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Weird Western Quarterly
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For David, the Hawk-God of DC2 — happy trails to you, boss!

'TIL THINGS ARE BRIGHTER

*Well you wonder why I always dress in black
Why you never see bright colors on my back
And why does my appearance seem to have a somber tone
Well there's a reason for the things that I have on...*

- Johnny Cash, "Man In Black"

1868:

Franklin Hawkes was tired. Tired deep down in his heart, where no amount of rest could change it. It had started years ago, when his wife died, but he didn't let it show then — he had his son to think of; he couldn't give in to grief, no matter how tempting it may be. So he tucked it away, not letting it out unless his boy was sound asleep in their flat above the family's general store. That worked out fine for many years, until the War came around, and he woke up one morning to find his boy, now a young man, long gone. He'd left no note, but Franklin didn't need one to surmise where he'd run off to — many men had departed the little town of Fox Grove to join the fighting, but precious few had returned alive. Despite such prospects, the elder Hawkes held onto hope... but once the War came to an end and his boy still did not return, the tiredness that had dogged the man all those years threatened to crush him.

But life went on, and Franklin tried to go with it. He still went about his business, still opened up the store every day and waited on folks like nothing had changed, but there were days when he wondered why he bothered. Today was one of those days: it seemed like everywhere he turned, something made him think of his wife and son. He focused harder on his work to take his mind off of it, standing on a ladder and stacking tins of coffee methodically. Better to concentrate on that, make sure each one on the shelf was straight, not the least bit crooked, than to dwell on what he couldn't fix. He was fiddling with one of them when he heard the little bell hanging above the door chime out. "Be just a moment," Franklin said without looking — he was juggling three more tins in his arms, and wouldn't be satisfied until they were all neatly put away. He reached over to place another on the shelf, but it slipped out of his fingers and went tumbling towards the floor.

To his surprise, however, it never got there: a hand shot out and caught the tin. He twisted around and saw a young man in a patched chambray shirt and jeans standing at the foot of the ladder, looking up at him with a hint of a smirk. Something about him was familiar, but Franklin couldn't put his finger on it. He stared at the stranger, trying to see past the dark scruffy beard and shabby clothes... and when it hit him, he nearly fell off the ladder.

"Hannibal?" he said quietly.

The young man's smirk broadened into a grin. "Hello, Papa," he replied.

With a clatter, the rest of the coffee tins fell as Franklin rushed down the ladder. He placed his hands on either side of the young man's face, looking hard into his son's blue eyes until he was sure that what he saw was real. "My God... all this time I thought... oh my God..." he said breathlessly, then threw his arms around the young man, afraid he'd disappear if he didn't.

Slowly, Hannibal Hawkes returned the embrace, saying, "I missed you too, Papa."

"Where have you been for the last six years?"

The young man paused, but didn't answer right off. Instead, he stood there quietly, wiping bits of apple from his whiskered chin, then said, "I was in the Army."

"But you were only fourteen when you left, how could they... "

"I lied about my age," he answered, surprisingly quick. "You remember, I looked a little older than I was back then. I told them I was seventeen, and they bought it. By the time I really was seventeen, the War was over... no harm, right?"

"I suppose... but what about after the War?"

"I got involved in... a business opportunity. Me and some other fellas... we did all right for ourselves, made some good money... but I got to missin' home, y'know? I never... I didn't plan on stayin' away for so long... "

"Why didn't you ever bother to write? You couldn't send me one letter to let me know you were okay?"

"I was busy... you know how it gets. Time just kind of... slips away from you." Hannibal took another bite of apple and chewed it up before saying, "Why can't you just be happy to have me home?"

Franklin sighed and placed a hand on his son's shoulder. "I am happy, but you have to understand: all this time, I thought you'd gone and gotten yourself killed, and after losing your mother all those years ago... " He sighed again. "One letter, and I could have slept a lot easier."

He turned away, eyes squeezed shut. "I'm sorry, Papa. I know that don't fix much, but I am. I can promise you, though, I ain't gonna run off on you again. I'm home to stay." Hannibal looked back at his father and said, "And you don't have to worry 'bout me bein' a burden or anything: I saved up a lot of money while I was gone, and I've got plans for it, real good plans."

"I'm sure you do," the elder Hawkes said, smiling. "You always were

smart... and don't you ever think that you're a burden on me. You're my son, and I... " He stopped when the shop door opened, and a middle-aged lady stepped inside. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Pendleton!" he said, his voice carrying a note of brightness that had been missing for many years.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hawkes... sir." She gave Hannibal a sideways glance, in obvious disapproval of his rough appearance. The two men in turn looked at each other, and a chuckle passed between them. "Might I ask what is so amusing?"

"Mrs. Pendleton, allow me to *re-introduce* you to my son, Hannibal," Franklin said.

"Your... " She took a second look, then pressed a hand to her mouth. "Oh my word... little Hannibal Hawkes! I remember when you and that Smithfield boy made off with my prize goats. You raced them right down the main street... "

"Yeah, and I got my hide tanned for it." Hannibal grinned at his father. "Couldn't sit down for a week, thanks to you."

"But you learned your lesson, didn't you?" He tried to sound stern, but he was smiling too much, and who could blame him? His son was *alive!* After years of mourning him *in absentia*, he was standing right there, joking with his old man like not a day had passed. It seemed like a dream, and if it was, Franklin hoped that he never woke up.

Mrs. Pendleton cupped a hand under Hannibal's chin, saying, "You've certainly grown into a handsome young man... at least what little I can see of you under this beard. My goodness, it looks like it hasn't seen a razor in months."

"I was thinking of shaving it off anyways," he replied. "A new look for a new start. Matter of fact, if you folks will excuse me, I think I'll go upstairs and clean myself up a bit."

"Certainly, the stairs are... " Franklin stopped himself, his face turning red. "Good Lord, what's wrong with me? *Of course* you know where the stairs are!"

“Well, you never know, you might have gotten bored while I was gone and moved ‘em.” He stepped around to the end of the counter and grabbed a saddlebag he’d dropped there when he entered the store, then headed for a door near the back. Behind it lay a narrow staircase leading to the flat upstairs. Hannibal paused at the top, taking in the home he hadn’t seen in six years. Most of the furniture was the same, and Ma’s rocker was still in the corner, the quilt she’d made the year before she died draped over the back. He let his hand pass over it as he walked to his old bedroom — dust had settled over much of it, but he noted a dent worn into the edge of the bed, like someone had spent a good deal of time sitting there.

I’m sorry, Papa, I really am, Hannibal thought as he closed the door, *but the folks I ran with weren’t exactly the letter-writin’ type.* He dropped the saddlebag on the bed, pulled out a clean shirt, and began to strip off the one he was wearing.

Beneath the shirt, the young man’s body was pockmarked with scars, some rather fresh, and a bloodied bandage was wrapped around his arm.

