

It was hot.

That was all our hero could think about aside from the click of his spurred heels into the sandy path. While the hot sun beat down its burning rays of yellow-orange onto him, it was easily reflected off of his huge white and black tipped horns. Not only that, wearing a white and black vest and matching assless chaps certainly helped keep the sun off of him. During midday, he would be a beacon of light - a beacon of hope, and heroism! However, it was getting late in the day now. The summer sun only just started to tease the horizon on his wonderfully innocent desert town.

Dark shadows began to grow, even over his blue jeans and matching undershirt, as he whistled quietly while making his way through town. Strong but humble, he rested his hands on the seat of his buckle as he perused over the various alleyways in town. There hadn't been any sign of trouble this week so far, but that's no reason to let your guard down.

The sounds of people returning to their homes and closing up shops could be heard. Doors swung closed, and boots shuffled over dusty wood floors as the bustle of daylight faded with the sun. It wasn't uncommon for the befuddled drunk to fall on their face as they left the bar at this hour, but it seemed today was a lot quieter than usual.

Suddenly, out of the corner of our hero's masked eyes, a flash of silver and black swiftly moved past him and into the darkness of a nearby gutter culvert between two buildings. It only took him a few seconds to adjust himself, but in mere moments our hero was off into the dark alleyway.

The clash of his boots against the muddled ground of dirt and broken wooden boards were a soft clamor to our hero's ears. In his vision, the sight of his mysterious target was what captured him as he made his way down the alleyway.

He lightly tips his white hat when a slow realization fills his body. Quickly, his boots hit the ground in front of him as his body made a dash into the shaded alley. A burning orange color draped over everything from how low the burning sun had become. The rush of air passed the hero's tassels and vest was a stream of white and blue when he ran through the buildings between - searching for that unseen figure from his peripheral view.

It was a few minutes of running, searching even, that our hero spent before finding his first clue. A small piece of paper with golden writing scribed on the page. The hero let out a small huff before reading it.

*“Rodeo, oh Rodeo. Why-fore art thou following me, Rodeo.”*

Rodeo Blue’s nostrils flared. His hands calmly took the paper and folded it, pressing it into his vest pocket for later. A faint wind passed by his tassels when a buff of dirt and dust rushed down the alleyway.

A sharp presence ran up the town hero’s back. Something had affixed itself to a point against his light hide leather clothing. He didn’t dare move. Slowly, he raised his hands to the air - he had been caught. All he could really say was “Howdy there, Partner.”

The assailant, a tall and slender pony in black clothes, and a shaded hat had a rapier pointed against the town’s hero’s back. He clicked his mouth in disappointment when he answered, “How does our town’s hero always wind up in trouble?”

“Wouldn’t be much, if troublemakers like you weren’t around.” The masked bull called from his front; his eye trying to glance back at the mysterious but familiar fellow. “Sides, it’s my job to get into trouble - so that others don’t.”

The assailant simply smiled. “Heh, makes things more fun with you around. ...Still, I haven’t done anything. ...Yet.”

“You’ve done more than your fair share, pardner.” A bit of dust had been kicked up when our hero tapped his foot just then.

“Tch, and I have helped you a bunch there, ‘pard’.” Shaded eyes glanced down at the dust being blown in his direction, but only for a brief second. “That Serah Problem would have gotten away if I hadn’t intervened.”

Contempt was written on Rodeo’s face. It was objectively true that this fellow had done plenty of good deeds, but he was solely responsible for plenty of bad as well. “So, that means you’ll return that Firestone of India back to its rightful owner, right?”

There was a long silence. The distant sound of doors closing and locking rang through the dim alleyway. Our assailant’s cape lightly flowed through a brief breeze as beads of sweat formed on both of their faces.

The silence was broken abruptly as the masked man in black deftly jumped back from the hero’s body. His booted feet landed on a sturdy set of stacked barrels against the wooden facade. “Don’t you have a party to attend? Would be a shame if you were late.”

In two swift motions, Rodeo Blue grasped his trusty rope within his gloved hands and turned around. However, his swiftness was beaten by dexterity - the assailant was gone; leaving only the glimpse of his black cape just exiting the view of the alleyway from the rooftops above. He had escaped.

