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opening extract from

Charlie Small: Destiny Mountain

written by

Charlie Small

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If you find this book, PLEASE look after it. This is the only true account of my remarkable adventures.

My name is Charlie Small and I am four hundred years old, maybe even more. But in all those long years I have never grown up. Something happened when I was eight years old, something I can't begin to understand. I went on a journey... and I'm still trying to find my way home. Now, although I have destroyed a terrible bloodthirsty vulture, robbed a bank and been caught in the middle of a bison stampede, I still look like any eight-year-old you might pass in the street.

I've travelled to the ends of the earth and to the centre of the earth. I've been chased by a merciless posse, I've really rattled a rattlesnake and caught a cougar by the tail! You may think this sounds fantastic; you could think it's a lie. But you would be wrong, because EVERYTHING IN THIS BOOK IS TRUE. Believe this single fact and you can share the most incredible journey ever experienced!

Charlie Small


Wild
Bob
Ffrance

Looking Down The Barrel Of A Colt 45

BUMP!

'Ouch!' I cried as I rolled to a stop. Looking back I could see that I had tumbled down a huge gorge between two cliff walls. The ground beneath me was dusty and scrubby, and I was just about to get up and dust myself down, when I heard a familiar click behind my left ear.

'Where d'ya think you're goin', boy?' asked a soft voice. I turned around carefully, with my arms raised, and found myself staring down the barrel of a Colt 45.

'Oh, shucks! It's a bad day for you, boy,' said the young man looking at me. Piercing blue eyes shone from a dirty, grimy face; his long, greasy hair hung down to his shoulders, and he had the meanest grin I've ever seen.

'I'm Wild Bob Ffrance, the most wanted outlaw in the whole of the wild and wicked west – and you've just barged into my camp.'

Oh no! Help!

Things Go From Bad To Worse

With a twitch of his pistol, he signalled me towards a campfire that glowed behind some scrubby bushes, and from where the smell of cooking drifted.

'Hands behind your head, boy, and no funny business or I'll splatter your brains on the ground like a mess of baked beans.'

I did as I was told! I put up my hands and walked towards the fire, expecting to hear the bang of his gun and feel the sting of a bullet between my shoulder blades at any second.

This is just typical, I said to myself. There you were, safe and sound and living the life of a hero with old Granny Green, when you decide you want to go exploring again; then you want to find your way back home. And before the end of the very same day, here you are being marched at gunpoint by a crazy, trigger-happy cowboy. Brilliant!

'Turn around. Now, sit down on that rock and keep quiet,' said Wild Bob Ffrance, and again I did exactly as I was told. Well, almost!

'Look, I'm no threat to you,' I began to say.

'I just stumbled down . . .'

P'TANG! Wild Bob's gun spat a tongue of orange flame and a bullet ricocheted off the rock where I sat. *P'tang . . . p'tang . . . p'tang!* The sound echoed across the evening sky.

'What part of "sit down and keep quiet" do you not understand?' said the man, spitting into the dirt at his feet.

'Well, I . . .'

P'TANG! Another bullet chipped the rock, just by my left hand, stinging my fingers. OK, I got the message!

'Now, let's see what you've got in there,' he said, pointing to my rucksack. 'Hand it over, nice and easy.'



The outlaw took my rucksack, his gun still trained on me, and tipped it up. My telescope and magnifying glass, the maps, my journal and all the other paraphernalia, fell to the ground.

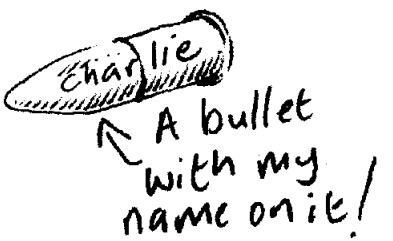
'It's my explorer's kit,' I said helpfully.

'It looks like a spy's kit to me,' said the gunman through gritted teeth. 'You were sent

by Horatio Ham to spy on me, weren't you, you low-down dog.'

'Ham! Who's Horatio Ham? I'm just trying to . . .'

'Shut your jabbering, boy,' the cowboy replied. 'I know a sneaking, slinking spy when I see one. Well, you've been spying on the wrong man this time.' He flicked open the chamber on his pistol and started reloading it with bullets from his gun belt.



Yikes! Was this going to be the end of all my adventures?

Challenged

'Hold on a minute,' I said. My heart was thumping so hard I thought it might burst out of my chest. 'What are you doing?'

'Don't worry, Mister Spy,' said the outlaw, clicking his gun shut. 'I'm not a murderer. It's going to be a fair fight; don't let anybody say that Wild Bob isn't fair. I'm challenging you to

a fastest-to-the-draw gunfight!'

Fair! Who was he trying to kid?

'I can't use a gun,' I cried, very scared indeed. 'I've never even held one before.'

'Don't give me that. Everybody knows how to use a gun. Why, I was given one as a christening present!'

'Well, I was given a silver napkin ring for mine,' I said. 'I really don't know how to use a gun. So, sorry, but I'm afraid I can't fight you!'

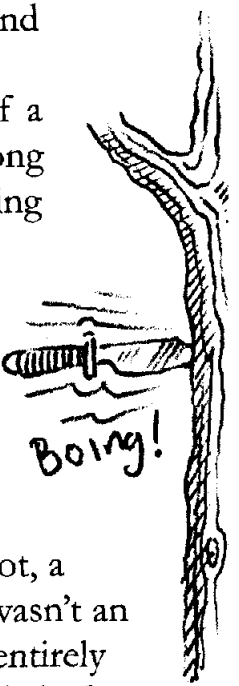
Wild Bob Ffrance stared at me for a moment, then smiled and put his gun down on a rock. Phew! I thought. I've got out of that one!