It wasn't long before Hannibal fell back into the rhythm of life around Fox Grove. He became a familiar sight around the general store, and folks that stopped in noticed how the young man's presence had bolstered his father again — the spark was back in Franklin's eyes, a welcome change after years of melancholy. Hannibal himself didn't seem much different from the way the older residents remembered him, though they noted how freely he spent money around town. Some had heard him allude vaguely to a business venture he'd gone into with some other ex-soldiers, but nothing more. In fact, Hannibal seemed reluctant to talk about his time in the Army at all. Those who'd seen firsthand the horrors the War had wrought could understand his silence, as there were some things that just weren't right to talk about in polite society. In any case, many agreed that the important thing was that he'd made it back home, no matter how long it took.

About a month after his return, Hannibal was unloading a wagon full of

supplies he'd picked up at the train station — a great deal of the store's manufactured goods were shipped in from back East, where the factories churned out their wares just as they'd done before the War. He'd nearly finished the task when he got hung up on a particularly large crate, which wouldn't budge no matter how much muscle he threw behind it. "What the Hell did those boys at the station load me up with, a bank safe?" he muttered, then hopped down to go and fetch a crowbar from the store.

His father saw him walking back outside and asked, "You got a problem there, son?"

"Yeah, this here crate." He waved the crowbar at it as he climbed back up on the wagon. "I'm gonna learn it some manners." Hannibal pried off the lid, then brushed aside the straw packing until he saw what was giving him so much grief. "Well, that explains a lot," he said, then rapped the crowbar against the potbellied cast-iron stove laying in the crate.

"Oh, for pete's sake, I'd forgotten all about that." Franklin had gotten on the back of the wagon himself to see what the item was. "The Murphys ordered that thing months ago."

"The Murphys over on the south end?" The young man got a wistful look in his eye. "Y'know, I remember they had a daughter... she was a real sweet gal... "

"Forget it. Rachel Murphy got married two years back."

Hannibal's expression immediately soured. "Her loss," he replied, and his father let out a laugh. "So," he continued, "reckon this means I gotta haul this thing over to the Murphy place, eh?"

"That you do." The elder Hawkes got back down, saying, "And they still haven't paid for it, so make sure you collect fifty dollars from 'em before you kill yourself hauling it off of here." His son nodded as he climbed over into the driver's seat and took the reins, giving them a snap to set the horses moving on down the street. Franklin then went back inside to go through the rest of the goods Hannibal had dropped off — it was a hodgepodge of tools, canned goods, ready-made clothes, and glassware: all sorts of items that were harder to get when you lived away from the

big cities. While Fox Grove wasn't truly a frontier town, it certainly wasn't St. Louis, either. He took some boxes of overstocked goods to the storeroom, and when he came back out again, he saw that he had company. "Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said to the three men milling about, "help you with anything today?"

One of the men, a tall fellow in a duster, leaned against the front counter. "You might. Saw the sign outside: 'Hawkes Mercantile'. You wouldn't happen to be Hawkes, would you?"

"That I would."

The tall man nodded. "Thought so. Got a strong family resemblance." He looked at the other two men, who also wore dusters, and said, "Don't you think so, Deke?"

Deke tilted his head as he looked Franklin over. "Ayuh, him an' Hank got the same sorta face. Hank's nose has got more of a bend to it, though. Right at the bridge."

"That's 'cause Hank broke it last year, remember?" the third one added. "That job in Danbury? Little bitch got in a lucky shot on him."

"Oh yeah... pissed him off something awful." Deke let out a laugh.

Franklin's brow furrowed — he had no clue who these men were, but something about them wasn't sitting right with him. "I'm sorry to interrupt your little reminisce, but what do you want?"

"Ah... forgive me, we didn't properly introduce ourselves." The tall man pointed at himself, then to the other men in turn. "My name is Barrett, an' that's Deke and Byron... I'm sure Hank's told you all about us."

"Hank? I don't know anyone named... " He paused, then said, "Do you mean Hannibal?"

The tall man, Barrett, tapped a finger on his forehead, saying, "Right... Hannibal... I've been callin' him Hank for so long, I forgot. I remembered the name of his hometown, though: Fox Grove, Missouri. Remembered that clear as day. Damn good thing I did, too, isn't it, fellas?"

The two men agreed, and Barrett turned to Franklin with a smile. "I remembered his dear ol' daddy, too."

The elder Hawkes found himself stepping backward before he even realized it. "Hannibal never mentioned you, not by name. He said he'd gone into partnership with someone... "

"A *partnership*? Is that how he put it? Funny, he sure as Hell wasn't treatin' us like partners when he ran off." Barrett pushed away from the counter and advanced on Franklin, flicking a hand towards Deke and Byron as he did so — one of the men began moving over to the front door of the shop. "Matter of fact, I'd say he treated us like a bunch of goddam fools."

"Listen, I don't know what you're talking about, but if you just sit tight and wait until Hannibal gets back, I'm sure we can straighten this all out." Over Barrett's shoulder, Franklin saw Byron lowering the shade on the door and throwing the latch. *Or maybe we can't*, he thought, and tried to direct his steps towards a display of shovels standing in the corner — not the best weapon, but better than being empty-handed. Deke caught sight of it, though, and came around to block Franklin's path, brushing aside his duster as he did so to reveal a pistol holstered on his hip.

"Looks like sneaky runs in the family," Deke said.

"I'd say so," Barrett replied, his own gun in plain view now. "Like father, like son."

Franklin tried to bolt, but Deke grabbed him before he could get more than two steps away and forced him against the counter. "What's the matter, ain't feelin' sociable all the sudden?" Deke said as he drew his pistol, pushing the barrel beneath the man's chin.

"Please... please, whatever Hannibal's done wrong, we can work it out," Franklin stammered. "You don't need to do this."

Barrett came up and put a hand over Deke's gun, saying, "He's right... there ain't no need to hurt him just yet." He gave Franklin another smile, one more disturbing than the last. "I've got a better idea."

"Right here, that'll do." Hannibal eased his end of the crate down to the floor, and Mr. Murphy followed suit on his end. The two men had wrestled it off the wagon with no problem, though the weight of it had almost done them in by the time they got it in the house — they leaned against the crate trying to catch their breath. Mr. Murphy looked over to his wife and said, "You'd best be grateful for this thing once we have it set up."

"'We'? Forget it, I'm done in," Hannibal said. "I just drop 'em off, I don't put 'em together. Besides, I need to be headin' back."

"Oh, you can spare a little time, can't you?" Mrs. Murphy asked. "Rachel and her husband are coming over for supper, and I'm sure she'd..." The jangle of reins and thud of hoofbeats could be heard outside, and the woman smiled. "Well, that must be them now."

