

# BARTON

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*Dare to Know*

### **Western Comics**

*Comics that feature the American West during the period of westward expansion.*

This wide-ranging genre typically depicts events occurring west of the Mississippi River between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century. The first Western comics appeared as newspaper strips in the 1920s. A mixture of fact and myth, Westerns are primarily shaped and driven by the Euroamerican settling of the American West, involve elements of the period, and rely on the characteristics of the frontier era. In addition to entertainment, the genre offers readers a sweeping sense of epic adventure, discovery of the unexpected, and boundless variety. Either on horseback or by wagon train, characters defy social conventions in pursuit of endless possibilities, challenges and crucibles, and incredible opportunity, all beyond the constraints of bureaucracy and technology. The iconoclastic characters, rich settings, and enduring themes are specific and exclusive to the genre, although the presence of research, historically accurate settings, and realistic actions varies widely. The imagery of comics is ideal for portraying the prairies, mountains, and deserts of the western frontier, a harsh yet beautiful landscape that is almost a central character. A sizable amount of panel space may be reserved for depictions of the wide-open spaces, and nature's obstacles—storms, drought, locusts and grasshoppers, rough terrain, and wild animals—can play a large role in the stories.

Western comics can serve as a framing device to examine the social concerns, attitudes, and mores of the time in which the work is published and the society that produces them. Particularly prevalent in the "Golden Age" (1938-1956) and "Silver Age" (1956-1970), Western comic books were a natural outgrowth of the popularity of Western films, novels, and pulp magazines of the 1930s to the 1960s. Similar to their cinematic and literary counterparts, Western comics of the time reflect the traditional attitudes of the genre. More often than not, they emphasize the virtues of moral and physical daring, rugged individualism, hope, and faith, and quite a few openly decry racism, sexism, and imperialism. Beginning in the "Bronze Age" (1970-1985), the tone of Western comics changed to exhibit a more authentic light. Characters were given a greater complexity, and stories grew darker and focused on the violence and lawlessness of the era. The popularity of Western comics has waxed and waned with cultural shifts over the years, but, following a period of scarcity in the 1980s and 1990s, they have regained a relatively steady readership. Centaur Publications' *Star Ranger* (1937-1939); Comics Magazines Company's *Western Picture Stories* (1937); Dell Comics' *Western Action Thrillers* (1937) and *Red Ryder Comics* (1941-1957); Fawcett Comics/Dell Comics' *Gene Autry Comics* (1941-1955); Fawcett Comics' *Hopalong Cassidy* (1943, 1946-1959); Dell Comics/Gold Key's *The Lone Ranger* (1948-1977); Timely Comics/Atlas Comics' *Wild Western* (1948-1957), *Two-Gun Western* (1950-1952), *The Apache Kid* (1950-1956), *The Western Kid* (1954-1957), *The Outlaw Kid* (1954-1957), and *Western Gunfighters* (1956-1957); Timely Comics/Atlas Comics/Marvel Comics' *Kid Colt*, *Outlaw* (1948-1979) and *The Two-Gun Kid* (1948-1949, 1953-1977); Atlas Comics/Marvel Comics' *Red Warrior* (1951), *The Ringo Kid* (1954-1957), *Gunsmoke Western* (1955-1963), and *The Rawhide Kid* (1955-1979); Fawcett Comics/Charlton Comics' *Tom Mix Western* (1948-1953), *Gabby Hayes Western* (1948-1957), *Lash LaRue Western* (1949-1961), and *Rocky Lane Western* (1965-1968); Avon Comics' *Bad Men of the West* (1951) and *Blazing Six-Guns* (1952); and DC

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Comics' *Western Comics* (1948-1961), *Tomahawk* (1950-1972), *All-Star Western* (1951-1961, 1970-1972), *Bat Lash* (1968-1969), and *Weird Western Tales* (1972-1980) are classic examples.

