

The Cisco Kid, volume 1

Rod Reed

Jose Luis Salinas, Illustrator

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Fans of that great American art form the comic strip are living in a Golden Age. Currently, many of the classic serials by the giants of the field are widely available in handsome and affordable collections from high-profile publishers inhabiting both the comics and mainstream markets.

There's also been a simultaneous growing trend for smaller, independent publishers reissuing their own collections of unjustly ignored or overlooked strips. Classic Comics Press has long proven itself one of the frontrunners in this category, combining a steadfast focus on quality of presentation with impeccable taste, as reflected in its choice of titles to reprint.

However, with the publication of *The Cisco Kid* by Rod Reed and Jose Luis Salinas, the Chicago-based imprint seems to have laid solid claim to the lead position in this happy race. This first volume represents the strip's first two years, accompanied by biographical and historical essays that engage even as they illuminate some of the larger and lesser-known aspects of both creators and their creation. As for the strip itself, which ran between 1951 and 1957, it's a marvel of concision and expression, a melding of two great talents that resulted in one of the most entertaining, engrossing, and exciting western sagas in any medium.

The original Cisco Kid first appeared in O. Henry's story, "The Caballero's Way." As the central character was adapted to various media over the years, he morphed from the original dark-hearted character into an idealized Mexican caballero, a gallant prairie squire whose appealing manner and easy chivalry were matched only by the power of his fists and the strength of his moral compass.

Reed's breezy yet brawling script meshes seamlessly with Salinas' lively and lush pen-and-ink drawings, bringing both the Kid and his world to life from first panel to last. This is a Western landscape peopled with beautiful, strong-willed women and equally handsome, stalwart settlers, and crowded with bad-tempered brigands and murderous businessmen. And yet every player, from lead to secondary characters, is possessed of a palpable depth of character, their innermost natures wholly contained within a simple twist of speech or in an easy slouch.

The Cisco Kid is, in many important ways, more than just a remarkable piece of entertainment, a bravura performance by two masters of the field, or even a masterpiece of graphic literature—although all of those statements are true. Ultimately, it is a vital piece of Americana, one that's worthy of both widespread critical analysis and popular attention.

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