They stepped outside as a man steered a buckboard up alongside the Murphys' barn. Sitting beside him was Rachel, looking just as pretty as Hannibal remembered — he'd always had a thing for redheads, and she was no exception. Hannibal followed behind as her parents went up and greeted them, keeping a respectable distance until Mr. Murphy waved a hand to him, saying to his daughter, "You won't believe who turned up recently, honey: the Hawkes boy finally came home from the War."

"Hannibal?" Rachel looked him over, her eyes wide with surprise. "Goodness, it's been so long. How have you been?"

"Well enough." He tipped his hat to Rachel and her husband standing beside her. "By the way, congratulations to you both. Just found out earlier today."

"Thanks... Lester Oldman, nice to meet you." The man shook Hannibal's hand when he offered, saying, "Did I hear her father right? You just got back from the War?"

"In a roundabout way. I got involved in some business down South once I got out of the Army... it kept me away."

“Ah, I see. I know a few fellas in my unit who did the same — good opportunities down there for a man that’s willing to work hard. What regiment were you in?”

“5th Missouri.”

“What a coincidence,” Rachel said, “Lester was in the 5th too. That was cavalry, wasn’t it, dear?”

Lester nodded, his brow furrowing. “That’s right, but I don’t recall seeing you there, Mister... Hawkes, is it?”

Hannibal swallowed hard, then said, “Must have been another company... you know how it was, so many men millin’ about... and I wore a beard then, too.” He scratched at his clean-shaven cheek nervously. “We probably walked right past each other and never knew it.”

“I suppose you’re right... say, do you remember Captain Drake? Burly man, always had a swagger stick tucked under his arm? There was this one time we...”

“Listen, I really have to be gettin’ back to town.” Hannibal began walking backwards towards his wagon. “Sorry to interrupt your visit.”

“Nonsense,” Mrs. Murphy said, “you can stay a while longer. I’m sure your father won’t mind if you’re a little late.” But the invitation fell on deaf ears as the young man continued back to his wagon. He didn’t look back after he finally got the horses moving again, and only slowed their pace once he’d passed out of sight of the Murphy place.

Stupid, that was so stupid, he thought, taking off his hat and wiping sweat from his brow. You should’ve known that you might actually bump into somebody from the 5th sooner or later... should’ve kept the story simpler. Lucky for you, he bought your lame excuse. Now you just have to hope that you never run into him again. Hannibal’s shoulders sagged as the wagon bumped on down the road — the situation was wearing on him, all the stories, all the dancing around he had to do whenever he talked to someone. The worst part was lying to his father day in and day out... but he couldn’t tell him the truth, not yet. *Maybe not ever,* he thought, and his shoulders sagged

even further.

The Murphy place lay a good hour outside of town, and dusk was approaching when Hannibal finally pulled the wagon up in front of the general store. Oddly enough, there were a few people gathered by the front door — Mrs. Pendleton turned away from there as Hannibal approached, saying to him, “Young man, tell your father that if he’s going to close up early, he should at least leave a note on the door saying why.”

“What are you talkin’ about?” He went to enter the store, and was surprised to find the door locked and the shade drawn. “Papa? Are you in there?” he called out, rapping on the door.

“You think we didn’t try that already?” one of the obviously-annoyed customers said.

Hannibal ignored the comment and peered through the shop’s display window — nothing seemed out of the ordinary. “I’m gonna try ‘round back,” he told those gathered, then trotted around the building. The back door was unlocked, and Hannibal stepped inside, calling for his father again. No answer. *I don’t like this one bit*, he thought, and headed upstairs, but he found nothing out of place there either. A knot was beginning to tighten in his stomach as he went back down, unsure of what to do next. He began to move to the front door to unlock it when he saw something he’d missed before: his father’s pocketknife jabbed into the countertop, pinning a note. He pulled it free and felt his heart stop as he read the note:

You know what we want. Be up on Pine Ridge by sundown or he’s dead. NO TRICKS.

There was no signature, but he didn’t need one to know who it was from. *Why couldn’t they just let me be?* he thought, slumping against the counter. *It’s not like they couldn’t go and...*

One of the men outside banged hard on the front window, glaring at Hannibal through the glass. The young man unlocked the door and poked his head out, saying, “Go home, everybody, we’re closed.” The people started grumbling rather loudly at that, but Hannibal wasn’t in

the mood to hear it. "Look, there ain't nothin' you need in here that can't wait 'til tomorrow, now *scat!*" He slammed the door and locked it again. Some of the folks outside cursed at him, saying they'd take their business elsewhere from now on, but that wasn't important at the moment — the sun would be setting within the hour, and he wasn't about to let his father suffer for his mistakes.

Pine Ridge was just what it sounded like: a sharp rise of land dotted with pine trees, located a few miles east of town. As Hannibal rode up to it, he kept an eye on the tree line, knowing that Barrett and the boys could easily see him coming from that vantage point, even in the waning light — it was the perfect place for an ambush, but Hannibal had no choice. When he passed the first pines, he dismounted, laid a hand on the gun holstered to his belt, and called out, "All right, I'm here... now where the Hell are you?"

"Right this way, Hank, don't be shy," Barrett answered from somewhere deeper in the pines.

"I'm not in the mood for games! You send my father out, and I'll..."

"You'll do as I say or I'll shoot him dead right here an' now!" The young man tensed, then did as he was told. He led his horse further under the trees until the ground leveled out in a small clearing. Waiting there were Barrett, Byron, and Deke, guns drawn, with his father on his knees before them. "Nice to see you again, Hank. Now, toss that gun over here, real careful-like."

Again, he did as he was told, getting a good look at his father as he leaned forward to toss his revolver to them. Franklin's hands were tied behind his back, and his face looked swollen on the right side. "What did you do to him?" Hannibal snapped.

"Oh, he's fine," Barrett said, tousling the elder Hawkes' graying hair like he was a child. "We just had a little sit-down while we was waitin' for you, an' he didn't like what we had to tell him." He frowned at Hannibal, saying, "I can't really blame him for that. I mean, you went an' filled

his head with all that nonsense 'bout joinin' the Army, tellin' him that you was off fightin' Rebs an' bein' a good little soldier boy, when the truth was that the Union turned you out the minute they found out you was too young. Didn't even last a week with 'em."

"Shut up, Barrett. Just shut up and let him go."

"Aw, but I ain't got to the best part! There you was, all alone without a friend in the world but itchin' to fight... lucky for you, I came along an' gave you something to fight for. Sure, maybe we weren't regular Army, but we took care of them Southern traitors in our own special way, didn't we, boys?" He glanced over to Deke and Byron with a grin, and the other men let out a chuckle. "Course, them Union boys never saw eye-to-eye with us, 'specially once the War was over. I mean, we was just doin' our patriotic duty, same as them... "

"No, we weren't... we never were." Hannibal looked at his father, silently begging his forgiveness. "We were criminals, through and through. We spent more time terrorizin' innocent civilians than we did fightin' Rebel troops, stealin' from folks that barely had anything left already. That weren't right at all."

