

## EPHEMERA

### 1878 Dime Novel

Ron McCoy

In 1858, the publishing firm of Beadle & Adams opened up for business in New York City and for nearly four generations thereafter ranked as the most famous and prolific producer of dime novels.

Dime novels—the term reflects the usual purchase price of these paperbound booklets, though some sold for half that and double issues commanded twenty cents—appeared in the 1840s. Cheaply printed, sparsely illustrated with woodcuts, they offered readers sensational fiction. Around the time of the Civil War, tales were increasingly set in the American West.

Beadle & Adams issued its first Western—*Maleska: Indian Wife of the White Hunter* by Ann S. Stephens—in 1860 and sold 300,000 copies, about five times the normal print run. Not surprisingly the firm inundated the market with many more examples of the genre. *Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot of the West: A Wild Life of Romance* by "Buckskin Sam," the cover illustrated here, came onto the market in 1878.

The wildly improbable adventure is set in Texas in 1860, "half-way between Oakville and San Patricio, near the boundary line of Live Oak County, and at the Nueces ford." Heroes Kit Carson, Jr., Big Foot Wallace, Texas Bill, Reckless Joe, and his brother Daring Dan contend with poisoned arrows, Mexican *banditos*, and Irish immigrants.

Early on, Buckskin Sam notes that on the frontier even educated folk "get into the habit of using the same language as those who have no education." That prepares us for this bit of advice from Big Foot Wallace: "Jack, keep yer eyes open if yer have to jam in sum terbaeca to smart 'em in tew keepin'so. There's Reds along the Neuaces arter loose stock an' sculps, an' yer must look sharp or yer'll loose your'n."

After twenty-seven pages *Kit Carson, Jr.*, climaxes with the rescue of Miss Martha Wells, Reckless Joe's fiancée, from a "Comanche" Indian village: "On, like an avalanche, came the mounted Rangers on the Indians' rear, driving them into one mingled mass, Kit riding over them and crushing them to the earth beneath his horse's heels, a six-shooter in each hand, uttering wilder yells than any brave on the field, and urging on his boys, who, in the same style, left death

at every bound of their horses."

Dime novels are no more, but their tone remains with us yet. Once, asked by a chronicler of matters cinematic how he organized a Western film, legendary director Cecil B. DeMille replied: "Set the scene, introduce your characters, establish the conflict, and get them on their horses." To which Kit Carson, Jr., Big Foot Wallace, Daring Dan, Wildcat Bob, Three-Fingered Jack, Rocky Mountain Rob, Deadwood Dick, Calamity Jane, and all the other inhabitants of Beadle & Adams's crowded, popular, and lucrative stable of Westerners, might have added in chorus: "Ready when you are, C.B."



Vol. I. Complete in One Number. Beadle & Adams, Publishers, 63 & 65 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK. Price, Ten Cents. No. 3.

### Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot of the West.

A WILD LIFE ROMANCE BY "BUCKSKIN SAM."

