

THE
DOCTOR
AND
THE KID

A decorative flourish consisting of several elegant, swirling lines that curve upwards and to the right, ending in small circular motifs.



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THE BUNTLINE SPECIAL—A WEIRD WEST TALE

MIKE RESNICK

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AND
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A WEIRD
WEST TALE



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To Carol, as always,

And to Ralph Roberts,

Writer

Editor

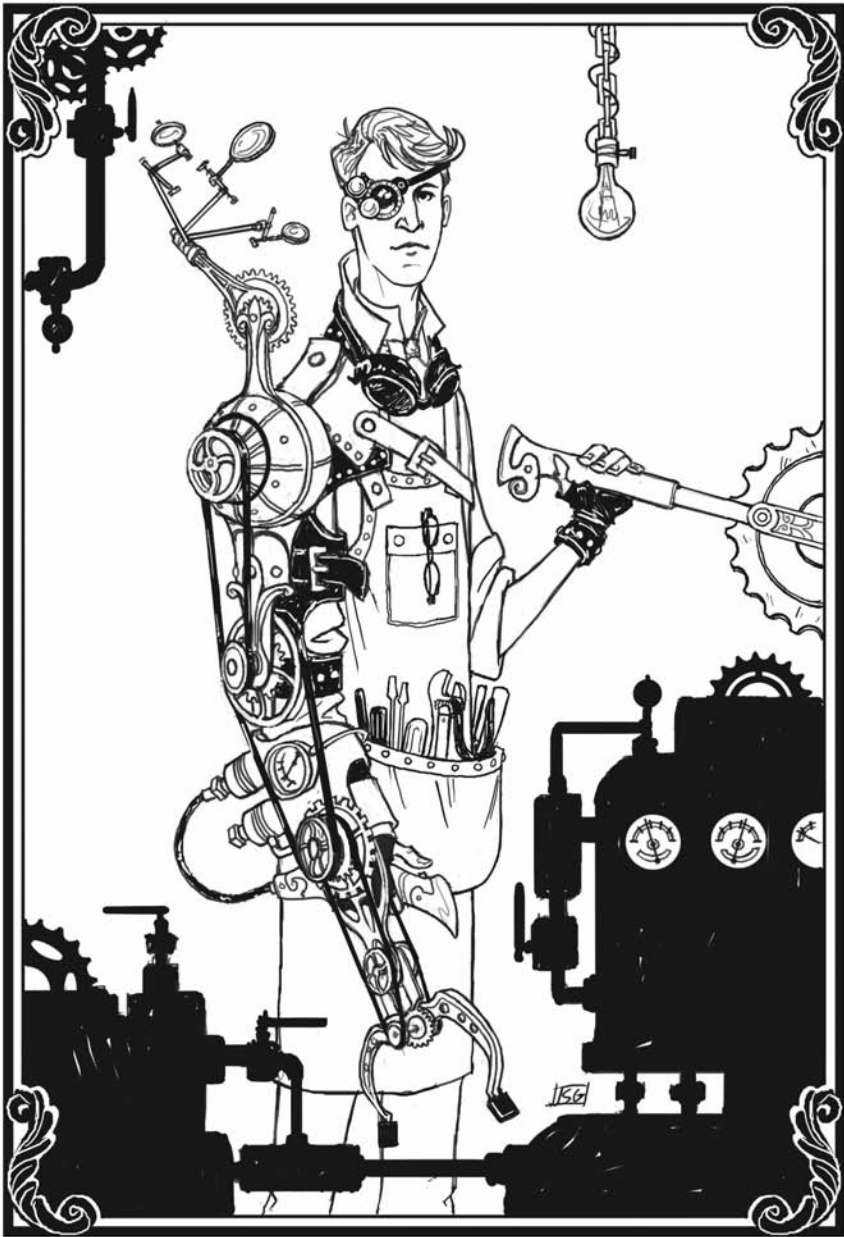
Publisher

Producer

Entrepreneur

Computer Guru

Friend of three decades





PROLOGUE

From the pages of the March 25, 1882, issue of the Leadville Bulletin:

THE REMARKABLE MISS ANTHONY

Susan B. Anthony, the famed suffragette, will be spending the coming week in Leadville, where she will be giving a number of speeches. Her reputation has reached beyond our shores, and she will be touring Europe, speaking all over the continent, next year.