"I don't recall you sayin' nothin' 'bout right an' wrong when you was takin' your share of the loot," Byron said.

"I *should* have... dammit, I should have just walked away the minute I realized what you guys really were, but I let you keep draggin' me through the mud until I finally got fed up and quit... "

"An' ran off with the biggest haul we ever got our hands on!" Barrett finished for him. "Funny how your conscience didn't kick in 'til you had close to twenty thousand dollars sitting right in front of you."

Franklin's eyes widened. "My God... all that money you've been passing around town... you *stole* all of that?" he said.

"We stole it," Barrett corrected, "straight off the express train bound for Louisville a couple months back. But then we got caught in an ambush, an' your beloved son here thought it would be a perfect time to cut an' run with the money. Too bad he didn't figure on us wantin' it back."

“And now you’re gettin’ it back, just as soon as you let Papa go.”

“Not a chance. We get what we want first,” Barrett said. Hannibal stared hard at the man, then turned towards his horse to open a saddlebag, but stopped when he heard a trio of hammers click. “Oh no, you’re keepin’ them hands where I can see ‘em. Boys, go check out the bags.”

Byron and Deke searched the saddlebags, pulling out four cotton sacks. “This one feels a mite short,” Deke said, holding one of them up.

“Some of the money’s gone, I spent it,” Hannibal said. “I don’t remember how much, maybe a thousand at most...”

“Well now, that won’t do at all,” Barrett replied, and grabbed Franklin by the hair. “Reckon we’ll have to hold onto your daddy a bit longer ‘til you get it all back. An’ if you don’t...” He pressed the barrel of his gun against the man’s temple.

“No!” Hannibal began to rush forward, but as he took his first step, Byron smashed the butt of his rifle against the back of the young man’s head, knocking him to his knees. He struggled to get back up, and Byron continued to hit him until Hannibal crumpled to the ground.

“Stop it, you’re going to kill him!” Franklin said as he tried to get to his feet, paying no mind to the pistol pointed at his head.

Barrett kicked the elder Hawkes’ legs out from under him, then pressed his bootheel into the man’s throat, saying, “Maybe you’d rather die instead?” He then let out a chuckle, and pushed his boot down even harder, choking him.

Hannibal struggled to stay conscious, though he could feel blood running down his scalp. He lifted his head, painful as it was, and looked over to his father, sprawled just as helplessly on the ground as he was, with Barrett towering over him. He wanted to get up, to fight, but he couldn’t, he felt strangely disconnected from his body... and then something even stranger happened: a fog seemed to roll across his vision, briefly obscuring the two figures, though he could still make out their shape. As it passed, he found himself laying not in a dim clearing

littered with pine needles, but on the bright swirling sands of a desert, a fierce battle raging around him. The fighters were like nothing he'd ever seen, bronze-skinned men in white skirts and sandals clashing with twisted monsters, swords and spears colliding with shields. Before him, where Barrett had been, stood a dark-haired, bearded man in robes, holding a strange staff of sorts — a small globe was affixed to the top, giving off a red light as bright as the setting sun. He laughed as his foot bore down on the neck of a man laying on the ground, in the same position as Hannibal's father... and from somewhere deep within Hannibal's mind came a spark of recognition, an old anger rising up at the words spoken by the robed man as he held the staff aloft:

"Pharaoh is dead! Egypt will be mine again!"

The phrase meant nothing to Hannibal. In fact, he wasn't even sure how he understood it — whatever language the man had spoke, it certainly wasn't English — but the rage it stirred within him gave him the strength he needed to continue fighting, though the images before him seemed to waver with each passing moment. He reached up and to his left at one of the spear-wielding creatures nearby, only to have it become Byron as Hannibal's fist collided with his jaw, the outlaw dropping his rifle as he went down. Deke leveled his pistol and fired at the young man, who saw instead a needle-thin dagger fly through the air and into his shoulder, but when Hannibal tried to pull it out, his fingers wrapped around nothing. *What's wrong with me?* he thought, but it was a brief one — Deke went to take another shot, and Hannibal had enough presence of mind to knock him into a nearby tree.

"To hell with this." Barrett cocked his gun and took aim at Franklin's head, but Hannibal grabbed him and wrestled him to the ground before he could pull the trigger. The young man's eyes continued to play tricks on him the whole time: one moment he was struggling with Barrett in an effort to get the revolver away from him, and the next his hand was wrapped around that strange glowing staff the robed man carried. That didn't deter him in the least as he tried to pry the object — whichever one it was — from his opponent's grasp. Unfortunately, determination wasn't enough, and Barrett won out, jabbing the gunbarrel into Hannibal's ribs and pulling the trigger.

It felt like someone punched him low in the chest. All his breath rushed

out of him as he fell back, one hand clutching at the wound and the other trying to hold onto Barrett. His father kept calling his name, but he couldn't answer, couldn't move — whatever surge of strength that had come over him before was gone, he could only lay on the ground, pine needles poking through his shirt and digging into his flesh, eyes fixed on the treetops far above him. After a minute, he heard another gunshot, and his father fell silent. He was aware of movement around him, and voices, but he couldn't focus, everything was falling away from him. The last thing he saw with any clarity was Barrett standing over him, flanked by the shadowed forms of Deke and Byron. "You never should've double-crossed us, Hank," the man said.

Then the darkness reared up and swallowed him whole.

"Hannibal."

The disconnected feeling had returned. He was aware of his body, but couldn't make it obey him, couldn't move or speak. He wasn't even sure if his eyes were open, everything was dark.

"Hannibal Hawkes."

He tried to make a sound, twitch a finger, anything to let whomever was speaking to him know that he heard, but it was impossible. For the second time that night, he thought, *What's wrong with me?*

"Your body has been gravely injured, and needs time to rest. Your mind and soul, however, are as strong as they have always been. Perhaps even stronger, now."

He felt a chill run down his spine. *You... you can hear my thoughts? How did you... Another thought popped into his head: You're not talkin' English. That stranger in the robes that I saw, he talked like that too, but I can understand every word... oh God, am I goin' crazy?*

"No, you are simply remembering things your conscious mind had forgotten long ago, though they have always been there below the surface, shaping you,

influencing you."

What do you mean?

"Your need for challenge... your desire to fight, to experience the rush of battle."

