

When the Pecos Kid strode the screen, evil was not mere mischief and its perpetrators were double-dyed scoundrels. There was no shriving for their sins except bloodletting, and the Kid was there to administer. When they committed robbery, they did it with pistols and invariably left gory and incontrovertible evidence upon the floor of the First Drivers' and Cattlemen's Bank. When Black Dalton (or Ace Simmons or Hole-card Beaucaire) lusted after Florabel, the Prairie Nightingale, he panted, pawed, and knocked the furniture over. He was pressing kisses that carried a 125-pound head of steam on her throat when the Kid let him have it, from both guns—not without, of course, the punctilio of calling upon him to draw.

The Pecos Kid was often launched upon the screen at the working end of the Vigilantes' rope. The devotee of the Western knew that there were two methods by which he could denoose himself: a confederate could shoot the rope apart with a bullet at the instant of the Kid's strangulation; or the Kid would ask the final solace of a condemned Western hero—a dram.

"Pass him up a flask of mouth-whiskey," the Vigilante leader would direct. The Kid swigged to the count of nine. His cheeks puffed out like an ape's. Suddenly he'd expel the whiskey in a stinging spray. There were flurries, howls, and curses, reaching for guns, and a random fusillade. But the Kid was well away, pouring leather into his cayuse.

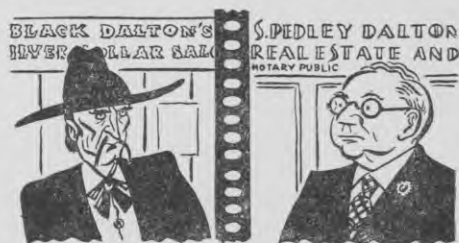
Try that with a lemon phosphate.

The Pecos Kid, weary, dusty, and unshorn, having traversed a trail strewn with the skulls of bufler, would enter a settlement. He was never indiscreet enough to inquire, "What's the name of this town, pardner?" because the invariable reply would be, "We don't ask names hereabouts, stranger. We stay—or we ramble." Nor did he ever give his name. Instead, he was recognized, usually by the fleetness of his draw in his first encounter with a henchman of the villain, who in turn was advised of the advent of the Kid into these precincts. The plot began to simmer with the villain's invocation, "Hmmm.

So it's the Pecos Kid. Ridin' a apron-faced bronc, Huh? Well, I'll fix his wagon!"

The Kid would be found eating ham and eggs in The Chinaman's. Why always ham and eggs and always in a restaurant operated by a Chinese, the deponent is not prepared to say. But that's the way it was.

Not always was Black Dalton the proprietor of the Silver Dollar Saloon. Sometimes he was Lufe Dalton, Indian agent; Si Dalton, the crooked banker; Hank Dalton, sheriff of Lop Ear County; or Lame Elk De-Aw-La-Ton, leader of a bank of marauding Navajo that had busted off the reservation and were taking a census of the white settlers by scalp. In some pictures he was Ponsoby Smythe-Dalton who swore by his hypothecated coronet that, damme, he was going to run sheep on land hitherto sacred to horned cattle, egad.



*The villain in the piece.*

Organized lawlessness was an essential ingredient of the Western movie for a generation. When the industry and civic agencies realized that the audiences for these films included millions of Mexicans, British, South and Central Americans, they abolished criminal conspiracy by manifesto and directive. A sheriff could no longer, under any circumstances, work in concert with a theiving band. At worst, he could only be honestly mistaken. Indians took the warpath only up to 1879; hence any picture in which the aborigine takes up arms must make it clear that nothing like that happens now; that the Navajo peacefully weaves rugs for the Fred Harvey tourist trade and the Apache handles a wholesale line of prime mutton.