

War Dance



The arrow pinged across the fire, streaked over the microphone and dug its way into the palm tree across the clearing

By BUDD WILSON SCHULBERG

Gallant last stand of the ferocious but somewhat impoverished Apache, faced with the civilizing fleshpots of Hollywood

IN THE center of one of the great arid plateaus of Arizona stands an adobe longhouse, typical of the quadrangular buildings with thick walls and many entrances which the Indians have scattered through that vast sun-baked land for many centuries.

But this particular longhouse is like no Indian building ever seen. For every room is furnished with a radio; a well-stocked bar is on twenty-four hour service for the occupants; and a red neon sign over the entrance tells you in no uncertain terms that this is *Burke's Rancho Apache*.

Any socialite preparing for divorce

or convalescing from one will tell you that Burke is Dan Burke, the famous Western movie star of not so many years ago, who finally drank himself out of the business and now operates this ranch for adventurers who want to rough it at twenty dollars a day.

Directly across the clearing from the luxurious ranch house is a palm tree, one of the props Burke brought with him from Hollywood for atmosphere. From the palm tree sticks an arrow, an Indian arrow shot into the tree with tremendous force.

Whenever guests in stiff new riding habits ask Burke the history of that arrow, he strikes a picturesque pose in his immaculate white chaps, pushes his embroidered ten-gallon hat back from what remains of his heroic profile and tells his story:

How that arrow was found there more than fifty years ago, after the Apaches had gone on the warpath for the last time, massacring every white settler in a bloody battle that took place on the very site of Burke's Rancho Apache.

Burke was not a bad actor for a cowboy star and he tells his story well. But oldtimers who drop around from the nearby villages now and then have another explanation for that arrow, which, they will assure you, "Ain't only truer but a darn sight stranger."

IT HAPPENED the year Burke arrived. He had built his desert Waldorf-Astoria but it wasn't getting any play. He was a good enough showman to know he needed something sensational.

And when he heard about the war-dance of the lost tribe of Apaches, he knew that was it. It was a ceremony no white man had ever been allowed to witness: one of those traditions that somehow persists long after the conditions which created them have disappeared.

That was all Burke had to know. His brain was full of neon signs and circulars. Dan Burke Presents the first public appearance of the great Warlords of the West, the Last of the Apaches—Only one dollar (free to residents of the hotel) to watch the colorful, savage War Dance, a spectacle which earlier spectators could pay for only with their Lives.

Oldtimers shook their heads when they heard of the plan, for they had finally learned to leave the Apaches alone. They had no imagination, was the way Burke put it. They didn't know how to play the redskin stuff for all it was worth.

They hardly expected to see Burke

come out alive when he rode into the reservation to see the chief. But Burke had rehearsed his speech well and the chief listened.

He wasn't like the old Apache chiefs who would have fought with arrow and tomahawk against the whole U. S. Army. He was weary. He knew the fighting was over; now even the farming and hunting were almost gone.

He listened because he knew the white men had won and his tribe must forget the pride of its ancestors.

So he listened and nodded. He weighed Burke's offer of more money than he had ever seen before against the memory of his ancestors. And the ancestors lost.

All his people were glad when they heard his choice. There were many things they needed in town; now they would be able to buy. Yes, they said, in their own way, we cannot eat tradition. And what is the sense of hiding our war dance when there are no more wars to fight?

BUT there was one among them in whose veins pride did not run so thin. Johnny Apache. He had been called Johnny Apache from the day he arrived at the Indian school, where the boys were advised to take American names.

When he could not think of a Christian name, the registrar called him John. For a last name, Apache had been his own idea.

Johnny Apache, youngest of the chief's sons, was taller, faster and stronger than all the others, a throw-back to another day when all the warriors had his body and his heart.

Now his people were shrunken physically and spiritually and Johnny Apache stood out among them like a great bronze memorial to the past.

When Johnny Apache heard what was to be done he frowned and grew quiet. To think of the Apaches, last of all the tribes to accept invasion, going down in the ceremonial dress of their fathers to put on a show for a lot of pale-faced tourists! To see the great Apache warriors cavorting around like a pack of trained seals!