If Hannibal could have nodded, he would have. The unknown speaker had put his finger right on it: from the moment the War started, he'd felt a need to join in, not just because he wanted to do his part for the Union, but because it seemed like he belonged there, on the battlefield. But when the Army turned him down due to his age, the need remained, and he'd jumped at the first opportunity to fulfill it, no matter how wrong or immoral it was. He could blame Barrett all he wanted for making him an outlaw, but the initial step was still taken by him alone. *But I don't want that anymore, he thought, I want out. I tried to get out, but it followed me home; it's gonna hound me for the rest of my life...*

"Only if you let it." With those words, a shape became visible before Hannibal: a tall, broad-shouldered man, dressed in similar garb to the warriors he'd seen earlier... but unlike them, this man had the wings of an angel, and wore a mask made of chain-mail, giving him the visage of a hawk. He stood (floated, hovered?) close to Hannibal, close enough for him to see the piercing blue eyes that lay behind the mask.

Your eyes... you've got my eyes...

If the winged man heard the thought, he made no sign. *"I was once told that the road of a hero is never a straight one, and ever marked with sacrifice...yours has been no different. Though you cannot erase your past mistakes, you can use your talents to protect the innocent from those who continue to do harm in the world."* He then reached up and removed a chain hanging around his neck, from the end of which dangled an amulet in the shape of a hawk — it seemed to glow in the darkness, dazzling Hannibal's eyes with a blazing white light until that was all he could see. *"As you were before, so shall you be again... a champion of justice..."* He felt the weight of it slip around his own neck, the amulet resting against his chest, seeming to sink into his flesh and touch his heart...

... and then he suddenly found himself gasping for breath, choking on a mouthful of earth. Everything hurt, he couldn't see... but he could move

again, albeit with difficulty. Struggling against the weight bearing down on him, Hannibal forced his arms up, inch by inch, until his hands finally broke through the dirt piled on top of him and reached empty air. Slowly, he pulled himself out of the shallow grave his former partners had tossed his body in, making it halfway out before collapsing from exhaustion. It was still nighttime, the only sound in the pine woods being the strangled wheeze Hannibal made as he gulped air down into his aching lungs. Once he'd recovered enough strength, he ran a hand over his torso, checking the damage done by Barrett's gunshot. There was an entrance wound at the bottom of his ribcage, badly burned by the muzzle flash, but no exit out his back. He then felt a second hole, only a few inches from the first, and a broken rib just beneath. The bullet must have glanced off the rib and shot right out again — enough of a wound to make him bleed like a stuck pig and pass out, but not enough to kill him. *It's a miracle I ain't dead*, he thought.

Was it a miracle? Something picked at the back of his mind, something he thought he'd seen just a minute before... someone had been talking to him... an angel...

He couldn't remember; nearly everything after Byron hit him with the rifle was a blur — the back of his skull still ached from the blows. He shook his head, then climbed the rest of the way out of the hole. As he pulled himself free, he glanced back down into the shallow grave, and saw his father's body, still mostly covered by dirt, laying there. Hannibal could feel tears beginning to form as he reached down and touched his father's face — the skin was cold, the eyes half-open... there would be no miracle for him.

"The road of a hero is never a straight one, and ever marked with sacrifice..."

Hannibal jerked up and stared at the trees around him. He could have sworn he heard a voice, but there was no one there. Unconsciously, he slipped a hand under his shirt and pressed it to his chest, right over his heart — though his fingers brushed only bare flesh, the action calmed him, brought a clarity to his mind that he'd never experienced before. Despite the pain he felt, he knew he could go on; he knew he could stand tall and finish the task ahead of him.

He looked back down at his father again, passing a hand over the man's

eyes to close them. "Goodbye, Papa," he said, then spread the earth back over the body — he didn't want to leave his father there, but it was necessary for now.

It was a long walk back to Fox Grove, and he had a job to do.

Caldwell Junction was a little shanty town about twenty miles west of the Missouri border, in the vast stretch of land known as "Indian Territory" — it was supposed to be reserved solely for relocated tribes, but some white folk had illegally staked claims within the area, mostly the sort that were involved in illegal business to begin with. The town consisted of a handful of buildings in various degrees of dilapidation, the biggest (and busiest) being the saloon, where nearly everyone that passed through ended up at one point or another. Barrett, Deke, and Byron were no exception: after dispatching dear ol' Hank and his daddy, the three of them hightailed it in the general direction of Mexico, and decided to spend a night or two in Caldwell Junction to blow off some steam and spend a bit of the ill-gotten money they'd reacquired a few weeks before. That particular night, Barrett's attention was focused on a gal in a low-cut dress and too much rouge, who'd accepted his invitation to take up residence in his lap, while Byron and Deke wasted their share of the cash at the poker table.

"Read 'em an' weep, boys!" Byron crowed as he laid down his hand. "Full house!" Deke swore and gave his partner a withering glare as Byron began to rake the money towards him.

"Not so fast, *senor*," a Mexican with an impressive mustache replied, laying down his own cards one at a time, until four jacks were in view. "Please to be taking your hands off my money."

Now it was Byron's turn to glare. "You goddam, bean-eatin', donkey-screwin'..." He drained the last gulp of warm beer from his glass, then pushed away from the table, saying, "I hope you enjoy it, 'cause it's the last cent you're gettin' outta me!"

"Hey, where you goin'?" Deke said.

“Gonna go water the flowers.” Byron clomped out onto the porch in front of the saloon, then hung a left, heading towards the alley running between buildings. A rumble of thunder greeted him as he stepped into the shadows, unbuttoning his fly so he could get rid of some of the beer he’d been drinking all night. “Stupid, lucky greaser,” he muttered to the wall, “probably hides cards under that damn ugly moustache of his...”

Then he heard the click of a gun hammer beside his head. He froze, his eyes sliding to the right to see a dark figure standing there, blocking the mouth of the alley. Lightning flashed overhead, briefly illuminating him, though it didn’t help much: the man was dressed in black from head to foot, his face obscured by both his wide-brimmed hat and a black mask covering his eyes. The only bright spots on him were a white kerchief tied around his throat and the pale silhouette of a hawk stitched onto his shirt.

“Where are your partners?” the man asked, the question punctuated by a deafening crack of thunder.

“Saloon... they’re in the saloon,” Byron said, silently cursing himself for leaving his rifle in there with them. “Who are you? Bounty hunter?”

“Put your hands behind your head,” he ordered, ignoring the query completely. Byron did as he was told, now seeing the length of rope in the man’s free hand, a small loop already made on one end. The man slipped the loop over Byron’s right hand, then brought it down to the level of his belt, running the other end of the rope beneath the belt before grabbing Byron’s left and tying it up as well. When the man was finished, Byron’s hands were cinched tight to the back of his own trousers. “Now, you’re gonna do exactly what I say, or else...” He tapped the tip of the gun’s barrel against Byron’s temple. “Got it?”

The outlaw began to nod when Deke called out from the street, “Hey, Byron, how long does it take for you to piss?”