She will be signing autographs this Saturday at the Baptist Church bake sale.

NEW ARRIVALS

Dr. John H. Holliday and his companion, Kathryn Elder, have arrived from Arizona and have announced their intentions to settle here. Dr. Holliday has

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rented a studio where he plans to set up his dentistry business, and is also said to have invested in the Monarch Saloon and Casino.

Holliday was a participant in the famous altercation in Tombstone, Arizona, last autumn, which has come to be known as the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Both he and Wyatt Earp have been absolved of any guilt or complicity in the incident by the local Tombstone court.

R. I. P.

Leadville resident Abner Fuller was shot and killed while visiting family members in New Mexico. Two eyewitnesses claim the murderer was the famed desperado Henry McCarty, alias William Bonney, alias Billy the Kid. A warrant has been issued for his arrest, joining numerous other warrants. If anyone has any information concerning his whereabouts, please report it to the Bullet and we will telegraph the information to the New Mexican authorities.

Mr. Fuller's body had been shipped to Leadville and will arrive on Tuesday. Funeral services and burial are expected to be Wednesday afternoon.

ANOTHER DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Famed British writer Oscar Wilde filled the Tabor Opera House to capacity with his humorous lecture last night, and will speak again this Friday before heading back East to conclude his American tour. He was seen dining with Susan B. Anthony last night at the new Captain Waldo's restaurant, which replaced the original that was lost in a fire last spring.

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FAMOUS GUNFIGHTER ACQUITTED

“Texas Jack” Vermillion, a former associate of the Earp Brothers in Arizona, and a participant in the questionable police action now known as Wyatt Earp’s Vendetta Ride, was found innocent of the killing of Wilbur McCoy in the alley between Shale’s General Store and the Buntline Manufacturing Plant, just off Front Street, on March 14. Dr. John H. Holliday and two other bystanders testified that Vermillion shot McCoy in self-defense. The jury deliberated for less than ten minutes before reaching its verdict.

BRASS MOLE FINDS NEW VEIN

The remarkable Brass Mole, the electric machine designed by Mr. Thomas Edison and built by Mr. Ned Buntline, uncovered a new silver vein in the Montrassor Mine at the previously unattainable depth of 1,637 feet. According to the Cornwall Assay Office, this is as rich a sample as any yet brought in.

NEW GAME DEBUTS SATURDAY

The sport of baseball, so popular in the United States, will debut here on Saturday afternoon, when the Gunnison Prairie Dogs take on the Twin Lakes Six-Shooters. Tickets are ten cents apiece until sold out. Come see what all the excitement is about!



HOLLIDAY WAS CUTTING INTO HIS STEAK at the Sacred Cow when the large shadow fell over his table. He looked up to see an elegantly dressed pudgy man standing next to him.

“Are you the notorious Doc Holliday?” asked the man.

Holliday checked to make sure the man was unarmed. “I am,” he replied.

The man extended a hand. “I am the notorious Oscar Wilde. I wonder if I might join you?”

Holliday shrugged. “Suit yourself.”

Wilde sat down opposite him. “I didn’t see you at my lecture last night.”

“Good.”

“Good?” repeated Wilde, arching an eyebrow.

“It means you’re not hallucinating.”

Wilde threw back his head and laughed. “I *knew* I’d like you!”

“I’m flattered,” said Holliday. “Not many people do.” He gestured to the bottle on the table. “Pour yourself a drink.”

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"Thank you. I will." Wilde reached for the half-empty bottle and filled a small glass. "I am told that you are the only shootist who might have read my writings."

"Johnny Ringo probably did, but he's dead now." Holliday paused. "I hope," he added. "The only other one might be John Wesley Hardin. He's been in jail the last few years, but I hear he's studying to be a lawyer when he gets out, so at least it's safe to assume he can read." He paused. "Though I've met my share of lawyers who couldn't."

