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Calamity Jack

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Think **Jack and the Beanstalk** set a few years on from **Gangs of New York**, hurtling along with the manic energy of the Keystone Cops. This graphic 'caper' comes in Comic Book technicolour, with heroic exploits undercut by wise guy one-liners. Even the title echoes Hollywood - remember Doris Day's Calamity Jane, aboard the Deadwood Stage 'a-headin' on over the hills? So-o-o Whip crackaway! Whip crackaway! Whip crackaway! Whips crack away a fair bit in this tale too - or rather, the severed braid of Rapunzel, now used to deadly effect as a lasso, with a soundtrack of FWISSSHH or a yelled 'Yee-Ha!'. Readers of this story's forerunner - **Rapunzel's Revenge** from the same team of Hale and Hale (wife and husband) and Hale (no relation) - will already know the style and even a slice of the story. For Jack, a member of a 'clan' in the Hales' parallel America (to our eyes, he's a Native American near the bottom of the city streets stack) has previously appeared in that reworking of **Rapunzel**. He's quick to admit that he was born 'a criminal mastermind' with an unfortunate amount of bad luck. Faced with the brutal gang boss Giant Blunderboar, who abducts Jack's mom to bake bread made from flour ground from human bones, our hero gets out of town quick. He rides the Iron Horse way out West, where, in a couple of pages, the authors reprise **Rapunzel's Revenge**, leaving Jack to head back to rescue mom with the resourceful 'Punzie' at his side.

The reader can't relax any more than the characters, who include a flying pixie show girl called Pru - Jack's criminal partner of choice - sundry pigs in police clothing, a young newspaper owner with a dash of Old World charm, giant ants with malign intentions, a handy magic beanstalk, a goose who lays golden eggs when she feels like it, and a marauding jabberwocky. When he finally pauses for breath, Jack realises what everyone else, especially Punzie, has known all along - he's a nice guy in gangster's clothing. Things (almost) end with a Big Screen Kiss as Jack and Punzie float off into a pink sunset, snuggling down in the cabin of a zeppelin (compare closing love-nest shots in Bond movies). Though they don't seem to have noticed Mr Jabbers the jabberwocky isn't far behind. Like the text says, 'Darn Tootin?'. (I didn't either.)

Running Order:

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