The man grabbed Byron by the collar and spun him around so he faced the mouth of the alley, the stranger’s gun wedged against the back of his skull. “Call to him... calmly,” the man whispered behind him.

Calmly? you've gotta be kiddin' me, Byron thought, then licked his lips and said, "I'm down here, in the alley."

"Good boy." The stranger turned his gun around and clubbed Byron across the skull with the butt, knocking him out cold, then dragged the body out of sight as rain began to fall in fat droplets. By the time Deke stepped into the alley, the earth beneath his boots was already turning to mud.

"Byron? Where you hidin'?" He looked back and forth down the alley, rain rolling off the brim of his hat. "C'mon, let's get back inside afore we're soaked through."

"Down here," a low voice said, "I've got something to show you."

Deke hesitated, tilting his head a bit. "That you, Byron? You sound funny." He took a few steps forward, saying, "For a second there, you sounded kind of like... "

A lasso flew out of the darkness further down the alley, sailing neatly over Deke's head and tightening around his throat — he managed to get a hand beneath the rope, giving him some slack, but it wasn't enough to keep the unseen attacker from pulling him off his feet. Mud splattered over him as he hit the ground, struggling with the impromptu noose as he was dragged further away from the safety of the street. Since his right hand was entangled, he clumsily reached cross-body with his left to draw his gun. Unfortunately, by the time he worked it free of the holster, a boot shot out and kicked it from his hand. Deke cried out in pain and anger, but the sound was drowned out by another crack of thunder. He could see the man on the other end of the rope now, as well as Byron slumped over behind a nearby crate. "You murderin' bastard... " Deke choked.

"You're one to talk," the stranger said, and tightened the lasso around Deke's windpipe until he lost consciousness. He then used the rest of the rope to hogtie the outlaw, dumping his body beside Byron's. He checked both men over briefly to make sure they were still breathing before throwing a tarp over them, obscuring them from anyone who might chance down the alley.

"Two down, one to go," he said quietly, then headed to the saloon.

"Oh goodness, it sounds awful out there," the woman cuddling with Barrett said in mock fright as lightning lit up the street outside, followed close behind by a thunderclap. "Hold me closer, will you, honey?"

"Girl, you keep squirmin' like that, an' I'll do a lot more to ya than holdin'." He playfully bit at her neck, causing her to squeal. "Yeah, I can think of a thing or two better'n holdin' at the moment."

"Well, why don't you stop thinkin' an' start doin'?"

"Maybe I will." He knocked back the last of his whiskey, then looked about the saloon. "Where's them two morons I came in with?"

The woman curled a lock of Barrett's hair around her finger. "Why, you want them to come up an' play, too?"

"Hell no, you're all mine!" He slid her off his lap, glancing back one last time towards the plate-glass window facing the street. He thought he'd seen Deke and Byron go outside, but with it raining cats and dogs out there, he couldn't imagine why they would. He shrugged it off and let the woman lead him to the stairs, never noticing the figure in black standing out on the porch, watching him from the edge of the window.

The woman's room upstairs was dark compared to the saloon proper. She moved to light a candle, but Barrett laid a hand over hers, saying, "Forget that... I think I can find what I'm lookin' for." He shut the door, plunging the room into full darkness, and leaned in close, kissing her as he fumbled to remove his gunbelt, while she unbuttoned his shirt for him. They were about to move their business to the bed when Barrett stopped abruptly.

"What's the matter?" the woman asked him. "You change your mind?"

"I thought I heard something outside the door."

"It's probably someone else going to their room. Never mind it." She went to kiss him again, but instead let out a shriek as the door to her room burst open, revealing a black-clad figure, his twin revolvers leveled at Barrett.

"You're coming with me," the man said, "right now."

"Not likely," Barrett answered, and shoved the woman towards the stranger. He then dropped to his knees and scooped up his gunbelt, drawing and firing in one swift motion. The man in black tried to get the woman clear in time, but the first bullet sank into her belly. She collapsed, screaming again, while the next two bullets whizzed past the stranger's head as he backpedaled from the tight confines of the room, letting off a volley of his own as he did so. Barrett was on the move as well, and the stranger's bullets only succeeded in making feathers explode out of the pillows on the bed. "I don't know who you are," Barrett said from behind a wardrobe in the corner of the room, "but you're a lousy shot!"

"I don't want you dead, not like this." The man had moved out of firing range, standing with his back to the wall outside the door. "You're gonna to pay for what you did, but it's gonna be in accordance with the law."

"So you're a lawman, eh? Funny, it usually ain't the lawmen that wear the masks!" Barrett was stalling, and for more than the obvious reason of him being pinned down in the room: the man's voice was familiar, though the face that came to mind along with it was impossible to believe. He chanced a look from behind the wardrobe to the woman, laying on the floor sobbing. "Tell me, lawman, you gonna let an innocent gal bleed to death?"

"Give up, and she won't."

"Not likely," he said again, taking advantage of the lull to reload. "Either you stand down an' let me walk, or we keep arguing an' she dies. What's it gonna be?"

Time seemed to stretch on forever, the silence broken only by the sounds of the storm outside. Then Barrett heard two thumps on the floorboards

— he peeked out his head and saw the stranger’s guns laying in the doorway. “Well, don’t that beat all,” he muttered, and slowly got up from his hiding spot, buckling his gunbelt back in place as he did so. He kept the gun itself trained on the doorway as he came forward, stepping out onto the second-floor landing overlooking the saloon’s main floor, a wooden railing running along the length of it. The stranger was standing at arm’s length from the door with his hands behind his head, the look of anger in his eyes not easily disguised by the mask. “You made the right decision, lawman. You want me bad enough, maybe you’ll find me again, but for now... ” He twitched the barrel of his gun to the side, and the man stepped aside accordingly and let Barrett stroll on by...

... then the stranger whirled around, grabbed the outlaw by the scruff of the neck, and forced him over the railing. Most of the patrons had high-tailed it out of there the moment the gunfire started, and the few that stayed to watch the spectacle regretted it as the two men fell onto the poker table directly below them, splinters of wood and playing cards flying everywhere. Barrett’s gun went skidding away when they landed, but the stranger was in no shape to go after it: the lower part of the white emblem on his shirt was slowly turning red. Despite that, he propped himself up and pointed at one of the men nearby, then to the stairs. “You... go help that woman... ” he gasped. It was all he had time to do before Barrett cracked him over the back of the head with a busted chair leg. He sprawled flat, unable to stop the outlaw as he flipped him over and ripped the mask away.

“Well, how do you like that?” Barrett said, glaring at the battered visage of Hannibal Hawkes. “I go to all the trouble of killin’ you, an’ you ain’t got the decency to stay dead!” He knelt down, grabbing a handful of his former partner’s shirt and pulling him close. “Didn’t I teach you enough of a lesson last time, Hank?”

