

# The FRONT PAGE

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## The Rawhide Kid: Blazing Saddle

By Lawrence Ferber  
Contributing writer

He can steer a horse into submission, draw his gun faster than your heart pumps out a beat, shoot the lead from a pencil, deliver a jaw-bruising round-house kick, and boy, he sure dresses sharp! Ladies and gentlemen, a new breed of cowboy has mozied into town: The Rawhide Kid.

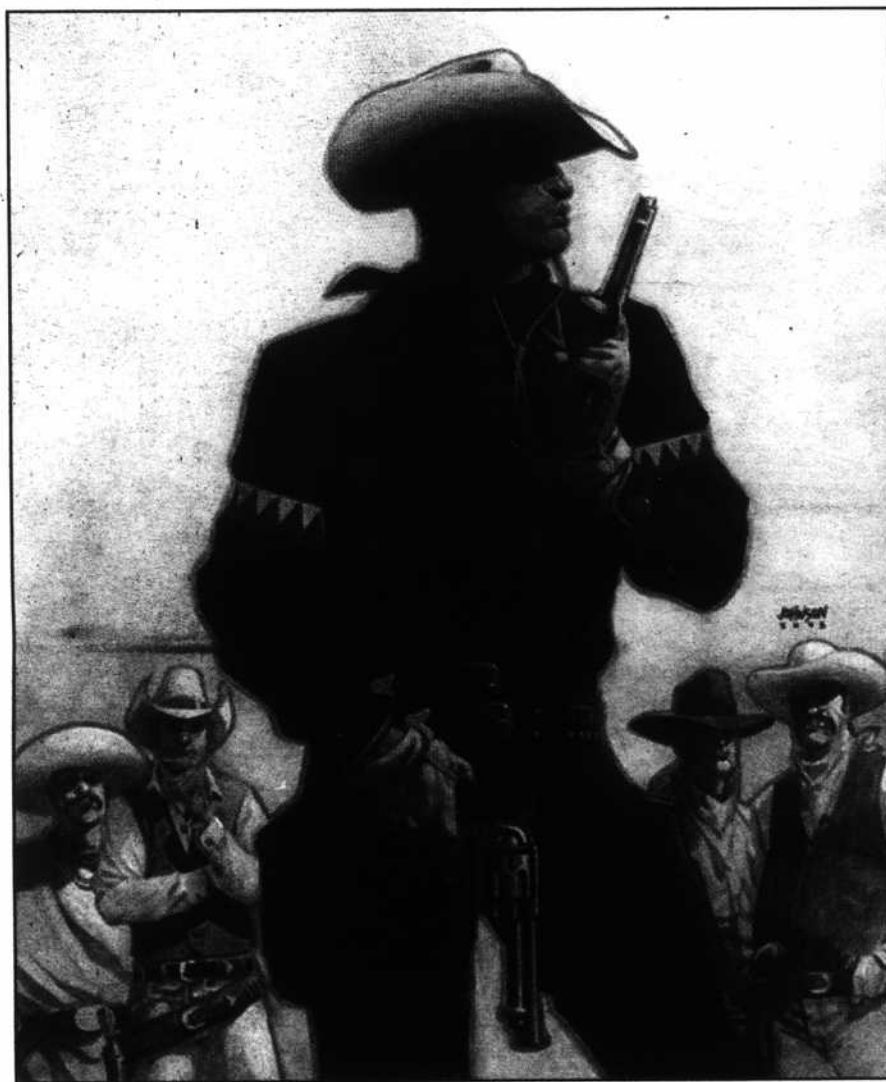
"The notion here was to do a straight western with a non-straight lead," says Axel Alonso, an editor at Marvel Comics. He's discussing "The Rawhide Kid," a new five-issue limited series whose title character is a mite — well, a lot — pink in the saddle.