But the chief had made up his mind and the law of the patriarch ran deep in Johnny Aache. When the time came, he donned his war-paint, braided his jet-black hair, dressed himself in the bright colors and beads that long ago became a costume even to the Apache.

He then slung his long bow over his shoulder and rode with his father's people to Burke's Rancho Apache, wha-hooing with the rest of them as they descended upon the hotel the way Burke had instructed them.

Burke was there in all his beautiful-cowboy, public-address-system glory. The Rancho was sold out. The ballyhoo was bringing results.

Burke was putting on the war dance with all the glamour and glitter of a Hollywood opening. Temporary grandstands surrounded the enclosure where the Apaches were to appear. Giant spot-lights lit their dancing space like a stage.

The audience was laughing and yet interested; there were exclamations and little cries from the ladies when the painted warriors made their entry.

Around a fire the Apaches began, single-file in a wide circle, moving in a rhythmic slow motion to the loud-soft-soft-loud tempo of the tomtoms, manipulating their bows in unison as they began their stylized battle, while the old chief took up the chant, a monotonous sing-sing, the saga of the glories of the tribe.

But booming over the microphone

was the bland voice of the master of ceremonies, Burke, the ham in him lapping up the spotlight again:

"There they go, ladies and gentlemen, the first merry-go-round in the Southwest. But it was not so merry for their enemies, for these Apaches aren't the red-skinned version of our jitterbugs. (Much laughter from the crowd.)

"They are showing you how their forefathers whipped themselves into fighting frenzy before going out to give us white men the shortest haircuts on record."

There was more laughter and Johnny Apache heard it, but his expression did not change. Once the ceremony began he must think of nothing but to make it as impressive as it has always been.

The tomtoms quickened. More brush raised the flame into the sky. The dancers' pattern broke into greater individuality as the heat of the fire began to penetrate their blood.

Round and round the fire they whirled, while Burke went on talking, wooing himself with the sound of his own voice.

The considerable amount of whisky in him made the wisecracks come easily; and he was delighted with the way things were going. He had staged a hit.

BUT now the audience was laughing less, for the bizzarre drama of the ceremony began to grip them.

As the fire crackled higher, the dancers threw themselves toward it, barely skimming over it, symbol of scorn for every danger.

All unison was gone now as the tomtoms seemed to race each other, as each dancer twirled, sprang, leaped, each driven by his own inner frenzy,

the shrill war-whoops vibrating in their throats, their arrows poised tremblingly against the bows they pointed now at the sky, now at each other, now directly at the audience.

The people in the grandstands had become quite silent and intent; the Apaches' fever had somehow reached them.

Burke took the microphone in his hand again: "What a sight, friends! These savage warriors working themselves into a lather, ready to shoot their arrows into the fire the way they have for hundreds of years before going forth to face their enemies.

"So hold your seats, ladies and gents, and don't duck because this time, thank Heaven, the boys are only playing"

Intensity increasing with each drum-beat made every moment seem as if it

must be the breaking point. Suddenly as all the dancers' reached the climax and let their arrows fly into the flames, into the air like a great fierce bird went Johnny Apache, the arrow fitted to the string pulled back and back until it seemed as if the giant bow must crack.

Then there was a shriek and the chief was on his feet joining the dancers. As his hand shot out against the strong, tense arm of Johnny Apache, an arrow pinged across the fire, streaked over the microphone and dug its way into the palm tree across the clearing.

Except for Dan Burke, who would never forget where that arrow had pointed, everyone who saw the old man snatch the bow from Johnny Apache and take his place in the writhing circle assumed that this was part of the ceremony.