Wilde laughed again. "I'll be speaking again on Friday. May I count on seeing you in the audience?"

Holliday shook his head. "No, I'll be playing cards at the Monarch, over at 320 Harrison Street."

"Surely you can stop gambling for an hour or two to come hear me speak."

"Do I ask you to skip speaking and come on over to watch me gamble?"

"Speaking's part of my livelihood," protested Wilde.

"Gambling's part of mine."

"Touché."

"Whatever that means," said Holliday.

The waiter came by and asked Wilde for his order.

"I'll have what my friend is having," replied Wilde.

"Including a bottle of whiskey?"

Wilde smiled. "No, I'll just borrow his."

"Within the limits of propriety," said Holliday. Wilde looked for a smile, but couldn't find one.

Wilde shifted his weight, trying to arrange his bulk comfortably on the plain wooden chair. "So what is the notorious Doc Holliday doing in Leadville?"

"Trying to be less notorious," replied Holliday.

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“Seriously,” said Wilde. “Is there some gunfight brewing?”

“I hope not.”

“Surely you jest.”

“Look at me,” said Holliday irritably. “I’m a dying man, wracked with consumption. I can’t weigh a hundred and thirty pounds. I’m a dentist by trade, but I’ve pretty much given it up, because you can’t keep your clientele when you keep coughing blood in their faces.” He stared at Wilde. “There’s a very good sanitarium in Leadville. I’ll move into it when I can’t function on my own any more.” A brief pause. “I came up here to die, Mr. Wilde.”

“Excuse me,” said Wilde. “I didn’t know.”

“You’re damned near the only one.”

“I haven’t heard anything about a sanitarium here in Leadville,” admitted Wilde.

Holliday coughed into a handkerchief. “There are other good ones, I’m told. I came here because everyone told me the air was pure and clean at ten thousand feet, and it is.” He grimaced. “What they didn’t tell me was that it’s so damned thin that the birds prefer walking.”

Wilde nodded his head and smiled. “I may borrow that line from you someday.”

“There’s no charge. You’re welcome to the consumption, too.”

“You fascinate me,” said Wilde, pulling a thin cigar out of his pocket and lighting it up. “I may have to write a play about you.”

“For a British audience?” said Holliday. “If you insist on wasting your time and money, come on over and do it at the Monarch.”

“You own it?” asked Wilde.

“Part of it.”

“Then why not call it Doc Holliday’s, and put a huge sign out front?”

“Because there’s fifty or sixty men that would like to see me dead,” answered Holliday. “Why make it easier for them?”

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Wilde leaned forward. "Did you really kill all those men you've been credited with?"

"Probably not."

Wilde studied his face. "I can't tell if you're kidding or not."

"I'm supposed to have killed two men who were five states apart on the very same day." Holliday smiled. "They must have thought I was riding Aristides."

"Aristides?" repeated Wilde.

"He won the very first Kentucky Derby, which my friend Bat Masterson assures me is on the road to becoming a very important race."

"Bat Masterson? What does a gunman know about horse-racing?"

"We're not all one-dimensional shootists, Mr. Wilde," said Holliday. "I'm a dentist. Masterson is a sports journalist. And it looks like Hardin is going to be a lawyer." Holliday snorted in amusement. "I'll bet it won't stop him from killing people. It just means he'll have a defense lawyer he can trust."

"What about this Billy the Kid that everyone's talking about?" asked Wilde.

"I'm not talking about him."

"I mean, what else does *he* do?"

Holliday shrugged. "I hear he's barely twenty years old. I don't imagine he's had much time to find a profession yet."

"Besides killing people, you mean," said Wilde.

"That's only a profession if someone pays you to do it," answered Holliday. "I've never been paid a penny. Neither have most of us. And if you do it for free, no matter how reluctantly, then it's not a profession, it's an art form."

"Or a hobby," suggested Wilde. "How reluctant *are* you about killing people?"

"You make it sound like it's all I do, Mr. Wilde," said Holliday,

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and Wilde couldn't tell if he was being sardonic, angry, or merely conversational. "Occasionally I eat and sleep, and even pull a tooth or two." A brief pause. "But I will say that I never killed a man who didn't deserve killing."

