

The One-Legged Cowboy

John Herold

Readers Magnet

(188pp)

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A wounded man pursues retribution and makes a valuable friend in the Western novel The One-Legged Cowboy.

In John Herold's Western novel *The One-Legged Cowboy*, an aging cowboy pursues the men responsible for the loss of his leg.

While traversing the desert, Joe's horse, Thunder, is fatally injured; Joe incurs a broken leg. He is rescued by Gray Owl Waiting, a member of a reclusive, peaceful Native American tribe. Gray Owl Waiting believes that Joe has a part to play in his spiritual quest. They become friends, with each assisting the other.

The men wind up on a ranch, where Joe's leg is amputated. While recovering, he learns that someone had planted an irritant on Thunder. He sets out to find those who are responsible for his misfortunes.

Gray Owl Waiting's backstory is intricate. He was abducted and sent to a boarding school; he escaped and returned to his tribe. These experiences manifest themselves in his justified distrust of outsiders. Though he first helps Joe out of a sense of morality, he finds a kindred soul in the cowboy. Together, they help each other become better versions of themselves.

But beyond the men's friendship, the novel is underdeveloped. Its landscapes and people are acknowledged in name only, sans details to flesh them out. People sound alike in conversation to the extent that the book's exchanges, which are busy with multiple speakers, add little to the story.

The book moves at a crawl as Joe and Gray Owl Waiting leave one town for another. And though they dodge Apache raiders and assist small-town residents along the way, there is not much that's wild about their version of the Old West. Though it represents internal progress for Joe, a possible romance crowds the novel further.

Because the identities of the men responsible for Joe's accident are revealed early on, there's little tension to the men's pursuit of them. The culprits remain out of grasp; Joe learns to adapt, thanks to a prosthetic leg. As he becomes a respected lawman and treasured friend, vengeance feels less urgent. Still, there's a confrontation in the book's rushed conclusion. Errant and missing punctuation combine with misspelled words to mar the book's delivery further.

A wounded man pursues retribution in the Western novel *The One-Legged Cowboy*, though the life-giving friendship that he forms in the meantime stands to be more fulfilling.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 25, 2023)

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