

CAP GUNS AND A SCREENPLAY

By Paul Edward Johnson

A moment ago, on this 4th of July, I did a search on the internet - looking for toy cap guns.

Now I'm looking at what Wikipedia has to say about them:

A cap gun is a toy gun that creates a loud sound simulating a gunshot and a puff of smoke when the trigger is pulled. Cap guns were originally made of cast iron, but after World War II were made of a zinc alloy, and now most newer models are made of plastic.

Cap guns get their name from the small discs of shock-sensitive explosive compounds (roughly 1.4 to 1.6 mm in diameter) that provide the noise and smoke, the same as the separate percussion cap primers used in real firearms of the mid to late 1800s, although invariably smaller and made from cheap plastic or paper rather than soft metal. Some are arranged in plastic rings of eight or twelve. There are also single caps, roll caps (of 50 to 500), and disk caps, all of which are actually extremely small versions of percussion fireworks. Armstrong's mixture is often used today as the explosive, but previously the tiny powder charge was a mixture of potassium, sulfur and antimony sulphide sandwiched between two paper layers which hold in the gases long enough to give a sound report when the cap is struck.

Cap guns became especially popular when the heroes of cinema and television rode through the West ridding the territories of villains. Many cap guns were named after or endorsed by leading matinee idols like Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy, The Lone Ranger, Tonto, Dale Evans, Marshal Matt Dillon, or any of countless others.

The "Golden Age" of cap guns was a 20-year period following World War II when television became popular and such companies as Nichols

Industries, Hubley, Kenton, Kilgore, Wyandotte, Classy, Mattel, Actoy, Esquire, George Schmidt, and Stevens made millions of cap guns in various versions. While many had their names patterned after a hero or heroine, many cap guns also were named with western-sounding names, like: "Stallion 45," "Pony," "Mustang," "Pioneer," "Cowboy," "Texan," "Colt 45," "Rodeo," and such.

From the end of the war until about 1965, children over the world emulated their heroes and collected and played with these toy guns.

In 1950 the Stallion 45 was introduced at the New York Toy Fair and became a sensation. It was declared the "Toy of the Year." Besides its large size, which was the same size as its namesake, it featured individual 2-piece bullets, which would hold a single cap and when the gun was fired, the cylinder revolved, the bullet fired, and smoke came out of the end of the barrel.

Today, cap guns and other toy guns in the United States must be manufactured with a bright orange, red, or yellow tip placed over the "muzzle" of the cap gun, or with the entire gun made in these or other bright colors. Laws requiring these markings were made because of incidents where civilians - usually children or teenagers - were killed by police officers when the officers thought they saw real guns. While these incidents were rare, lawmakers decided that toy guns must be marked so they cannot be mistaken for real guns. It is also possible to commit acts of robbery with a replica gun, since no shots need to be fired from a gun that looks passably real.

My fascination with cap guns began on June 10, 1946, when for my fifth birthday my mother and father gave me two identical Roy Rogers' cap-gun pistols and a leather gun belt with leather holsters.



During that summer of 1946 I roamed the sidewalks on my street in Royal Oak Michigan, toting my Roy Rogers' pistols; protecting my friends Tommy and Billy and Judy and her little sister Shoe-Shoe from imaginary villains who might saunter onto Lawndale Drive and threaten them.

When my family moved to East Lincoln Avenue in Royal Oak during the summer of 1948, my mother gave me a Roy Rogers' jacket. I imagined it bullet-proof and made me more fearless, especially on Halloween when I was given a Roy Rogers' cowboy hat, neck scarf, and cowboy boots.

On weekends my cousin Barbie would visit and I would let her be Dale Evans. We would "ride the range" together around our house and gallop through vacant lots.

During the summer of 1951, at age 10, after my family had moved to 5025 Vincent Avenue South in Minneapolis, I sauntered into a five & dime store located on Xerxes Avenue, close to 50th Street, where I discovered what looked to me to be the real deal: the Stallion 45.

The Stallion 45 was way too expensive for me to buy. So when the store clerks were busy with customers I shoved the Stallion 45 inside my Roy Rogers coat and walked out.

I hid the Stallion 45 inside one of my scuffed Roy Rogers cowboy boots. The Stallion 45 was so realistic I knew if my parents ever saw it they would take it away from me.

I didn't even dare let my younger brother Larry see it. He would have told on me.



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During late afternoons, when Larry wasn't in our bedroom, I would take out the Stallion 45, load its six bullets into the revolving cylinder, peer out windows above our back yard, and stealthily shoot any critter that moved. Squirrels, gophers, birds.

On one such late afternoon, my father drove our Deluxe Ford into our garage.

When Dad emerged from the garage carrying a watermelon nestled in his arms, I shot him. Four times. Right there. From a window overlooking our back yard.

But he kept striding toward the back door of our house. And I heard the door slam shut in our kitchen below the bedroom I shared with my brother Larry and our baby brother Ricky.

I hustled to the closet, jammed the Stallion 45 into one of my old Roy Rogers cowboy boots, loathing what I had a moment ago attempted.

That night, I crept out of the house to the alley and tossed the Stallion 45 into our garbage can.

On January 22, 1956, I gave Ricky a present for his fifth birthday: my old Roy Rogers' cap pistols and holsters.

