

Louis L'Amour re-imagined

Beau L'Amour's graphic novel brings to life his father's work

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Courtesy Louis L'Amour Enterprises, Inc.

Shad Marrone is a man with a sheriff's posse on his tail in the Louis L'Amour graphic novel *Law of the Desert Born*.

Great writing is forever, and so, apparently, are great writers.

Louis L'Amour died 25 years ago, but his timeless stories about the American West live on through his family's efforts. The latest reincarnation of his prose is among the most creative yet: His son, Beau, recently transformed Louis' 1946 short story *Law of the Desert Born* into the first Louis L'Amour graphic novel.

"I had long heard that graphic novel sales are extremely limited – there are more creators than fans, and we're just beginning to see how true that is," Beau joked while making his way from his Southern California home to Durango. He'll speak and sign copies of the graphic novel Thursday evening at Sorrel Sky Gallery.

The book is a collaboration between friends – Charles Santino adapted the text from Louis' story, Beau co-wrote the "script" with his writer pal Katherine Nolan, and their friend Thomas Yeates did the comic book-like illustrations. It's bound in a fine, hardcover package and includes an informative appendix written by Beau about how the graphic novel came to be.

The story is pure L'Amour, but it's one of the earliest examples of what would come to be his inimitable retelling of the Western saga. As Beau explains in the appendix, it was one of the first Western stories his father penned after returning from the European World War II front.

As this Western story goes, the lines between good guys and bad are blurred: The "hero" of the story, Shad Marone, gets caught in a two-wrongs-not-making-a-right scenario and ends up on the wrong side of the law after gunning down his foe.

The local sheriff engages prisoner Jesus Lopez – who with his half-Mexican and half-Apache blood is no favorite of the locals – to help track Marone; but Lopez and Marone have their own history, which lends to the drama.

Having never read a graphic novel myself, I really enjoyed this. The images far outnumber the words in the book, but Yeates' drawings forward the story on their own. It's a cinematic effect – the art of conveying story through progressive images – and the creative quartet's background in filmmaking is evident in the book.

Durango is familiar ground for the L'Amours, who bought a ranch west of town several years before Louis died in 1988. Beau spent a great deal of time here as a boy in the 1960s when his father was a noted regular at the Strater Hotel. His family remains friends with the Campbell family. Shanan Campbell Wells owns Sorrel Sky and has hosted several literary events for Louis' widow, Kathy.

"I get there more than I would think I could," Beau L'Amour said. "Whenever I get what I call portable work when I'm not locked into L.A. or New York, I love to do those kind of projects on the ranch there."