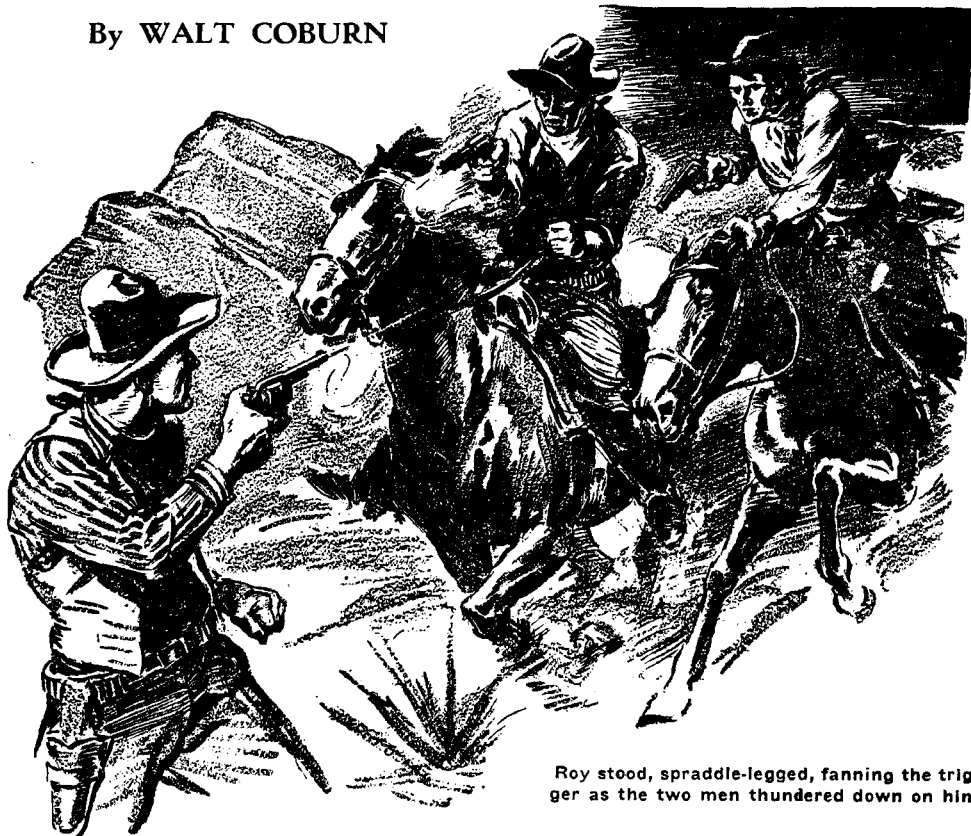
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By WALT COBURN



Roy stood, spraddle-legged, fanning the trigger as the two men thundered down on him

Watered Guns

WHEN WILD BILL BENTON eloped with the pretty Gorman girl, he broke the feuding code that had held Bentons and Gormans at death grips for three generations. It took almost nine years for the Gormans to trace Will and Mary Benton from Texas to Montana, where Will had established a ranch on the banks of the Missouri River.

But the Gormans did find Wild Bill and they shot him down before the eyes of his wife and seven-year-old son Roy. Mary Benton's mind was never right after that day, and the terrific gun-battle planted in Roy a fear of violence that grew as the years passed.

Because of his mother's condition, Roy was reared by her uncle, PREACHER GORMAN, circuit-rider and the only peaceful Gorman in the tribe. After Mary's death Preacher Gorman rode away, for Roy was a man now

and the Preacher's work there was finished.

Roy found a job with TOM BALEY who owned the nearby Hat Ranch. He fell in love with Tom's daughter, Wanda; and he incurred the enmity of BIG RED MCGRAW who ran the Rafter Cross outfit for a banking syndicate. Roy's cowardice under McGraw's incessant bullying made even Wanda label him yellow.

THINGS come to a head on the day of the Wolf Creek Pool branding. McGraw, as foreman of the largest outfit in the pool, is directing operations and when he orders Roy to mark a bull yearling with the Rafter Cross brand, Roy, recognizing it as one of Tom Baley's Hat stock, refuses. As McGraw pulls a gun, Roy strikes him across the head with the still-hot branding iron.

The first installment of this two-part serial, herein concluded, was published in last week's Argosy