS NOT AN ANGEL WHO APPEARED TO CARRY ME TO SALVATION.



CLEARLY SOME SUPERNATURAL POWER RESIDED IN HIM, FOR HIS PROWESS IN RAINING DEATH UPON MAN AND BEAST ALIKE HAVE LONG SINCE PASSED INTO LEGEND.



THIS ACCOUNT AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD AND NOW RIPENED WITH AGE HAS NOT LOST ITS POWER OVER ME, TO SEE THIS MAN KILL WAS TO WITNESS A MASTER ARTIST AT WORK.



A PAINTER MUST BE FEARLESS AND SKILLED WHEN HE APPROACHES A CANVAS.



SUCH WAS THE WAY THIS MAN TOOK TO HIS WORK.



AS IF BY INSTINCT OR PRACTICE, HIS ACTIONS FLOWED NATURALLY LIKE MIGHTY RIVERS. HIS BODY CAME ALIVE IN ANTICIPATION OF EVERY DANGER BEFORE HIM. NO WASTED MOVEMENT, NO PAUSE OR HESITATION.

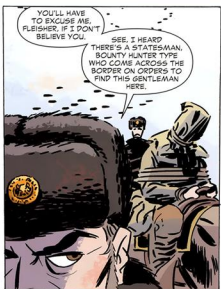


IT WAS A THING OF BEAUTY.



NATURALLY, I WAS TERRIFIED OF HIM.







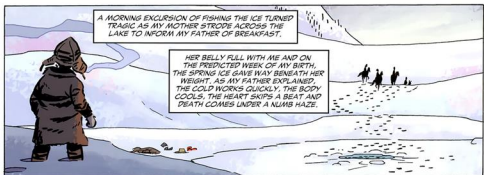




I KNEW THE DEATH THE MEN PREPARED FOR HIM, MY FATHER HAD SPOKEN OF IT ONLY ONCE, AS THE PAIN OF MEMORY WAS SUCH THAT HIS HEART CRACKED LIKE SPRING ICE.



THIS THING DONE TO HEX ON PURPOSE WAS BUT AN ACCIDENT WHEN IT CLAIMED THE LIFE OF MY MOTHER AND NEARLY ME INSIDE HER.



A MORNING EXCURSION OF FISHING THE ICE TURNED TRAGIC AS MY MOTHER STRODE ACROSS THE LAKE TO INFORM MY FATHER OF BREAKFAST.

HER BELLY FULL WITH ME AND ON THE PREDICTED WEEK OF MY BIRTH, THE SPRING ICE GAVE WAY BENEATH HER WEIGHT. AS MY FATHER EXPLAINED, THE COLD WORKS QUICKLY, THE BODY COOLS, THE HEART SKIPS A BEAT AND DEATH COMES UNDER A NUMB HAZE.



WHAT HORROR HE MUST HAVE FACED UPON PULLING MY MOTHER FROM THE LAKE, SHE ALREADY DEAD AND ME INSIDE. IT WASN'T UNTIL ADULthood THAT I FATHOMED THE BURDEN HIS SOUL CARRIED TO BRING ME INTO THIS LIFE.

IT WAS HER WARMTH THAT KEPT ME SAFE, BUT IT WAS THE PRESSING COLD THAT ROBBED ME OF SPEECH.

I HAD LITTLE DOUBT THAT HEX WOULD BE DEAD, HIS BODY FROZEN IN THE LAKE UNTIL SUMMER.





NO OTHER EXPLANATION SATISFIES MY LINE OF QUESTIONING ON HOW HE EMERGED FROM THE LAKE.



SPIRIT ALONE CANNOT SAVE A MAN EXPOSED TO THE ELEMENTS IN SUCH A MANNER. EVEN LUCK RUNS OUT AFTER A FULL NIGHT IN THE OPEN.





NO MATTER HOW WINDING OR DIFFICULT THE TRAIL, THEY NEVER WAVER FROM IT. A RECKLESS ANIMAL MIGHT RUN A MAN INTO A DANGEROUS GULLY OR OVER A STEEP PRECIPICE.



THE ACQUISITION OF SUCH FINE DOGS IS NO EASY TASK. MANY ARE RAISED FROM PUPS TO A SPECIFIC TRAPPER, TRAINED IN SUCH A WAY THAT NO OTHER MAN MIGHT TAKE THEM WHILE THEIR MASTER IS OTHERWISE OCCUPIED.