“Don’t... don’t call me Hank... hated that name... ”

“Sorry, *Hank*, but ‘Hannibal’ was too damn long a name to call out in the middle of a fight.” He grinned as he cocked his fist back. “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure they put your proper Christian title on your tombstone.” Hannibal wasn’t about ready to quit, however, and grabbed a broken glass lying nearby, jabbing it into Barrett’s side. He howled and let go of Hannibal, who cocked back his own fist and blasted the outlaw in the

jaw for good measure.

“There... now the odds... are even again,” Hannibal said as he climbed unsteadily to his feet, a hand pressed to the reopened wound — he knew that he should’ve given his body more time to heal before heading out after his ex-partners, but that would have meant possibly losing track of them completely. Now he was paying the price for his impatience. “You’re coming with me,” he said, stepping towards Barrett laying on the floor, “like it or... *whuff!*” He doubled over as Barrett’s foot came up and collided with his stomach.

“How many times do I got to tell ya: *not likely,*” Barrett growled. “An’ even if you do manage to haul me in, do you really think I ain’t gonna tell ‘em ‘bout what *you’ve* done? Hell, I’ll make sure that every damn person I pass on the way to the gallows knows what you really are: a ly-in’, stealin’, murderin’ sonovabitch, just like me.” He cast his eyes about the saloon until he saw his gun, laying not more than ten feet away, then flashed Hannibal a grin as he began to stagger towards it. “I hope you like wearin’ that mask, ‘cause you’ll never be able to show your face again. Every lawman in the West will be lookin’ to put Hannibal Hawkes in a pine box.”

The young man was holding his gut, fresh blood seeping out from between his fingers, but he stared hard into Barrett’s eyes nonetheless. “No, they won’t,” he replied, “because Hannibal Hawkes is already dead... you killed him, remember?”

The grin quickly faded from Barrett’s face as he realized that, while this may look and sound like the Hannibal Hawkes he’d pushed around for the past six years, there was something entirely new in those eyes, something that couldn’t be fazed by his threatening remarks, something that didn’t even feel the serious wounds inflicted on the young man’s body... and it scared the Hell out of him. Barrett dove for the gun, but Hannibal rushed forward at the same time, impossibly fast considering the beating he’d already taken. The two men grappled, just as they’d done weeks before, the gun in their mutual grip wavering between them, hammer cocked.

Then it went off, and Barrett slumped onto Hannibal, blood pouring out of the gaping hole in his throat. Hannibal pushed the dying man away

and stood up, both the emblem on his shirt and his hands now completely red. He heard someone on the second floor call out for help with the woman, but he was in no shape to help anyone. The gun was still in Hannibal's hand, and he dropped it onto Barrett's unmoving chest before turning towards the door — the couple of men still in the saloon proper stood clear as he passed by, stepping out into the street.

Turning his face up to the lightning-filled sky, Hannibal closed his eyes and let the rain soak him through, washing away the blood staining him.

"Who in the world could that be?" The sheriff of Fox Grove had been catching a quick forty winks, feet propped up on the desk, when someone started banging on the jailhouse door. With all the mysteries cropping up in the past month, he'd gotten precious little sleep. First there was the sudden, unexplained disappearance of Franklin Hawkes and his son, followed closely by the discovery that their store had been ransacked — whomever had done it didn't take much, just some ammunition, clothes, and a few supplies, but they'd left behind some rags soaked in blood, and the sheriff didn't like the look of that. Then while checking with the lawmen further away from Fox Grove in the hopes that either of the Hawkes had been seen elsewhere, he came across an odd bit of information: a wanted notice for a young man named Hank Hawkes. The physical description of the outlaw was similar to that of Hannibal, but there was no picture to verify the sheriff's growing suspicion.

Now he was getting unknown visitors in the middle of the night. Rubbing sleep from his eyes, he opened the door only to find no one there. Then he saw a man dressed in black standing beside four horses out in the street, all joined by a tether attached to the lead horse. On the two in the middle sat a pair of dirty, bruised, and disheveled men, gags in their mouths and their hands lashed to the saddlehorns, and tied down to the one in the rear was a very dead man. "What's all this about?" the sheriff asked.

"These men are responsible for the murder of Franklin Hawkes. The body's buried up on Pine Ridge." The man in black jerked a thumb at his still-living captives, saying, "These two should be able to take you right

to him.” He then reached into a saddlebag on the lead horse and pulled out a couple of cotton sacks, tossing them at the sheriff’s feet. “They’re also the ones who robbed the Louisville express about three months back. I couldn’t recover all the money, though, but that’s better’n nothin’.”

The sheriff stared in disbelief as the man untied the horses from his own — he’d spent a month running down every lead he had and getting nowhere, and this stranger just shows up and hands these guys over like it’s no big deal. He couldn’t decide if he should thank the man or cuss him out. There was still one question left unanswered, however: “What about Hannibal Hawkes? What happened to him?”

The man in black hesitated, twisting the end of the rope around his fist. “He’s... gone,” the man said finally. “I don’t think anyone will ever see him again.” He then handed the rope over to the sheriff, giving him a brief opportunity to see under the hat pulled low over the stranger’s face — though a mask covered his eyes, the sheriff thought he saw something familiar in those features.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” the sheriff said, picking his words carefully. “I don’t rightly know how he was involved in all this, but if he was around, I’m sure we could have worked it all out.” If this was who he thought it was, he hoped that the message got through, but the man didn’t respond, only walked over to his coal-black horse and mounted up. “You know,” the sheriff continued, “people are gonna ask who brought these guys in. You got a name, son?”

Another hesitation, this time with his head bowed down and cocked slightly, as if someone was whispering in his ear, then he straightened up in the saddle. “Nighthawk.”

Makes sense, the sheriff thought: ‘nighthawk’ was a cowboy term for a man that worked the range during the night, keeping an eye out for rustlers and anyone else up to dirty tricks under cover of darkness... and judging by the men he’d brought in, he seemed up to the job. “Well, I thank you kindly for the help, Nighthawk. You plan on stickin’ around?”

The man took a slow look around at the moonlit buildings, then said with a note of sadness, “I think it would be best if I moved on. Just make

sure Franklin Hawkes gets a proper burial... let him and his son rest in peace." The sheriff gave a nod, and the man who called himself Nighthawk rode off without another word, the darkness quickly obscuring him and his mount from view.

Deke and Byron were hanged for their crimes, but the mystery surrounding the death of Franklin Hawkes didn't stop at the gallows. For one, there was the lack of a corpse for Hannibal Hawkes, which certainly surprised the two outlaws when the makeshift grave was dug up. Despite this, the sheriff had Hannibal declared dead, and even went so far as to erect a headstone for him alongside his father's, though there was no body to go with it. His insistence on this raised some eyebrows, especially when word got around about an outlaw with a similar name — the sheriff shrugged it all off, and said that, if this 'Hank Hawkes' ever turned up somewhere, he'd check into it. By the time winter rolled around, most of the folks in Fox Grove had dropped the matter, and the whole incident began to drift into that nebulous area known as "local legend".

