

THE
DOCTOR AND THE
DINOSAURS



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THE BUNTLINE SPECIAL—A WEIRD WEST TALE

THE DOCTOR AND THE KID—A WEIRD WEST TALE

THE DOCTOR AND THE ROUGH RIDER—A WEIRD WEST TALE

MIKE RESNICK
THE DOCTOR AND THE DINOSAURS
A WEIRD WEST TALE



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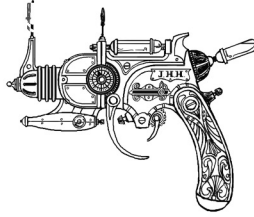
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To Carol, as always,

*And to Doodle, Aqua, and Baldy,
Fine writers, finer friends.*



PROLOGUE

From the pages of the September 17, 1885, issue of the Leadville Bullet:

Kate Elder has put up for auction all the dental instruments of John H. "Doc" Holliday, as well as one of his pistols. The famed shootist remains in the Leadville Sanitarium, a victim of consumption, and is not expected to last out the week.

From the pages of the September 17, 1885, issue of the Jackson, Wyoming, Chronicle:

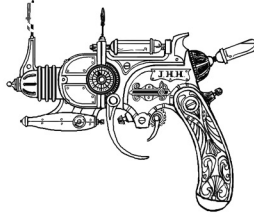
Edward Drinker Cope's expedition has announced the discovery of two previously unknown species of animal near his headquarters in the Grand Teton area, south and west of the Yellowstone.

A scientific expedition headed by Othniel C. Marsh and sponsored by his uncle, George Peabody of the Peabody Museum, is due to arrive at their campsite some sixty miles east of the Cope camp within the next twenty-four hours.

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From the pages of the September 19, 1885, issue of the Cheyenne Bugle:

Heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan has arrived from the East for his much-touted title defense against William Smiley. This may well be the last bare-knuckle championship fight, as gloves are becoming increasingly popular and indeed the great John L. has worn them in his last three title defenses. A celebrity referee from New York has come out on the same train as the champion.



1.

THE EMACIATED MAN LAY ON HIS BED, his mouth open, gasping for air in the plain, austere room. A white-clad nurse mopped the sweat from his forehead with an increasingly damp towel as he stared out the window at the snow-capped mountains a few miles away.

“Is there anything I can get you, Doc?” she asked solicitously.

“Air would be nice,” rasped the man, trying vainly to fill his lungs with the thin Colorado air.

“I could have a couple of the attendants move you to the patio downstairs,” she offered.

“I’ve *seen* the patio downstairs,” he whispered, wincing in discomfort. “I could use a drink, though.”

“You know what the doctor said.”

“I’m a doctor, too.”

“He’s a *real* doctor,” said the nurse. “You’re just a . . .” She searched for the word.

“Cold-blooded drunken killer?” he suggested wryly. “I’m not, you know. At least, not anymore. I haven’t had a drink in a week.”

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“I was going to say dentist,” replied the nurse. “And the doctor knows what’s best for you.”

“I don’t see that knowing what’s next for me gives him any insight into what’s best for me,” said the patient bitterly.

“No whiskey, and that’s final!” she said. Then she smiled. “But I do have a treat for you.”

“Let me guess,” he muttered. “A church choir composed of apple-cheeked children?”

“No,” she said, surprised. “But I could send for the minister if you want.”

He shook his head and winced again at the effort. “He’ll be reading over me soon enough.”

“Why are you like this?” she demanded in exasperated tones, trying to clean some blood he’d coughed up off his chest with a damp towel.

“Dying of consumption?” he replied bitterly. “Beats the hell out of me.”

“You make it very hard to be pleasant to you.”

“I’ve been told that before,” he said with a grim smile.

“Anyway, your treat,” she continued, forcing a smile to her face with an obvious effort. “Your closest friend is coming here tomorrow.”

The emaciated man frowned. “My closest friend?”

She nodded. “The famous Wyatt Earp!”

“I haven’t seen him in three years. He’s just coming to gloat.”

“But the two of you are dear friends!” she said. “Everyone knows that! I’ve come out to Leadville all the way from Delaware, and even back there they’ve all heard about Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday and the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral.”

Another grimace. “They’re never going to get that right,” he growled hoarsely. “It took place in the alley *behind* the O.K. Corral.”

“But it *did* take place, and you’re famous for it.”

“One bunch of shootists killed another bunch of shootists,” replied Holliday. “Nothing to brag about.” He tried to shrug, winced in pain, and lay back on his pillow, gasping for air. “More and more often these days I wish we’d lost. At least I wouldn’t be gasping for less air than that damned bird puts in its lungs.”

“What bird?” asked the nurse.

“That one perched on the windowsill,” replied Holliday, pointing weakly.