Rodeo pulled his hat a bit with his fingers. Letting out a gruff groan, he simply turned around and put his rope away. "I don't like that *Cuervo Amarillo*..."

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It was night.

Music from a jolly old piano hung in the air. A gallant hall had been set up for a party, complete with tables full of food and drink and a sizable dancefloor. People of various shapes and gallant dresses intermingled and spoke underneath the music. Merriment followed their steps as pairs danced with one another.

Fresh flowers had been placed tastefully around the tables and as decor on the walls. Various other decorative items had been put about - cat-tails, grasses and even feathers had been used to pop shape into the party area. A large sign hung above the entrance to the hall that read "Summer Solstice Celebration".

Our hero in Blue had already been pulled away by the host of the party. It was a ritzy shindig for sure, but it was never above Rodeo to make an appearance - especially invited. Following the handsome host through a foyer doorway, the two were shielded from the noise and bustle.

Shadows streamed by, in the lights of the building's hallway as the two made their way deeper within. The handsome fellow, a horse clad in formal wear and neatly tied mane, spoke up, "I wanted to thank you for all your help, Mr. Rodeo."

"Aw, shucks. I don't need nothin', heh. Seein' all of your smilin' faces is more than enough." The masked hero smiled brightly as he was led into a backroom.

The room they had entered seemed to be an auxiliary dance hall - something used for bridal reception and after-parties. Plenty of decoration had still been left around, but it was all neatly placed and cleared for future use. A singular table in the center of the room had been fully cleared, and a white table cloth had been draped over it.

“I know I know. You don’t take much for your troubles, but...” The handsome young man gave Rodeo a sultry wink before crouching down and pulling a black leather box out from beneath the table. He gingerly placed the box on the table and carefully fiddled with the lock on the front. The box opened as he undid the mechanism, “Here. A Star Sapphire, in your honor.”

It was a deep blue gemstone that had been gently placed among a silken lining of purple within the box. The gem was glowing despite the dim lighting of the auxiliary dance hall. The striking star shape seemed like it would shoot a beam of light through it if illuminated or given power of some kind. It matched Rodeo Blue quite well.

“W-Wow. I don’t know what to say.” The hero was taken aback by the incredibly generous gesture. He grabbed the edge of his vest when he took a step back and said, “You’ve taken all the words outta my mouth, pard.”

The handsome fellow smiled when his hands laid on top of the box, closing it. A flush coloration had filled his face but he could hardly face the very astounded Rodeo Blue in that moment. With the box shut, he picked it up and placed it back beneath the table for safe keeping.

“I-I hope you’ll take it with you when the party’s over.” A nervousness was all over the fellow. His hand scratched the back of his head when he hastily went over to the exit back to the party. “Haha, I don’t want to keep anyone waiting, so, uh...”

Rodeo smiled beneath his disguise, charmingly sauntering after the handsome fellow. “I’m not much of a dancer, but... mayhaps I’ll make an exception this time.”

Before he could follow the fellow back into the dance hall, however, a strange sound perked his left ear. A sort of clamoring had suddenly sounded its way just in the hall behind him. Naturally, he turned around and went to investigate - unfortunately leaving another bachelor dry on the dance floor.

His heavy boots against the wooden floor were sure to alert whomever was on the other side of the nearby doorway, but he did not care about that. What was important was keeping this town safe - and any valuables to be kept within the hands of their rightful owners.

There wasn't much time for worrying about *what* was going on, but the sudden shifting shadows in the dim light of the unused ballroom tipped off the bull in blue.

He let out a sharp breath as a shaded figure leapt through the curtains of a nearby window. What was seen was a wide, flat brimmed hat shape, followed by a tall caped ne'er-do-well. All in shadow, there wasn't much choice - he had to make chase.

Cutting through the empty chairs and tables, he slipped through the large open window, quickly following behind the fiend. The shape seemed to escape into the night, for a brief moment, but his eyes adjusted to the faint light of the moon. The shaded figure had taken a ladder access to the rooftop.

As his heels clicked against the ground, he nearly jumped up a few steps of the ladder. With a short huff, he made a point to skip a few steps to make a quicker ascent. As his head peeped above the edge of the roof's edge - it was clear who that fiend was.

