

BODY COUNT

By his own reckoning, he killed something like 30 already. The kid looked all of fifteen, but his death wouldn't worry him none.

In a blur he pulled his Colt, throwing his free hand to the hammer to fire off a round. As he did so he could feel a weight holding the hand back - slowing him down, just for split second, it felt like two dozen hands grabbing hold of him - it wasn't long but it was long enough for the boy to take aim and fire a single bullet right through his heart.

As he lay there in the dust and blood he looked up and counted the blurred shapes. "26".



CONTRACT KILLER

Satan revelled in the simplicity of the deal, six bullets for the man's soul.

Every bullet would find its target and every target would die and the Devil would collect.

But more delicious than that, any minute now, having signed the contract, the man's wife and children will run in-looking, to all the world, like the people the man wanted revenge on - and he will kill them with three perfect shots.

But just as Satan was warming to this thought, the man shot him in the head.



EDITORIAL



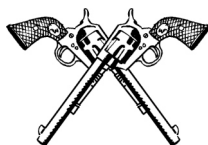
Howdy Pardner!

It's the *Wyrd West* issue - I've wanted to do this since I came up with the idea to do A4 - it was, of course, harder than I would have liked and I abandoned as many stories as I ended up using (god I hope I picked the right ones).

Editorial help this issue from Matt and John Yuan.

As ever all correspondence is welcome at pjholden@gmail.com

Best



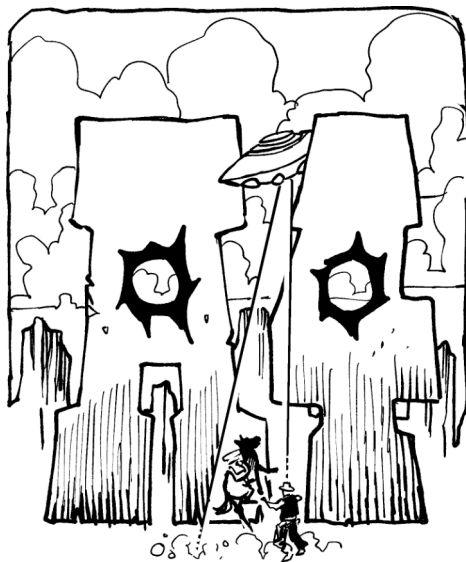
THE BADGE

The badge glinted in the moonlight, giving his position away, dammit. He pocketed it when he realised. And then it came.

A blur of motion and teeth, he fired six bullets in to it, but it acted like they were nothing. It lunged towards him, taking a chunk out of his side. Where he'd pocketed the badge.

The creature fell back choking, the sheriff stood grabbing for more bullets, but the thing was dying.

Killed, the sheriff reckoned, by that damn silver badge.



Issue Three Autumn 2023
by PJ Holden
www.pauljholden.com/a4

SNAKE OIL

It was stupid really. He would wander in to town, make a song and dance of his elixir to cries of "snake oil" and while that was going on his partner would pick every pocket possible. Shortly after, they'd hightail it out of town, chased by furious locals having sold nothing but at least they'd be loaded down with coins.

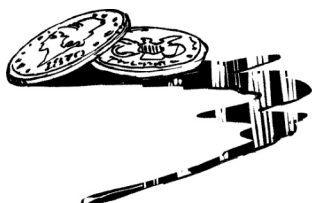
It was a good routine and he chuckled to himself, can you imagine if they knew it really worked? Still here's to the next 150 years.



THE CATHOUSE

Eventually the town would be dry, but for now, the saloon doors opened and willing folk would enter, pocket full of change and happy to spend it.

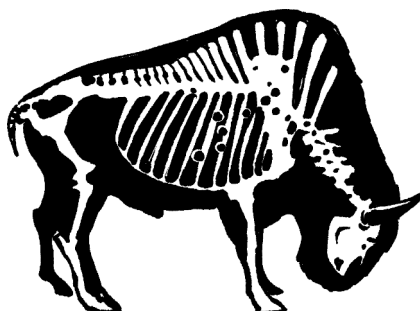
Loud, obnoxious men would go to the rooms with the women, rich on wealth made mining and spend thirty minutes or more there, then leave, woozy and drained of cash and blood.



GHOST PLAINS

Across a million square miles 30 million ghosts wander, retracing steps their species first made over 140,000 years ago.

Killed to help facilitate a genocide, flesh left to rot along with souls.



SIX SHOOTER

ONE. a rat. Small. Scared. Not sure if he hit it. He was 10 years old.

TWO. His horse. Pappy said he had to, as it was in pain and he was 16.

THREE. One of three bandits, chasing their coach they were on. He was nearly a man.

FOUR. His best friend. They'd grown up together.

FIVE. His wife. His childhood sweetheart.

SIX.