During a family Thanksgiving dinner in 1965, Ricky begged our father to give him a real pistol for Christmas: a very expensive Browning Marksman Medalist target pistol. Ricky said he wanted one because his friends had them. But Dad insisted there be no real pistol in the house.

On Christmas of 1965, Ricky asked Dad if he could have a Browning Marksman Medalist target pistol for his 15th birthday. Again, because his teenage buddies owned them.

But on Ricky's 15th birthday, January 22, 1966, Dad only gave Ricky a pellet pistol.

Then on the night of Abraham Lincoln's birthday, just several weeks later, just several blocks from home, just several stores from the five & dime where I had stolen the Stallion 45 cap gun, our father was gunned down.

He was murdered while trying to protect neighbors and our neighborhood's grocery store cashier, a woman my father had known for 15 years. She was being threatened by two cloaked teenage lads attempting to stick her up. They were brandishing huge Browning Marksman Medalist target pistols. And one lad then fired one shot above her head.

To prove to her their pistols were not toy cap guns.



Since then I've written several stories about how this "random event" affected friends and family.

During the past ten years I've attempted to try my hand at writing a spec screenplay about how this plagued my family.

Screenplays are not intended to be "literature." Instead, they are intended to be "blueprints."

Blueprints conforming to movie industry standards for what a movie may become when placed in the hands of movie producers, directors, cinematographers, art directors, music supervisors, casting consultants, lighting crews, and a host of the other essential production personnel; all before they and the cast of actors make what's words on paper take flight.

But before any of them get involved in the creative process, a spec screenplay must first impress a single person whose job is to read hundreds of spec screenplays submitted by spec screenplay writers.

And if the first ten pages fail to grab that reader, or simply the first page, they often toss it and move on to another spec screenplay upon their table.

And before they agree to read a spec screenplay? They wish to know what it's about in 40 words. Better yet, perhaps only 25 "elevator-pitch" words.

Forty-words-or-less descriptions of spec screenplays are called "loglines." If producers like a logline, they may request a "five-minute pitch."

Here's one of my loglines for my spec screenplay titled Above Justice:

A melancholy man's wife challenges him to solve the decades-old unsolved mysteries of his missing brother and murdered father. But when derelict homicide detectives conspire to dismiss his disturbing discoveries, he apprehends his true aspiration: the healing power of forgiveness.

And here's "a pitch" I wrote for Above Justice:

Dear Spec Screenplay Reader,

When American children "grow up" they put away their toy guns. But then they often acquire real pistols.

A front-page headline in a Minneapolis newspaper:
"A GUN AT 14, THEN A SENSELESS KILLING."

Above Justice was written to become a true-story movie that matters to teenagers, parents, and grandparents distressed by the senseless tragedies resulting from the American drug and gun culture.

Above Justice depicts an aging man's vexed quest to resolve the decades-old unsolved mysteries of his vanished brother and murdered father; a vexed quest he transforms into a transcendental flight toward the restorative and healing power of forgiveness.

As a professional career counselor I helped hundreds of people transform and advance their careers by writing their resumes. Successful resumes employ a traditional structure and format. And so do spec screenplays. They both require a writer to be crafty enough to hook their readers.

It's now my intention to hook you into reading my screenplay.

The first-segment of "Act One" depicts how the American gun culture portrayed in Hollywood movies contributed to shaping some childhood and adolescent values formed by my youngest brother Rick, who vanished at age 21 after collecting his financial share of our murdered father's estate.

The second-segment of "Act One" depicts my reluctant acceptance of a challenge from a mentor and my wife: to at age 60 investigate the decades-old unsolved mysteries of my vanished brother Rick and our murdered father, while tentatively suspecting the two teenage lads who murdered our beloved father had somehow later caused Rick to mysteriously vanish.

The final segment of "Act One" depicts my disturbing discovery: the unique pistols used to murder my father were identical to the expensive pistol Rick begged our father to give him for his 15th birthday. Only because Rick's teenage buddies possessed them.

The first half of the "Act Two" depicts my awkward fish-out-of-water attempt to confront Rick's former high school classmates during their class reunion on a Mississippi riverboat, believing they, at age 50, might be more inclined to reveal their secrets about the unsolved mysteries; secrets they could not bring themselves to disclose when they were only age 15.

The second half of "Act Two" depicts derelict homicide detectives clandestinely dismissing my pleas for them to investigate the men who were Rick's former teenage buddies. The detectives do not want the homicide unit's previously botched and poorly investigated case to resurface and thereby taint the reputations of their former colleagues.

"Act Three" depicts my voyage going beyond and above my vexed quest for justice; to instead apprehend what families victimized by cruel crimes need most: a powerful blessing which nurtures and restores true peace of mind: the healing power of forgiveness.

May you profit from Above Justice by imaginatively sensing what movie audiences may see and feel when they discover the healing and restorative power of Above Justice.

Blessings to you and yours,

Paul Edward Johnson

My father's all-time favorite novel was written by Thomas Wolfe: Look Homeward, Angel.

Within Thomas Wolfe's novel, Oliver Gant is depicted as a frustrated sculptor who cannot sculpt the face

of his angel into the same form that he persists to envision her face to be in his mind's eye.

But night after night he strives to get her face "just right."

Above Justice has become my attempt at creating something angelic. As I continue to try to sculpt my angel's face, I may soon "get her right and ready" for a movie producer to make her take flight.

My most-recent rewrite of Above Justice may now be closer to what it should become.