"The men drink whiskey, the women stay at home, the bad guy wears black, and the good guy rides into town on a white horse," Alonso continues. "It just so happens he's a little bit different, he's not from the same mold as Clint Eastwood."

The first issue hit the stands in February; the last in the series came out last month. All the issues will be collected together as a graphic novel, to be published by Marvel in August.

The Rawhide Kid actually isn't entirely new in town — only his acknowledged queer status is. Originated in 1955, the Kid has fronted several volumes of his own comic title since, the last of which was an unspectacular four-issue miniseries in 1985. The revelation that the Rawhide Kid would be revived this year as a full-fledged homosexual, however, has resulted in a firestorm of interest and, moreso, controversy: some from homophobic comic readers, some from homophobic comic professionals. Yet Alonso and the Kid's artist from way back then and now, 82-year-old John Severin, admit that Rawhide's gayness only makes sense both in retrospect and otherwise.

"I was in conversation with Severin, he's easily the most respected combat and western artist, and we'd been talking about doing a combat book or western book," recalls Alonso of the upcoming series' genesis. "I was looking through the catalog of available Marvel characters and I said to John, 'look at Rawhide, he's better looking than a Western character has the right to be. He's gay.' And John said, 'you're right.'"



Gay characters aren't strangers to Marvel comics' pages. Titles like *eXiles*, *X-static*, *Alpha Flight*, and *X-Men* have boasted queer characters over recent years. Yet never before have they taken front and center stage. Alonso also feels there's a massive gap between how Rawhide Kid's gayness is presented versus other mainstream comics' gay characters. "I'm not at all concerned with being PC nor am I concerned with doing what a lot of people in the industry have been doing, which is playing it safe and putting forth afterschool special versions of sexuality," he insists. "The goal wasn't to do some sort of outreach project. It was to do a Western. We're not trying to put you into the heart, mind and soul of a gay cowboy — we wanted to show him shooting

the heck out of bad guys."

And that's exactly what the Rawhide Kid does. He may mince, primp, camp, and dish gossip, but call him a sissy and you'll pay the price with a broken nose or pierced artery. "I do get a kick out of that. Who doesn't?" Alonso smiles. "I think it's great! 'Who are you calling sissy motherfucker?' What you're doing here to some degree is playing with sexual politics, changing ideas of masculinity and hell, it's fun. Who hasn't been called something and wanted to strike back? The Kid does that, and after he decks the guy he worries about a split nail. I think that's funny stuff — don't you?"

Alonso and Severin came to their bent cowboy epiphany in early 2002. To

continued on page 16

### Book Notes

By Richard Labonte  
Contributing Writer

*The Music of Your Life*, by John Rowell. Simon and Schuster, 260 pages, \$23 hardcover.

Compassionate comedy is born of imperfection, heartbreak, regret — the survivable failures of our lives. That's certainly how it goes in *The Music of Your Life*, a remarkable debut collection of seven well-polished stories. There is in every one an authentic balance between wishing for a magic future and settling for a prosaic present, a wry, poignant assertion that dreams don't always come true. There's also a charming trace of old-school gay DNA in every sweetly melancholic story — a passion for show tunes and Julie Andrews, an eye for just the right color, a career as a florist. In the title tale, a 10-year-old adores both Lawrence Welk's "champagne music" and Batman's suggestive tights, avoids schoolyard bullies when he can, and is a disappointment to his confused, ashamed father — the classic gay tropes, always honored with gentle, unembarrassed respect. Rowell's stylish fiction is infused with the manners and memories of his North Carolina roots, a tone that probably prompted his publisher's press-release comparisons to the early writing of Truman Capote. The parallel is appropriate.



*Highsmith: A Romance of the 1950s*, by Marijane Meaker. Cleis Press, 207 pages, \$14.95 paper.

There are actually three intertwined histories in this bewitching memoir, remarkable considering its brevity. The first is Meaker's account of her fevered few years, from the late 1950s to early '60s,



continued on page 6

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