The nurse turned, saw an owl sitting on the sill, and shooed it away, flapping the moist towel at it.

“Unclean things!” she complained, returning to bedside. “Carrion eaters.”

“We all are, when we get hungry enough,” said Holliday.

She stared at him. “John Henry Holliday, you are a most unpleasant man.”

“I’ve been called worse,” he said with a chuckle, then coughed again.

She walked to the door. “I have other patients to tend to. Call if you need me.”

“And you’ll hear me through the closed door?” he asked with a smile.

She glared at him, then walked out into the hall, considered leaving the door ajar, then let her anger get the better of her and slammed it shut.

Holliday looked ruefully at the door. “Yeah, John Henry,” he said softly, “you’re still a charmer.” He turned his head, looked over to see that the owl had returned and was once again perching on the window. “I hope you’ve been enjoying yourself.”

The owl stared at him.

“She’s got a lot on her mind,” he continued. “She didn’t realize that you’re not supposed to be out at mid-afternoon.”

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He was about to say something more, but he began coughing, reached for a handkerchief, couldn't find one, and soon coughed another mouthful of blood all over his chest.

"You'd better be who and what I think you are," he said weakly. "My gun's in a drawer of that night table, and I would take very unkindly to a real owl eating off my chest."

The owl stared unblinking at him for a long moment, then hopped lightly to the floor. Holliday simply stared at him, and as he did so, the owl began to change and grow. Its feathers vanished, its wings became arms, and a few seconds later the dying man was confronting Goyathlay, known to whites as Geronimo, the most powerful medicine man among the Apaches.

"You are dying, Holliday," said Geronimo.

"We're all dying from the minute we're born," replied Holliday. "I just do it a little more enthusiastically than most."

"There is every likelihood that you will be dead before your friend Earp arrives tomorrow."

"Just as well," said Holliday. "Saves me the trouble of apologizing for what I said about his wife. That's the reason he hasn't spoken to me for three years."

Geronimo stared at him for a long moment.

"Would you like to live?" he said at last.

"In *this* condition?" asked Holliday, trying to chuckle and coughing up more blood instead. "When did you develop a sense of humor?"

"I have come to offer you a bargain. If you accept it, you will need your health, and I will restore it."

"Who do you want killed?"

"Possibly no one."

Geronimo fell silent and Holliday stared at him. "Well? I'd at least like to hear the offer before I can't breathe anymore."

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“Things are happening,” said Geronimo. “Serious things.” He stared at Holliday. “Things that must stop.”

“I’m too sick and too weak to make a comment every time you stop talking, so just spit it out,” rasped Holliday.

“We have not seen each other since I signed the treaty with Theodore Roosevelt, the treaty that allows the United States to cross the great river the white eyes call the Mississippi and go to the edge of the world, where the endless sea lies. The other medicine men opposed that treaty, but through your efforts and his, it was enacted. And until now it has been done peacefully.”

“Let me guess,” said Holliday, realizing he’d promised to be silent but unable to stop himself from offering opinions. “The army fired on your people. Nothing I can do about that.”

“No, the army has kept its word,” said Geronimo. “This particular problem was unforeseen, even by myself.”

Lack a certain modesty, don’t you? thought Holliday. Then: *What the hell. You’ve got every right to think that highly of yourself.*

“There are two men involved in this,” continued Geronimo. “You are a learned man. Perhaps you have heard of them.” Holliday made no answer, and Geronimo continued. “Cope and Marsh.”

Holliday shook his head, then winced at the pain. “No, I never heard those names before.”

“They are”—Geronimo searched for the right word but couldn’t find it—“scientists.”

“Like Tom Edison?” asked Holliday.

“No. They tear up the earth, searching for—”

“Gold?” interrupted Holliday.

“Bones,” said Geronimo.

Holliday frowned. “Bones?” he repeated blankly.

“Yes.”

“*Human* bones?”

It was Geronimo’s turn to shake his head. “No, not human bones. But they are disturbing human bones as they dig for the bones they seek.”

“Okay, they’re disturbing human bones,” said Holliday. “Where are they digging?”

“In the land the white eyes call Wyoming.”

“That’s out of your bailiwick.”

“I do not know that word,” said Geronimo.

“There are no Apaches buried in Wyoming, so why do you care?”

Geronimo smiled a humorless smile. “I knew you would understand.”

“I don’t understand a damned thing,” growled Holliday, fighting back another coughing seizure.

“You know that we have burial grounds that are sacred to us. You helped me once before when the railroad was desecrating our burial ground.”

“That was an Apache burial ground in Arizona,” said Holliday irritably. “What the hell has it got to do with whoever’s buried in Wyoming?” He fell back on his pillow, suddenly exhausted.

