

UrBaN *cow*BoY

By James *H*anna

WHY WE LIKE IT: *A world weary officer burdened with PTSD looks back on his time with the San Francisco Probation Dept and his experiences with the damned and the damaged. Through his recollections we are afforded a glimpse inside a reality show where the mystique of being a cop is demythologized and the sometimes covert tricks of the trade are laid out like a hand of cards. It's a long way from Hollywood and TV heroes like Clint Eastwood and Karl Malden. This is a low key narrative that slowly gathers strength and Hanna's handling of character and dialogue is what you'd expect from a seasoned writer. Both the prose and the voice are Wednesday afternoon rather than Saturday night but then that's as it should be when it's Wednesday afternoon. Quote:*

To my credit, I never took stress leave although my nerves grew increasingly raw. Far better a gaucho's aura than the shame of a doctor's note.

Senior Editor CHARLES writes...*The first paragraph of this CNF is a textbook example of how to open effectively. No fooling around. Draw your pistol, point the barrel and fire.*

(Spacing and format is author's own.)

Urban Cowboy

by

James Hanna

I am hypervigilant. I have an exaggerated flinch response. Whenever I lock a door, I go back and check it three times. These are the emotional limps I acquired while I was a San Francisco probation officer, a job that let me boast that I was an urban cowboy. So consoling was this image that my PTSD seemed secondary; even today I would venture to say that my glory was cheaply bought. How proud I was of my duty belt, my handcuffs, my two-way radio. How proud I was of the Glock 40 that I usually kept in my locker at work. I even affected a lazy drawl and walked with a gunfighter's swagger, and at times I kept a cheroot clamped between my teeth.

When Mary, my wife, said I looked like Clint Eastwood, I was quick to correct her. "You could say he looks like *me*," I replied. "I'm a real peace officer. Clint Eastwood is shooting blanks."

"Well, maybe you shouldn't be so cocky about putting people in jail."

"Nabbing bad guys goes with the job," I drawled. "I can't get hung up on it. I don't try and understand them—I just tie and throw and brand them."

"Hmm," she said. "That's kind of profound," then recognition dawned on her face. "Hey, that's the theme song from *Rawhide*," she scoffed. "That TV show in the sixties where Clint Eastwood got his start."

"Yeah," I said, "but it's my song now. I *deserve* it more than Clint Eastwood."

Sometimes people would ask me how many arrests I had made. Whenever this happened, I feigned nonchalance and said, "Maybe two or three hundred." I spoke without inflection, as though reciting a grocery list, and I did not bother to mention just how the arrests took place. When it came to the ticklish business of putting people in jail, The San Francisco

Urban Cowboy/Hanna

Probation Department was averse to taking risks. We never made our busts on the streets where bystanders might intervene; instead, we lured our clients to the probation department and arrested them in teams. No rough and tumble for us, no roping and throwing for us. Why risk a bruise or a fractured skull when a timely lie would suffice? So whenever I received a complaint that one of my clients was misbehaving, I conjured up a pretense to bring him to my office. Usually, I would ask him to report for a piss test or to sign some paperwork, but when it came to pathological stalkers I had a more convincing line. Most of them had rescue fantasies where their victims were concerned, and I shamelessly exploited their delusions to get them hooked and booked. For instance, a stalker once told me that his victim was being abused by her father, so I called the stalker on his cell phone when I learned he was lurking outside her home.

“Jimmy Wong,” I said when he answered my call. “I need you in my office at once.”

“What’s happenin’, Mister Hanna?”

“Your girlfriend’s in trouble—we have reason to believe that her father’s still molesting her. I need you to tell me everything you know about him. I want to lock that pervert up.”

In less than fifteen minutes, Jimmy Wong knocked on my office door, and I was waiting for him with a pair of detectives from the San Francisco Police Department.

“Not again,” Jimmy said as we hooked him up.

“Thanks for reporting,” I said, and I gave him a pat on his shoulder as we perp-walked him to jail.

Yes, I was more conman than cowboy, more bluffer than buckaroo. And I compulsively kept the odds in my favor when I cuffed a client up. My odds grew ridiculously high one day

Urban Cowboy/Hanna

when I was taking a sex offender to jail—a client who attempted to bolt after I collared him for possessing child porn. I was accompanied by two burly detectives from San Francisco Sex Crimes Unit, and the client broke away from all three of us as we entered the jail sally port. The moment he was loose, a dozen deputy jailers, responding to an alert signal, poured through the electronic jail door and wrestled him to the ground. When I thought of Clint Eastwood single-handedly gunning down three or four bad guys, I had to admit that fifteen to one were hardly sporting odds.

On one rare occasion, I left the building to bust a client who lived in Oakland—a former head nurse on probation for stalking a woman she barely knew. She had been spotted outside of her victim’s home cutting the telephone wires, and she had failed to report when I called her on her cell phone and tried to trick her into coming to my office. Since this woman seemed dangerously nuts, I teamed up with an Oakland task force—a gang of deputy sheriffs assigned to an apprehension squad. They were a cavalier, good-natured lot with a gallows sense of humor. “Oh shit, that’s my sister,” one of them said when I showed them my client’s mug shot.