HOW THIS MAN OF DRY CLIMES--WHO MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN RAISED ON THE MOON FOR THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIM AND THOSE BORN IN THE NORTH COUNTRY WERE SO GREAT--CAME IN POSSESSION OF SUCH FINE DOGS, I'LL NEVER KNOW.



ONE POINT WITHOUT QUESTION WAS HIS DOGGED DETERMINATION AND SKILL AT TRACKING MAN AND BEAST ALIKE.



STRIPPED OF THE BEAUTIFUL YARN WITH WHICH WE HAVE BEEN SO LONG ENTHUSIASTIC TO ENVELOP HIM IN, TRANSFERRED FROM THE INVITING PAGES OF THE NOVELIST...



...I SAW HIM AS HE WAS, AND, SO FAR AS ALL KNOWLEDGE GOES, AS HE EVER HAS BEEN.



JONAH HEX, A SAVAGE IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD, A MAN WHOSE CRUEL AND FEROCIOUS NATURE FAR EXCEEDS THAT OF ANY BEAST.

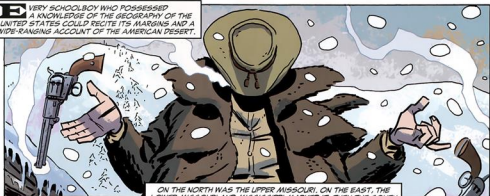








EVERY SCHOOLBOY WHO POSSESSED A KNOWLEDGE OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNITED STATES COULD RECITE ITS MARGINS AND A WIDE-RANGING ACCOUNT OF THE AMERICAN DESERT.



ON THE NORTH WAS THE UPPER MISSOURI, ON THE EAST, THE LOWER MISSOURI AND MISSISSIPPI MARKED IT, THEN THE SOUTH OF TEXAS, AND ON THE WEST BY THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.



COUNTLESS THROGS OF EMIGRANTS CROSSED THE MISSISSIPPI AND MISSOURI RIVERS, SELECTING HOMES IN THE RICH AND FERTILE TERRITORIES THAT LAY BEYOND.



BUT THIS IMMENSE TRACT OF COUNTRY, WITH ITS EASTERN BOUNDARY MOVED BACK BY CIVILIZATION, IS NOW KNOWN AS THE PLAINS AND THIS IS WHERE HE BELONGED, MORE SO THAN THE COLD NORTHERN COUNTRY FOR WHICH HE WAS SO GROSSLY UNPREPARED.

SO I STOOD CONVINCED THAT, HAVING BEEN FROZEN AND WET FOR UNTOLD HOURS, HE WOULD PERISH BEFORE FIRST LIGHT.



THE WORLD IS FULL OF TALL TALES AND MANY OF THEM ARE TRUE, BUT AN INVENTIVE SHOW COMES BETWEEN THE TELLER OF THE TALE AND HIS AUDIENCE.



SOMEHOW, WE MUST MASTER AND MAKE SENSE OF LIFE OR IT WILL RUIN US.



WE CAN MASTER IT ONLY BY UNDERSTANDING IT, AND WE CAN UNDERSTAND IT ONLY BY TELLING EACH OTHER THE QUITE NAKED AND, IF NEED BE, THE DEVASTATING TRUTH.



THE LIE IN THIS CASE WOULD BE TO SAY THAT, IN THE ABSENCE OF MY FATHER, THIS MAN RAISED ME AS HIS OWN.



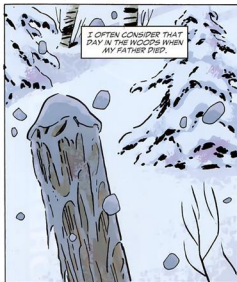
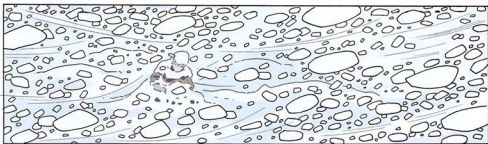
THERE IS THE ROMANTIC END TO A NOVEL.



I WOULD SAY THAT JONAH HEX TAUGHT ME TO BE A GUNSLINGER AND WE TOOK TO THE AMERICAN DESERT AS FATHER AND SON, AS OUTLAWS AND BOUNTY HUNTERS.











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Next in...

JONAH HEX #34

Hex just wants to be left alone...What evil deed will provoke him to seek vengeance one more time?

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