

THE KEMOSABE

by Mike Resnick

So me and the Masked Man, we decide to hook up and bring evildoers to justice, which is a pretty full-time occupation considering just how many of these _momzers_ there are wandering the West. Of course, I don't work on Saturdays, but this is never a problem, since he's usually sleeping off Friday night's binge and isn't ready to get back in the saddle until about half past Monday.

We get along pretty well, though we don't talk much to each other -- my English is a little rusty, and his Yiddish is non-existent -- but we share our food when times are tough, and we're always saving each other's life, just like it says in the dime novels.

Now, you'd think two guys who spend a whole year riding together wouldn't have any secrets from each other, but actually that's not the case. We respect each other's privacy, and it is almost twelve months to the day after we form a team that we find ourselves answering a call of Nature at the very same time, and I look over at him, and I am so surprised I could just _plotz_, you know what I mean?

It's then that I start calling him Kemosabee, and finally one day he asks me what it means, and I tell him that it means "uncircumcized goy", and he kind of frowns and tells me that he doesn't know what _either_ word means, so I sit him down and explain that Indians are one of the lost Hebrew tribes, only we aren't as lost as we're supposed to be, because Custer and the rest of those _meshugginah_ soldiers keeps finding us and blowing us to smithereens. And the Kemosabee, he asks if Hebrew is a suburb of Hebron, and right away I see we've got an enormous cultural gap to overcome.

But what the hell, we're pardners, and we're doing a pretty fair job of ridding the West of horse thieves and stage robbers and other varmints, so I say, "Look, Kemosabee, you're a _mensch_ and I'm proud to ride with you, and if you wanna get drunk and

shtup a bunch of _shiksés_ whenever we go into town, that's your business and who am I to tell you what to do? But Butch Cavendish and his gang are giving me enough _tsouris_ this month, so if we stop off at any Indian villages, let's let this be our little secret, okay?"

And the Kemosabee, who is frankly a lot quicker with his guns than his brain, just kind of frowns and looks hazy and finally nods his head, though I'm sure he doesn't know what he's nodding about.

Well, we ride on for another day or two, and finally reach his secret silver mine, and he melts some of it down and shoves it into his shells, and like always I ride off and hunt up Reb Running Bear and have him say Kaddish over the bullets, and when I hunt up the Masked Man again I find he has had the _chutzpah_ to take on the whole Cavendish gang single-handed, and since they know he never shoots to kill and they ain't got any such compunctions, they leave him lying there for dead with a couple of new _pupiks_ in his belly.

So I make a sled and hook it to the back of his horse, which he calls Silver but which he really ought to call White, or at least White With The Ugly Brown Blotch On His Belly, and I hop up my pony, and pretty soon we're in front of Reb Running Bear's tent, and he comes out and looks at the Masked Man lying there with his ten-gallon stetson for a long moment, and then he turns to me and says, "You know, that has got to be the ugliest _yarmulkah_ I've ever seen."

"This is my pardner," I say. "Some goniffs drygulched him. You got to make him well."

Reb Running Bear frowns. "He doesn't look like one of the Chosen People to me. Where was he _bar mitzvahed_?"

"He wasn't," I say. "But he's one of the Good Guys. He and I are cleaning up the West."

"Six years in Hebrew school and you settle for being a janitor?" he says.

"Don't give me a hard time," I said. "We got bad guys to shoot and wrongs to right. Just save the Kemosabee's life."

"The Kemosabee?" he repeats. "Would I be very far off the track if I surmised that he doesn't keep kosher?"

"Look," I say, deciding that it's time to play hardball, "I hadn't wanted to bring this up, but I know what you and Mrs. Screaming Hawk were doing last time I visited this place."

"Keep your voice down or that _yenta_ I married will make my life hell!" he whispers, glancing back toward his teepee. Then he

grimaces. "Mrs. Screaming Hawk. Serves me right for taking her to Echo Canyon. _Feh!_"

I stare at him. "So _nu_"

"All right, all right, Jehovah and I will nurse the Kemosabee back to health."

"Good," I say.

He glares at me. "But just this one time. Then I pass the word to all the other Rabbis: we don't cure no more _goys_. What have they ever done for us?"

Well, I am all prepared to argue the point, because I'm a pretty open-minded kind of guy, but just then the Kemosabee starts moaning and I realize that if I argue for more than a couple of minutes we could all be sitting _shivah_ for him before dinnertime, so I wander off and pay a visit to Mrs. Rutting Elk to console her on the sudden passing of her husband and see if there is anything I can do to cheer her up, and Reb Running Bear gets to work, and lo and behold, in less than a week the Masked Man is up and around and getting impatient to go out after desperados, so we thank Reb Running Bear for his services, and he loads my pardner down with a few canteens of chicken soup, and we say a fond _shalom_ to the village.

I am hoping we have a few weeks for the Kemosabee to regain his strength, of which I think he is still missing an awful lot, but as Fate would have it, we are riding for less than two hours when we come across the Cavendish gang's trail.

"Aha!" he says, studying the hoofprints. "All thirty of them! This is our chance for revenge!"

My first thought is to say something like, "What do you mean _we_, mackerel eater?" -- but then I remember that Good Guys never back down from a challenge, so I simply say "Ugh!", which is my opinion of taking on thirty guys at once, but which he insists on interpreting as an affirmative.

We follow the trail all day, and when it's too dark to follow it any longer, we make camp on a small hill.

"We should catch up with them just after sunrise," says the Masked Man, and I can see that his trigger finger is getting itchy.

"Ugh," I say.

"We'll meet them on the open plain, where nobody can hide."

"Double ugh with cherries on it," I say.

"You look very grim, old friend," he says.

"Funny you should mention it," I say, but before I can suggest that we just forget the whole thing, he speaks again.

"You can have the other twenty-nine, but Cavendish is mine."

"You're all heart, Kemosabee," I say.

He stands up, stretches, and walks over to his bedroll.

"Well, we've got a hard day's bloodletting ahead of us. We'd best get some sleep."

He lays down, and ten seconds later he's snoring like all get-out, and I sit there staring at him, and I just know he's not gonna come through this unscathed, and I remember Reb Running Bear's promise that no medicine man would ever again treat a goy.

And the more I think about it, the more I think that it's up to me, the loyal sidekick, to do something about it. And finally it occurs to me just what I have to do, because if I can't save him from the Cavendish gang, the least I can do is save him from himself.

So I go over to my bedroll, and pull out a bottle of Mogen David, and pour a little on my hunting knife, and try to remember the exact words the medicine man recites during the _bris_, and I know that someday, when he calms down, he'll thank me for this.

In the meantime, I'm gonna have to find a new nickname for my pardner.

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