### Common Elements

Westward expansion
Civilization vs. wilderness
Western archetypes (e.g., cowboys, scouts, gunfighters, bounty hunters, lawmen, outlaws, gamblers)
Lawlessness
The pursuit of justice or revenge
U.S. Cavalry
American Indians
Homesteaders
Conflict
Wilderness and vast landscapes
Cattle ranches
Cattle drives

Wild and woolly cow towns
Gold and silver mines
Mining camps
Dusty saloons
Wagon trains
Railroads
Stagecoaches
Manhunts
Shootouts
Saloon brawls
Gambling
Friendly or hostile relations with American Indians

### Graphic Novel Examples

<i>1872</i> (2015) by Gerry Duggan and Nik Virella
<i>All Star Western Volume 1</i> (2012) by Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti
<i>Bat Lash: Guns and Roses</i> (2008) by Sergio Aragonés and Peter Brandvold
<i>Blaze of Glory: The Last Ride</i> (2002) by John Ostrander and Leonardo Manco
<i>Bouncer</i> (2015) by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Francois Boucq
<i>The Complete Toppi Volume 2: North America</i> (2020) by Sergio Toppi
<i>Copperhead Volume 1</i> (2015) by Jay Faerber and Scott Godlewski
<i>The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born</i> (2007) by Stephen King, Peter David, Robin Furth, and Jae Lee
<i>Django / Zorro</i> (2015) by Quentin Tarantino, Matt Wagner, and Esteve Polls
<i>Doug Wildey's Rio: The Complete Saga</i> (2012) by Doug Wildey

<i>Golden Age Western Comics</i> (2012) by Steven Brower
<i>Gus and His Gang</i> (2008) by Christophe Blain
<i>High Moon Volume 1: Bullet Holes and Bite Marks</i> (2017) by David Gallagher and Steve Ellis
<i>Jim Cutlass: Mississippi River</i> (1979) by Jean-Michel Charlier, Jean Giraud, and Christian Rossi
<i>Jonah Hex: Face Full of Vengeance</i> (2007) by Justin Gray, Jimmy Palmiotti, Luke Ross, and Tony DeZungia
<i>Ken Parker A Colori 1</i> (2015) by Giancarlo Beradi and Ivo Milazzo
<i>Law of the Desert Born</i> (2013) by Louis L'Amour and Charles Santino
<i>The Lone Ranger Omnibus 1</i> (2013) by Brett Matthews, Sergio Cariello, and Paul Pope
<i>Lucky Luke Complete Collection Volume 1</i> (2019) by Morris

<i>The Man with No Name: Saints and Sinners</i> (2009) by Christos Gage, Wellington Dias, and Richard Isanove	<i>The Sixth Gun Book 1: Cold Dead Fingers</i> (2011) by Cullen Bunn and Brian Hurtt
<i>Marshal Blueberry: The Lost Dutchman's Mine</i> (1991) by Jean-Michel Charlier and Jean "Moebius" Giraud	<i>The Smell of Starving Boys</i> (2017) by Loo Hui Phang and Frederik Peeters
<i>Marvel Masterworks: Rawhide Kid Volume 1</i> (2006) by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby	<i>Stern Volume 1: The Undertaker, the Vagrant, and the Assassin</i> (2017) by Frédéric and Julien Maffre
<i>Memorial Ride</i> (2021) by Stephen Graham Jones and Maria Wolf	<i>Tex: The Lonesome Rider</i> (2015) by Joe Kubert and Claudio Nizzi
<i>Of Dust and Blood: The Battle at Little Big Horn</i> (2008) by Jim Berry and Val Layerik	<i>That Texas Blood Volume 1</i> (2020) by Chris Condon and Jacob Phillips
<i>Pretty Deadly: Volume One, The Shrike</i> (2014) by Kelly Sue DeConnick	<i>Two Moons, Volume 1: The Iron Noose</i> (2021) by John Arcudi and Valerio Giangiordano
<i>Pulp</i> (2020) by Ed Brubaker, Sean Phillips, and Jacob Phillips	<i>The Undertaker Volume 1: The Gold Eater</i> (2016) by Xavier Dorison and Ralph Meyer
<i>Scalped Deluxe Edition Book One</i> (2015) by Jason Aaron and R. M. Guéra	<i>Weird Western Tales: Jonah Hex</i> (2020) by Michael Fleisher, John Albano, José Luis García-López, and Tony de Zuniga
<i>Shot All to Hell</i> (2018) by Nate Olson, Mark L. Gardner, and Nic Chapuis	<i>Western</i> (2011) by Jean Van Hamme and Grzegorz Rosinski