“The Comanche are buried there,” said Geronimo.

Holliday used most of his remaining strength to utter two words: “So what?”

“The two men have many other white eyes working for them. If the Comanche kill them for desecrating their sacred burial grounds, they will have killed so many that the army will have to respond, and then we will be in a war of extermination. The white eyes have more men and more horses and more guns, so eventually it will be the People who are exterminated.”

“All because someone is digging in the ground for bones?”

“Yes.”

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“And you think one skinny man riddled with consumption can make them stop?”

Geronimo stared at him expressionlessly. “If they are not stopped, there will be war.”

“Then there’ll be a war, with their arrows and stolen guns against the United States army. I wouldn’t want to be on your side.”

“The Comanche know that they cannot win with the weapons they have.”

“Then they’d better let them dig,” said Holliday.

“You do not understand after all, Holliday,” said Geronimo. “This land is *sacred*. No one but the People may dig in it. If anyone else does so, it is desecration.”

“Then the People are going to be on the wrong end of a war,” said Holliday.

There was a momentary silence.

“Not necessarily,” said Geronimo at last.

Here it comes, thought Holliday, but he remained quiet as he waited for the Apache to explain.

“There was a time before God made the People and other men that monsters walked the Earth, monsters such as you cannot even imagine.”

“Spare me the fairy tales and get to the point,” growled Holliday, and then suffered a coughing fit that lasted almost a full minute and drenched his hospital gown in blood.

“Many of those monsters lie beneath the sacred burial ground. I know the Comanche medicine men and their allies among the other tribes—they are the same ones who opposed my agreement with the man Roosevelt—and before they let a single warrior die they will bring forth those monsters to kill the white eyes. But,” continued Geronimo, “they cannot control the monsters once they resurrect them, and the monsters might just as easily turn on the People. Do you understand what I am saying?”

Holliday didn't trust himself to answer without coughing again, so he settled for nodding his head.

"And once the monsters walk the earth, there is nothing to stop them from coming to the Apaches' homeland. I made the treaty with Roosevelt and against the wishes of the other medicine men because I did not wish to see our young warriors die in a battle against the white eyes. I do not intend to see them die now, fighting both the army and the monsters."

"I can't even walk to the door," said Holliday. "I don't know how you think I can kill these monsters." *If they really exist, which I doubt like all hell*, he added mentally.

"They do not exist *yet*," explained Geronimo. "You will go to the land called Wyoming and stop these two men from tearing up the sacred ground, and perhaps they will never exist again."

"Should be easy enough to scare them off," remarked Holliday. He stared at Geronimo. "Once I get my health back."

Geronimo shook his head. "It will not be easy, or I would not be speaking to you."

"Explain."

"It will become clear to you once you are there." He paused. "And you will find an ally there, if you can convince him to join your cause."

"It's *your* cause," wheezed Holliday. "My cause is to walk from here to the door without gasping for breath."

"Have we an agreement?"

Holliday nodded his head. "I'll agree to just about anything that will get me out of this goddamned bed."

"So be it," said Geronimo, and began chanting a prayer or perhaps a spell in his native tongue. When he was finished he turned to Holliday. "It is done."

Holliday lay motionless, afraid to find out that nothing had changed. Finally he sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

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“*Son of a bitch!*” he said, getting to his feet. “You actually did it!”

He spun around, grinning, then ran—not walked—to the bathroom door—

—and then grasped the edge of the door with one hand while his emaciated body was wracked by another coughing fit. When he was done he wiped his mouth with his sleeve. It came away soaked with blood.

“You lied!” he snapped.

“I did not,” said Geronimo calmly.

“I’m still coughing, and I’m still gasping, and I’m still skinny as a rail!”

“You are breathless because you *ran* to the door,” said Geronimo. “When is the last time you ran?”

“What difference does that make?” demanded Holliday. “You promised to restore my health.”

“And I did,” answered Geronimo, walking to the window and seating himself on the ledge.

“I’ve still got the consumption!” roared Holliday.

Geronimo smiled. “You see? You can run and you can yell. Could you do *that* this morning, or last week?”

“But I’m still—”

“What makes you Doc Holliday?” interrupted Geronimo.

Holliday stared at him, puzzled. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“I do not want a dentist,” said Geronimo. “I want a cold resourceful killer who is not afraid to die because he welcomes the thought of death. And what has made you that?”

“You said you’d restore my health, damn it!”

“And I have,” replied Geronimo. “To the day we first met, five years ago.”

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“I was dying five years ago.”

“We are all dying. Do you want an extra year or not?”

Holliday frowned and sighed deeply.

“Get out of here,” he said. He turned to close the bathroom door, and when he turned back, the room was empty. He walked to the window just in time to see a huge owl rising out of sight.