

"A Wild West Hero"

By Chris Spendlove

I swung open the doors of the dusty saloon, brushing the dirt of the street off of my Stetson. I quickly scanned the room for any signs of trouble; none of the regular trouble makers was there, so I walked on in. Striding up to the polished birch wood bar, I slapped a shiny nickel onto the counter. "Whiskey," I said. I was in the mood for a punch in the mouth. And no sooner had I thought this, I was spun around by an overly-rough and none-too-friendly hand and got exactly what I has asked for. The pain exploded in my mouth as I toppled over the barstools and fell with a sickening thud to the dusty floor. When you've been in as many bar fights as I have, you notice all of the subtle intricacies: first, the piano player stops playing. That's when you know you're in trouble. Then, you hear the dull screech of tables sliding away, the scrape of boots, the scuffling of the cowards running out of the bar. Then there's this silence; in general, people are afraid to get involved. It's happened more than once that someone's gotten cut or shot, and no one wants that. But then, as if triggered by an invisible hand, the fellas go at it, and all hell breaks loose. That's where we'll pick up with me. As I simultaneously struggled to get up and take inventory of my teeth, I noticed the turquoise-studded, black leather, maliciously-spurred boots of my favorite guy in the whole blasted world: Greasy Grant. "Swell," I thought. "And here I was, about to take a load off and enjoy me a--" But I didn't get to finish the thought, because just then, those same boots I'd been admiring delivered a swift kick to my ribs. Don't worry--it certainly left a mark. I scrambled to my feet, gasping for air like a fish out of water. I wasn't met with a very pretty sight; the greasy, filthy, nasty-mustachio'd mug of Greasy Grant filled my swimming view. He spat in my face, an equally filthy and disgusting event, and I noticed that he was accompanied by his regular posse, the Greasy Gang. Not very creative. I would have called 'em the Low Down, Filthy, Mother-disappointing Gang, but that was just me.

"You got a lotta nerve to come back here, Spendlove," he spat the last syllable of my name. His gang of geniuses cackled. I hated the way he said my name. It made my blood boil.

"Just couldn't stay away, Grant," I said, spitting some blood onto his boots. "You know how the women are here. Oh, wait. They don't want nothin' to do with ya. Maybe if ya bathed every once in a while..." You guessed it. He slammed his black-gloved fist into the side of my face. I guess he didn't take much stock in verbal agreements. I got up again, and, as he swung again, I grabbed his arm. "Not that old move again, Grant. I'm gettin' tired of your one-trick-pony act here. Lemme show you somethin' new." I twisted his arm aroundbehind him, faced the varmint towards his buddies, and kicked into the small of his back. Grant went flying into the crowd of miscreants. After a moment of confusion and a bit of colorful vocabulary, Greasy Grant was back on his feet. We struggled for a bit, punching and kicking, me trying to not get too dirty from his greasiness, and him not trying to get too clean from my well-groomed... well, everything. I tell ya. If I was day, Grant was night. I liked my whiskey, he liked his chocolate milk. I liked my women, and Grant... well, the women folk didn't like Grant too much. At any rate, after breaking a chair over my head, and me shattering a bottle over his, we tumbled out into the street, kicking and gouging in the mud and the blood and the beer. I noticed Grant reaching for his gun, but I got mine first, a pearl handled Colt .44, given to me by a lovely innkeeper in San Antone. He laughed, a guttural, phlegm-filled laugh.

"You done good, Spendlove," he spat. I cringed. "But not good enough." I heard the click of a hammer behind me, and as I wheeled around (facing the bar), I was looking down the barrel of a gun. I looked

up, and it was Sherrif Clark. He pulled the trigger, and a bang of gunpowder went off....

I opened my eyes, alive, and looked up.

"SURPRISE!!" shouted a crowd of people standing in saloon. There was a banner hung over the door that read "HAPPY BIRTHDAY SPENDLOVE" in big ol' letters, and everyone was holding one of those fake party-popper guns. I nearly died just the same.