Charley Horse, a thorn in his leg, had stolen the precious gift that other fellow from earlier wanted to give. The same box had been clutched against his shaded arms, but it was no mistake just what was going on.

The thieving horse stopped for just a moment, hearing the loud clunk of footsteps just behind him. A bit of air wafted past him, prompting the fiendish thief to take hold of his hat.

It was a brief moment, but long enough for the Hero in Blue to round a looped rope around Charley's free arm. A loud horse's snort split the silence.

"Charley, what're you doin' there, stealin' such a purty gift like that?" The rope was tight, but the horse did not budge.

He snorted again through that blackened mask of his before responding, "I was just borrowin' it."

"Borrowin' without a howdy to your good pal? I thought we were on speakin' terms."

A short grunt followed by a swift movement by the thief. Shifting his weight suddenly, the rope became loose just for a brief moment as it slipped out of his arm. His body turned away and began to run towards the edge of the building towards a new set of rooftop.

Fumbling with the box, Charley had lost his grip and that tight rope was fondly snuggled around the container. It slipped out of his grasp, and Rodeo Blue flicked it back into hand. The box had been apprehended, for now.

However, without so much as a passing glance, Charley had disappeared from Rodeo's view after grasping the box. Somehow, Charley had gotten behind Rodeo. With one motion - a thick kick to the back of his shin had disarmed our Hero in Blue.

Rodeo grunted in pain. He grabbed at his pain and reeled back, "Aaah! My leg!"

The thief grasped his prize once more. Making a getaway, he simply leapt over the nearest rooftop edge, meeting a second building with gravity on his side. Of course, it didn't take long for Rodeo Blue to recover, and follow pursuit. He would not be bested so easily.

The two of them went into the night. A silhouetted chase against the moon as the two figures fought. A scuffle here, and a trade there, the box seemed to change hands as one tried to overcome the other.

However, a simple loss of footing had them tumbling on barrels and boxes in an alleyway. Sounds of broken wood and planks scattered about had more or less muted any grunts of pain. None of the common folk were around to hear, as they were at the Summer Solstice.

The box had laid comfortably between the two. Their eyes slowly opened together, just to witness a third party enter the scene.

"You two are wonderful entertainment." A familiar winged fellow in dark clothing bent down to grasp at the box with black gloved hands. "But, I think I'll take my prize, for now."

"Cuervo Amarillo! Where'd you come from?!" Charley hopped back up to meet the tall adversary. "And, that's mine!"

"Oh?" Amarillo took the time to flatly place a foot against the nearby wall, holding the box in his clutches. He glanced at Rodeo Blue, who was slowly stirring to his feet in a tizzy. "But, it's only fair that my *brother's precious gifts* to his *crush* belong to me. We're identical twins, after all."

"What in tarnation...?" The Hero in Blue's eyebrows raised as he watched the second thief scale the wall with inexplicable ease. "Hoo boy, I have my work cut out for me, huh Charley?"

"Shut up!" Charley wasted no time as the damnable cape was starting to disappear from the top of the building. There was only one thing left to do - he gripped the stone and wooden siding, and began to climb.

Rodeo Blue simply whistled to himself, shaking his head. He briefly watches Charley climb up the wall with a strangely endearing conviction. Shaking his head, he simply ran down the alleyway and turned the corner. To his surprise, a ladder to the roof had already been installed!

It took barely any time to get to the roof at this point. The thief had simply took the time to gain some distance while also checking the contents of his prize. Its' mechanism had been defeated.

Amarillo had stopped moving, and simply checked the box over and over. "What...?"

Rodeo Blue slowly approached the thief, with a thick metal-lined rope in hand this time. His arm brought it forward before swiveling it around with the flick of his wrist. The rope connected this time, looping around the fiend's torso with ease.

"...Rodeo, oh Rodeo..." He smiled incredulously. His gloved hand lightly caressing the strong rope. His expression quickly grew dark, "...Is this some kind of a JOKE?!"

