

BOOKS

# Old Myths Get Graphic

Classic Westerns and creation stories are reborn as graphic novels

BY ANNA RUSSELL

**IN THE OPENING SEQUENCE** of "Law of the Desert Born," a graphic novel out Tuesday from Bantam Books, a man in a wide-brimmed hat rides on horseback toward a fenced-in area whose sign says "Bar B Ranch." He moves past the windmills and grazing chickens, enters a modest wood house and shoots a man twice. Then he puts away his gun and rides out.

The entire scene contains just over a dozen words, but the action stretches through 16 frames of detailed black-and-white illustrations over five pages. The mysterious

shooting provides the opening to the coffee table book, whose plot is based on a 1946 short story by Western writer Louis L'Amour, who published close to 90 novels before his death at 80 in 1988.

To research the visuals for the graphic adaptation, the writer's son and the project's producer, Beau L'Amour, 52, visited the areas where much of the story takes place, including Puerto De Luna, New Mexico. He noted details—how plaster falls away from adobe buildings, for instance, or the texture of logs—which he worked into the narrative along with adapter Charles Santino, co-writer Katherine Nolan and illustrator Thomas Yeates.

The resulting book, based on the original story that appeared in a pulp magazine, took two years and nearly 600 frames to illustrate. "The story doesn't tell you what to think or feel," Mr. L'Amour says. "There are things that people are doing that are extremely important to the plot and to the characters that are never commented on in dialogue."

"Law of the Desert Born" is one of a handful of large-format graphic novels coming this fall that deal in old tales—stories that adapt and embellish older source material, from Eastern creation myths to fairy tales to pulp Westerns. Here, selected scenes from three upcoming illustrated works:

While the Medicine Man passes down the secrets of the snow and translates the whispers of the aurora, it is the storytellers who keep the legends of Nord alive.



The best storytellers know all the old tales.

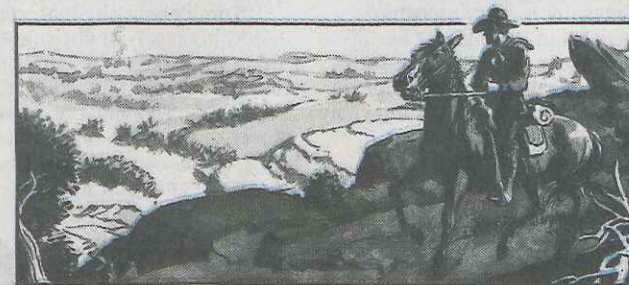
But also they can tell new ones...



'The Encyclopedia of Early Earth,' ► out in early December, is by London-based writer and illustrator Isabel Greenberg. She borrowed elements from the Old Testament, folk and fairy tales and Greek mythology for her fictional world, 'Early Earth,' in which raven gods toy with the inhabitants below. 'The whole book is really about storytelling and how there are certain stories that move you,' says Ms. Greenberg, 25. 'I liked how very similar stories in different cultures come back.'

◀ 'Brahma Dreaming,' a collaboration between the London-based team of writer John Jackson and illustrator Daniela Jaglenka Terrazzini, retells tales from Hindu mythology alongside full-page illustrations. The book, out in early November, contains three sections: 'Tales of Creation,' 'Tales of Destruction' and 'Tales of Preservation.' Left, an illustration for 'Kartikaya,' a story in which the son of Hindu god Shiva rides a peacock into battle. 'I think the mythology of other people is always extremely interesting,' says Mr. Jackson.

It can be tricky to tell the good guys from the bad guys in 'Law of the Desert Born,' ► an adaptation of a Louis L'Amour short story, produced by the late writer's son, Beau L'Amour. There is no narrator, and no clear villain. 'These are guys who are just trying to make the best of a bad situation. It's not trying to be an old-school Western that moralized and gives you easy answers,' says Mr. L'Amour. 'The time and the place was full of people reinventing themselves and getting away with whatever they could.'



Clockwise from top right: Isabel Greenberg; Thomas Yeates; Daniela Jaglenka Terrazzini

