

mand of a crazy little wizard. What's that? You say walking dead don't fit into a Western setting? You wanna bet?

The plot summary is fairly simple. Jonah Hex rides into Mud Creek, Texas, and finds himself in all kinds of trouble. His partner get shot, and Jonah's the only suspect. Or is he? Could his wild tale of walking dead and corpse stealing circus freaks be true?

All the old Jonah Hex trademarks are present. Jonah does not introduce himself when he doesn't have to, nor does he try to get by on reputation; he leaves it up to other people to recognize his face and try to guess his intentions ("Reckon where he'll go, Pa?" "No, son. But when he gets there, gonna be a bad day for someone..."). A rank-smelling ceegar still juts from the good side of his mouth. When people realize who they're talking to, they're either scared gutless or they get real hostile. He still hits what he aims for most of the time. And his dark sense of humour still shines through: asked how he came by his nasty scar, he replies, "Damn toothpick slipped."

Jonah's also got a suicidal streak of nobility which pops up every so often and forces him to be violently gallant. There's a beautiful scene in issue one where a pair of rednecked townfolk are making life hard for their "Injun" waitress. They spill beer on their table, and make her lick it up with her tongue. Then they make her lick their boots.

That's the plan, anyway. As one of the rednecks pushes the lady's face into the beer, Jonah sees fit to step in. Before the scene's over, the rednecks are the ones licking boots. Of course they take a bit of convincing first. As Slow-Go Smith notes: "Ain' that cow hocky on the toe, there?" Yum, yum. I do dearly love black comedy.

In fact, there's an awful lot of black humour

in *Two-Gun Mojo*. The writer, Joe R. Lansdale, has written horror westerns before (*Dead in the West*, *Magic Wagon*) and the work he's done here is incredible. The plot and dialogue are brisk and crisp and disturbing. The sense of humour he displays is downright twisted. You will laugh, but you'll make sure no one's watching when you do.

He does a great job on the bit players as well, which is unusual in a comic book. The inhabitants of Mud Creek make the Addams Family look like the Bradys. They stuff dead guys and take pictures for postcards. Other corpses they charge you cash to look at ("They're flaking a little," says the ghoulish little guy in the checkerboard suit," but they still look good. Cost ya a nickel to see 'em.'). When Jonah's friend Slow-Go Smith tries to turn in the Traywick gang (or more precisely, their heads) for the bounty, the sheriff gets downright uncomfortable. Seems some townfolks shot up some guys who were supposed to be the Traywicks. Realizing his error, the sheriff mutters, "Hell. Hope them other fellas ain't nobody anybody knows." The aforementioned rednecks at the saloon are unrepentant, even in the face of a crazyman's revolver. Orphan choirs sing at hanging. Little old grandmothers turn into crazed, pistol-packing vigilantes when their "entertainment" (Jonah, about to be hanged) escapes. All this and more lurks between the covers of *Two-Gun Mojo*.

The terrific dialogue is perfectly complimented by the book's great artwork. The penciler, Tim Truman, plays each scene for all it's worth, with dramatic panel angles and overblown action that makes the work leap out at you. His backgrounds are likewise terrific, so authentic you can almost smell the horse manure. Sam Glanzman, the inker, does a likewise grand job on the hatching and cross-hatching.

They've given Jonah's scar a new, even more striking look... you'll have to see it to know what I mean. It really looks painful.

Now, I'd hate to sound like a DC hype man, so I have to point out a minor flaw. The poses in some panels look kind of awkward, as if the characters could fall over at any second. It only happens every once in a while, and still looks cool, so it's not a big problem.

The book is aimed at mature readers. It's got a bucket of gore, a lot of violence and even a tiny bit of nudity. If that wasn't enough to make you lock it away from your kids, there's that sense of humour to worry about--it'd go way over their heads.

All things considered, this is a great book. It reminds me of the good ol' days of Jonah, and the "*Unforgiven* meets *Night of the Living Dead*" story doesn't seem all that strange. Once you've read the book, it seems downright logical. After all, in the words of John Albano, Jonah's creator, "He had no friends, this Jonah Hex, but he did have two companions. One was Death itself... the other, the acrid smell of gunsmoke..."

*Jonah Hex: Two-Gun Mojo* is a five-issue limited series, from DC's Vertigo line. At \$3.95 Canadian, it seems a rather expensive buy for a comic with no mutants or foil enhancements... until you realize you're getting more all-out western action than even Clint Eastwood could handle. The fourth chapter is on the stands now, but the series was ordered in small quantities around here and that means back issues are almost impossible to find. But if you do get the chance, either off-island or through the local comic shops, pick up all five parts. It's easily one of the best comics of the year.

Now, if only sales are good enough for a regular series... Ah, the lofty dreams of mortals...

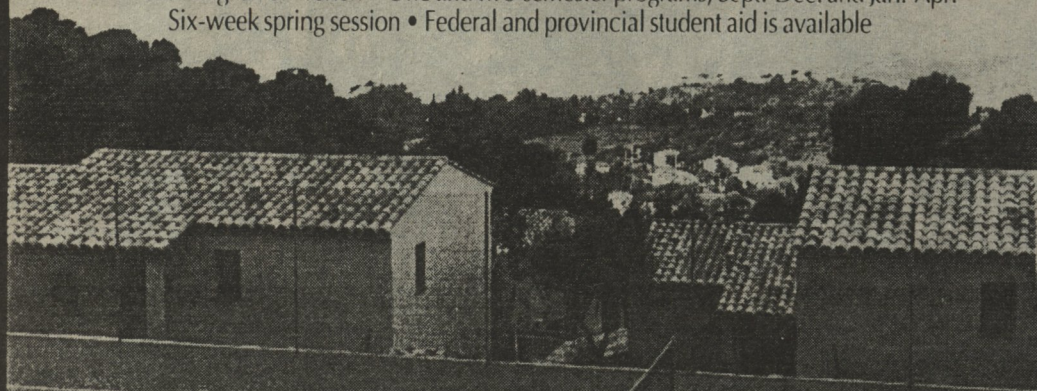
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