Had I made a deal with the Devil by so overplaying my hand—by summoning an entire posse to bust one mentally ill woman? If so, I received the Devil’s wages when we broke into her rented room. My client was not there so I could not hook her up, and a search for weapons produced only a penknife and several enormous dildos. When I told Mary about this adventure, she offered a joke of her own. “A pack of armed and dangerous vibrators!” she laughed. “Did you tell them to drop their batteries?” Fortunately, the woman was picked up that evening by a cop from San Francisco’s Mission Station. He had spotted her casing the victim’s home and arrested her without incident.

Many of my arrests were attributable to another's reputation—a brawny deputy sheriff whom most of us called Pac Man. He was a huge Filipino dude who worked on San Francisco's Fugitive Recovery Enforcement Team—an outfit known as FRET because it made the bad guys sweat. Pac Man had a couple of martial arts black belts; he had been shot or stabbed seven times, but he relentlessly combed the city to nab criminals on the run. Whenever I first met with a client, I always mentioned Pac Man. "If you get in trouble," I said, "surrender to me right away. If I have to put a bench warrant on you, you'll have to deal with Pac Man. Believe me when I tell you that you don't want to mess with Pac Man." This spiel was remarkably effective in getting clients to turn themselves in. Probationers spooked by the thought of an ogre would buzz my office phone. When they mentioned a drug charge they may have caught or a complaint they might have suffered, I said, "Make it easy on yourself or you know who's gonna getcha." These clients would quickly come see me and put their hands behind their backs. On their way to jail, some even thanked me for saving them from Pac Man.

So why, with all my precautions, did I suffer PTSD? Perhaps it was due to the threats I drew from clients who could not take a joke. On one occasion, a batterer spat at me while we were standing in open court, and he swore he would make me pay for using a fib to lock him up. Fortunately, this fellow was a resident alien from Ireland, and The Department of Homeland Security deported him back to the Emerald Isle. On another occasion, a stalker I nabbed was released after only two weeks, and he tracked me on the internet as soon as he got out of jail. The client was on probation for harassing a famous movie actress, and I had busted him after he sent her an email promising to cut out her tongue. Although she was subpoenaed, the actress did not come to court and testify, so the judge released the ingrate to continue his

Urban Cowboy/Hanna

rampaging ways. *U R not God*, he emailed me, *U R gonna dispear*. At least, his misspelled threats gave me a small consolation. I could claim to have the same stalker as a glamorous movie star.

To my credit, I never took stress leave although my nerves grew increasingly raw. Far better a gaucho's aura than the shame of a doctor's note. So my swagger grew bolder, my drawl became thicker, and I feigned a range rider's squint. And I chewed upon my cheroots until they were worn to nubs. "Ayup," I said to Mary before catching the Caltrain to work, "gonna lasso me some doggies and throw 'em in the pen."

"Is that what you call them—*doggies*?" she said. "Those poor souls you put in jail."

When I said that's what cowboys call cattle, she suggested I turn in my spurs.

One day, my office partner and I were taking a drug offender to jail—a shrimpy little fellow who had tested positive for cocaine. As we herded him through the jail parking lot, Pac Man pulled up in his van. After giving us a friendly wave, he opened the door to his van, and a half-dozen bad guys stepped out of it and accompanied him to the jail. They were linked together with chains, and they walked like a string of horses. He had caught them single-handedly, all in a morning's work.

My bravado left me as quickly as water circling a drain. How could I keep my swagger after seeing a muster like this? Here was your true urban cowboy; here was your lord of the range; here was the windburned vaquero I had so brashly pretended to be.

Pac Man looked at me and my lone, little doggie, and then he laughed generously. "Mister Hanna," he said, "are you trying to put me out of work?"

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *On several occasions, friends told me that I look like Clint Eastwood. This compliment sprang from the years I once spent with the San Francisco Probation Department, where I was an officer assigned to a domestic violence and stalking unit. Having made over two hundred arrests, I was quick to point out that it might have been said that Clint Eastwood looks like me. After all, I was nailing bad guys for real while Clint was just pretending to shoot other actors. Given the nature of my arrests, I was probably taking things too far. My modus was to trick the bad guys into reporting to my office then hooking them up with the help of two or three other officers. Thinking back on these busts, I have to concede there was nothing sexy about them.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: James Hanna is a former fiction editor and a retired probation officer. He has had over seventy story publications and three Pushcart nominations. Many of his stories deal with the criminal element. James' books, three of which have won awards, are available on Amazon. You can visit him there at:

https://www.amazon.com/James-Hanna/e/B00WNH356Y?ref_=dbs_p_ebk_r00_abau_000000

His story **How I Done Good in School** was published in Issue 7 (fiction).