"If you're looking for men who deserve killing, you might spend some time with Miss Anthony," observed Wilde. "I had dinner with her last night, and I gather she's had enough death threats to fill a small book."

"Believe it or not, Mr. Wilde," said Holliday, "I have spent most of my adult life trying to avoid confrontations, not seeking them out." He paused. "But I think you may overestimate the dangers to Miss Anthony."

"The threats are real," insisted Wilde. "She showed me some of the letters. Semi-literate, most of them, but dangerous."

"If anyone harms her, or even attempts to harm her, we're likely to have a replay of *Lysistrata*," said Holliday with a smile.

"You know the story of *Lysistrata*?" said Wilde, surprised.

"I have had a classical education, Mr. Wilde," replied Holliday. "Why, I've even read *The Nihilists*."

"You have?" exclaimed Wilde. His chest puffed up with pride. "What did you think of it?"

"I thought it showed promise."

Wilde's face dropped. "Only promise?"

"You're a young man with your whole career ahead of you," said Holliday. "I'm a dying man who is difficult to impress."

"It's a shame you won't live long enough to see the United States spread all the way to the Pacific Coast."

"No one currently alive may be around for that," answered Holliday. "It all depends on Tom Edison."

"Thomas *Alva* Edison?" said Wilde. "The inventor?" Holliday nodded. "What does he have to do with it?"

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“Didn’t you notice the electric street lights when you came to town?” asked Holliday. “And if you arrived by stagecoach the likelihood is that you rode the Bunt Line, one of those bullet-proof brass coaches that’s powered by one of Edison’s motors and requires no horses.”

“I came by train,” answered Wilde. “And I knew about the lights. I knew Edison had set up an office—or would it be a laboratory?—here in Leadville. But what does that have to do with expanding to the Pacific Coast?”

“The United States ends at the Mississippi River,” said Holliday. “It would like to extend to the Pacific, but so far the magic of the Indian medicine men, especially a pair known as Hook Nose and Geronimo, have stopped them. Oh, we have some towns and ranches here and there, but we’re here under sufferance. And since Edison is currently our greatest mind, the government has paid him to come out West and see what he can learn about the magic and how to counteract it.”

“He was in Tombstone last year, wasn’t he?” asked Wilde.

“Yes. He still spends some time there.”

“And now he’s in Leadville?”

Holliday nodded. “That’s right. The silver mines in Tombstone are just about played out, so he came up here with an invention that can extract silver faster than any ten-man crew you ever saw.”

“*You* were in Tombstone last year.” Holliday nodded again. “And now you’re in Leadville too.” Wilde frowned and stared at him. “It can’t be a coincidence.” He suddenly smiled. “Can it?”

“I don’t mine silver. He doesn’t gamble.”

“You didn’t answer the question.”

“You noticed.” Holliday, his dinner finished, stood up and left a silver dollar on the table. “Tell the waiter that includes his tip.”

“I think I’ll visit the Monarch later,” said Wilde. “I’d like to see

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you in non-violent action. I might even risk a dollar or two at the faro table.”

“Suit yourself.”

Holliday walked to the door, buttoned his coat, and stepped out into the chilly Colorado night air. The Sacred Cow was on Third Street, three blocks from the Monarch Saloon, and he decided to take a short cut, saving half a block by cutting down an alley. Suddenly he was aware of a large snake, some ten feet long. Its head rose up until it was looking directly into his eyes. Holliday knew what was coming, and waited patiently. A moment later the snake vanished, to be replaced by an Apache brave in buckskins.

“Goyathlay sends you greetings, White Eyes.”

“My eyes are bloodshot,” answered Holliday. “What does Geronimo want?”

“He wants to remind you that the two of you had an agreement once, in Tombstone.”

“We made a deal,” agreed Holliday. “But it’s over and done with, and I assume we’re at hazard again. What now?”

“Nothing.”

“All I’m supposed to do is remember we had a deal for a few days in Tombstone?”

But he found that he was speaking to empty air.