Amarillo took the time to press his heels against the sandy rooftop and lunge forward at Rodeo without much warning. His weight, combined with the box, threw off the Hero in Blue when those leather heels connected with Rodeo's chest. The winged target kicked off of the town hero. Rodeo just barely couldn't grasp at the now leaving ankles as they seemed to slip through the hoop that had held Cuervo Amarillo in place for that brief moment. Somehow, he was free once again.

Luckily, Rodeo Blue was able to catch the box that had been hurtling towards his head. "Woah there, pardner! What's gotten into you?"

Charley, who was gasping for air, finally caught up to the two of them to the other edge of the roof. "You... won't... get away... with my... prize."

"I'll tell you, *partner*. The box is EMPTY." Amarillo's hands wriggled into the air as they accentuated his frustration. "What kind of a game are you playing?! That Star Sapphire is gone!"

Rodeo Blue blinked as he peered into the box. It was indeed gone - no tricks here. That beautiful jewel had been stolen from beneath his hoof. "Well I'll be. Heh, it seems we've been double crossed somewhere."

“WHAT?!” Charley perked up as he flowed into a second wind. With incredible speed, he took the box from Rodeo’s hands, “Gimmie that!”

He gave it a once over, and sure enough he found that nothing was in it. Charley shook it in vain. With a grunting whinny, he threw the box onto the ground, “DANG IT.”

“No, no, you... one of you is lying.” Cuervo Amarillo twirled a finger as his expression was unreadable. He took a deep breath, “One of you must’ve taken it when my brother put it back under that table!”

Rodeo Blue simply chuckled to himself, “In my honor for this little ol’ town, you have my word. I didn’t do anything with the jewel.”

Charley simply grabbed at his face in frustration as he continued to make strange noises.

“No... You’re a slick one. Both of you are. I’m not like my brother - I’ve thought this through.” The devious pegasus in black raised his wings as he pulled out his rapier. Pointing it at both of his enemies, he simply stated, “I’m going to get to the bottom of this, whether you like it or not!”

It was as if time stopped for only a few seconds when Cuervo Amarillo raised himself into the air. His rapier seemed to pull him forward in one instant as he made an efforting grunt. Everything went black when the sound of metal against stone filled the air. The three of them had disappeared into the darkness of the building below.

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It was dark

Our hero couldn’t see anything. His body had been trapped in what felt like a typical chair. A roughness reverberated throughout his body as he couldn’t tug hard enough to free himself.

A second feeling slowly urged its way into his brain - his clothes, save for his pants, had been completely stripped! He couldn’t help but call out into the void, “Where are you, you fiend!”

Rodeo's ears perked up, "I'm right here, Rodeo, oh, Rodeo."

A third voice started to garble up air. It sounded like someone else was struggling - perhaps Charley? Although, it was more than just struggling, it was almost like he was fighting something. Grunting and breathing heavily was what our Hero could hear.

"I suppose I haven't had much time to get acquainted personally with you two, so I see this as a win-win for me..." That sly devil cut through the air with his words, "Now. One of you's going to tell me where in great white and blue is that star sapphire!"

"Ah'm tellin you, I don't know where it-!?" Rodeo's voice squeaked.

Something had brushed against his bare abs. Something soft. Actually, it was way too soft to be anything *real*, and yet it was there. He felt it move up and down slowly against his bare body. It...tickled!

"Ah ah ah~ That's not what I asked." Cuervo Amarillo simply leaned on the back of both chairs, tilting them slightly. "I suppose I should jog your memories a bit."

While Rodeo couldn't see anything, he could *feel* plenty. Soft, immaculate feathers had begun to attack his body now. He shook, grunted and resisted in vain as goosebumps ran up his spine.

"M-Mooooo!"

Would our hero and his arch nemesis ever escape?

Will the mysterious star sapphire ever be recovered?

What about the party?

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Maybe it was the trick of the light, or maybe it was the sound of everyone dancing. That handsome fellow simply got lost in his thoughts, clutching something hard beneath his suede jacket - deep in his lined pocket. Longingly he looked forward, thinking about that horned hero. It was so strange, what was this feeling? Was it love? Infatuation? Admiration?

He simply shook his head before smiling. A few friends came along and brought him some drinks. Perhaps next time he'll finally have that dance.