But as the memory of Hannibal Hawkes faded away in Missouri, another name was cropping up frequently in the saloons and back alleys further west, accompanied by stories of a masked man dressed in black who roamed the plains, taking down any criminal who dared to cross his path. No one knew where he came from, or why he'd chosen to serve the cause of justice in such a way, but one thing was certain:

If you preyed on the innocent, you'd better hope that Nighthawk never found out about it.

THE END

If you enjoyed this story, you can find more tales of your favorite DC heroes at DC2 Universe.

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Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Prologue

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Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Part 1 (of 4): Once Upon a Time in Texas.

The origin of Jonah Hex begins here! Before he could become the most feared bounty hunter in the Old West, he had to survive childhood. You're guaranteed to never look at the man the same way again!

Weird Western Quarterly #2 (2006)

Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Part 2 (of 4): Into the Wilderness.

The origin of Jonah Hex continues! Just when it seems things can't get any worse, Jonah's father makes a fateful decision, and the path of the boy's life takes an unexpected turn. It's frontier action at its finest as Hex moves closer to his destiny!

Weird Western Quarterly #3 (2006)

Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Part 3 (of 4): Life During Wartime.

The origin of Jonah Hex continues! He's finally got the life he wants, but will Jonah be able to keep it when war breaks out between North and South? Sides are taken, choices are made, and Hex dons a familiar-looking uniform for the first time!

Weird Western Quarterly #4 (2006)

Jonah Hex: Death & Gunsmoke, Part 4 (of 4): When Jonah Comes Marching Home.

The final chapter in the origin of Jonah Hex! As the Civil War ends, Hex's new life begins, but first he faces an old enemy for the last time. It's the moment you've all been waiting for, and it ain't pretty! Don't say we didn't warn you!

Weird Western Quarterly #6 (2007)

The Vigilante: A Lonely Soldier Away From Home

Weird Western Quarterly #7 (2007)

Bat Lash: In for a Penny, In for a Pounding

Weird Western Quarterly #8 (2007)

Windrunner: Inherit the Wind, Part 1 (of 2) - Secrets.

Before Barry Allen, before Jay Garrick, another man had been granted the power of the Speed Force. But who he was before he'd obtained those powers has always been a mystery...until now. A young man's quest for answers becomes entangled in magic and riddles in the first half of this 2-part tale!

Weird Western Quarterly #12 (2008)

It's the first annual Christmas issue of Weird Western Quarterly featuring a holiday tale with the Old West speedster, Windrunner as well as a Jonah Hex vignette, "Prelude to a Reckoning."

Weird Western Quarterly #9 (2008)

Windrunner: Inherit the Wind Part 2 (of 2) - Revelations.

Special extra-large issue! Torn between civilization and the wilderness, Chris Maxwell tries to find out where he fits...but when a strange old Indian shaman enters his life, he finds himself thrust into a power struggle beyond anything he can imagine, and a new legend of the West is born in a flash!

Justice League #15 (2008)

Lead Us Not Into Desecration, Part 1 (of 3).

What starts as a typical day for a group of Leaguers turns deadly as they are attacked by an unknown enemy. Who is the Lord of Time, and what diabolical scheme does he have that threatens both the past and the present with destruction? You won't want to miss what happens at the end of this issue!

Weird Western Quarterly #10 (2008)

Lead Us Not Into Desecration, Part 2 (of 3).

It's 1878: Do you know where your heroes are? Lost in time, their memories gone, four members of the Justice League have been marked for death by the Lord of Time. And if they want to make it out of this one alive, they're gonna have to rely on the kindness of strangers...namely Jonah Hex, Scalphunter, Bat Lash, and making her DC2 debut, Cinnamon!

Justice League #16 (2008)

Lead Us Not Into Desecration, Part 3 (of 3).

It's past and present versus the future as the Justice League teams up with some of the greatest heroes of the Old West to take down the Lord of Time! Can they stop his scheme before it's too late, or will Arizona be blown right off the map?

Weird Western Quarterly #13 (2009)

Jonah Hex: Children of Heaven

When Jonah Hex gets caught up in a fight between Chinese railroad workers and their white bosses, he thinks it's a pretty straightforward affair. But after meeting a young Chinese woman named Mei Ling, his life gets more complicated than he likes.

Weird Western Quarterly #16 (2009)

Weird Western Quarterly: The Better Part of Valor.

Rogues Gallery #17 (2009)

Rogues Gallery: El Diablo.

Legends of the Old West still resonate even today. One of the most persistent legends is of El Diablo and Lazarus Lane.

Journey with us back in time to the yesteryear of the Old West... as Rogues Gallery continues to put its spotlight on our guest writers...

This time by the acclaimed Susan Hillwig.

Weird Western Quarterly #20 (2010)

Weird Western Quarterly: The Reckoning.

Driven to the brink by the events of the previous issue, Jonah Hex goes on the warpath...but at what cost?

Weird Western Quarterly #19 (2010)

Weird Western Quarterly: Domestic Disturbance.

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray #1 (2010)

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray: The First Day of the Rest of Your Life.

The Blackest Night is over, and the Brightest Day has begun for twelve newly-resurrected people...but unbeknownst to all, there's a thirteenth person that got brought back as well. A hero to some,

a villain to others, Jonah Hex once again walks amongst the living, and Death itself is a closer companion than ever!

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray #2 (2010)

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray: Back In Black.

Wait a minute, how in blazes can we have a second issue if Hex was killed in the first? Well, y'see, that's the funny thing...

What, you think we're gonna spoil the surprise here? Go read the issue and find out for yourself!

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray #3 (2010)

Jonah Hex: Shades of Gray.

What started out as a quiet visit to Paradise Corners has turned into a big mess, and now Jonah has to decide between running for his life or making up for past mistakes.

Weird Western Quarterly #21 (2011)

Weird Western Quarterly: Brothers in Arms.

In the midst of the Civil War, Scalphunter and Matt Savage try to help a mysterious black woman ferrying slaves out of the South, while circumstances beyond their control threaten to drive the brothers apart.

Weird Western Quarterly #22 (2011)

Weird Western Quarterly: How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?

Bat Lash once again crosses paths with Penny "Dreadful" Dreasney. Has the gambler learned his lesson from their last encounter? Yeah, I don't think so either.

Weird Western Quarterly #23 (2012)

Weird Western Quarterly: At War With the Devil, Part One.

As the North and the South begin to clash, Windrunner finds himself on the front lines of a different, more personal war. When the smoke clears at the end of this issue, you'll know this is only the beginning of a battle that's been a long time coming.



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