'OK. Maybe you can't fight with a gun,' said Ffrance. 'So, I'll make it easy for you; follow me.' And he led me into a clearing by the cliff where I had fallen. It was scarred with cracks and caves of all shapes and sizes.

The outlaw turned his back to the cliff and faced me. 'If you can't use a gun, you'll have to use something else,' he said. 'So, choose your weapon, boy; any weapon you like.'

With that, he took a huge Bowie knife from his boot and sent it juddering into a nearby tree. Before it had even finished vibrating, he

pulled a slingshot from his pocket and launched a stone through the air, knocking a crow from the branch of a cactus plant; finally, he unfurled a long leather whip from his belt and flicking it with a loud crack, plucked the knife back out of the tree; the knife span up into the air, and he casually caught it in his free hand. 'What's it to be, boy?' he asked.



I was done for. This outlaw was a phenomenon! He was an expert with a gun, a knife, a slingshot, a whip and who knows what else? I wasn't an expert at anything. (Well that's not entirely true; the Perfumed Pirates of Perfidy had taught me to be an expert sword fighter.)

'Do you have any cutlasses?' I asked, praying that he would say no so I didn't have to fight.

'Not much call for cutlasses in the Wild West,' replied Ffrance, and spat on the ground. 'You'll have to choose something else.'

It was obvious that he wasn't going to let me off and I was going to have to fight. But what else was I good at? It was then I noticed the

lasso, curled around the pommel of a black leather saddle that had been placed in the shade of the cliff face.

Well, I was good at swinging through trees and climbing the rigging of a pirate ship. I was an expert at dangling from the end of puppet strings; I had become very good with all sorts of rope on my various adventures. Maybe I would be good with a lasso as well! There was only one way to find out. I pointed at the rope.

'The lasso?' asked the outlaw. I nodded. 'So, you're a rope merchant, are you?' And he tossed the coil of rope to me.

The Fight

'Oooof!' The weight of the lasso knocked me to the ground, and Wild Bob Ffrance smiled as I struggled back to my feet. This was ridiculous. How on earth was I supposed to throw the lasso when I could hardly lift it up?

'It looks like you're having a bit of trouble, boy,' chuckled Wild Bob. 'So, just to make things a bit fairer, I'm gonna fight you barehanded . . . with one arm behind my back . . . standing on

one leg . . . and with one eye closed!'

I think he was starting to find me a bit of a joke!

'Ready?' he asked. I unfurled the coil of rope until I found the loop of the lasso, and started to swing it over my head like I'd seen the cowboys do on telly.

'Ready!' I cried, but the rope got tangled around my arms, slipped down over my head and ended up curling around my ankles. I toppled over once again.

Wild Bob smiled as I scrambled to my feet once more. 'Are you ready now?' he asked again. 'Now, FIGHT!'

And he hopped towards me on one leg, while looking through one eye. He should have looked ridiculous, but he looked as mean as a wild cat.

Clumsily, I swung the rope and threw it, hoping that somehow the loop would fall around the outlaw and I could bring him down . . . but it went sailing off in completely the wrong direction!

What happened next happened very, very fast!

As I threw the lasso, I saw to my horror that

the mouth of the cave right behind Wild Bob Ffrance was suddenly filled by the biggest, sleepiest and grumpiest grizzly bear I've ever seen. As my lasso sailed away in the wrong direction, the grizzly bear raised his huge paws above Wild Bob's head and gave an ear-shattering roar. Instantly, the outlaw dropped to one knee, turning to face the grizzly and going for his gun at the same time. But his gun wasn't there; it still sat on the rock where he had left it with his other weapons.



The bear began to lumber towards the defenceless outlaw. At the same instant my wayward lasso fell onto Ffrance's revolver, sending it clattering from the rock. The gun hit the ground and went off. P'TANG! The bullet hit the rocks above the mouth of the cave, and a lump of granite the size of a pineapple fell straight onto the grizzly's head with a sickening *crack!*



The bear stopped in his tracks. He blinked once; he blinked twice, and slowly went cross-eyed. With a huge sigh, like a deflating bouncy castle, he dropped down onto all fours. Wild Bob rushed to get his gun, but the grizzly bear had ambled away in a complete daze. He didn't know what day it was any more!

'WOW! That was some mighty fancy rope work, boy,' said Wild Bob. 'You saved my skin and no mistake, even if you are a spy for Horatio Ham.'

'Oh, it's OK,' I said nonchalantly. 'But I am not a spy for Horatio Ham, honest I'm not. My name is Charlie Small, and I'm just a boy who's trying to get home.'

'I think I believe you; but don't you know it's not safe to be wandering through this territory while Ham is about?' said Bob. 'I think you'd better stick with me for the time being.' And the young man came striding over to me and shook my hand. 'You've just made a friend for life, Charlie Small; and after the way you lassoed my pistol, I'm going to call you the Lariat Kid from now on.'

'What's a lariat?' I asked.

'A lariat is another word for a lasso,' said Wild

Bob. 'I thought you would have known that, being an expert and all.'

'Oh yes, lariat. I remember now,' I said, quickly.

Wild Bob chuckled. 'Whatever,' he said. 'Now, let's go and see if my supper is ready.'

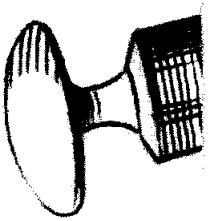
Wild Bob's Fireside Story

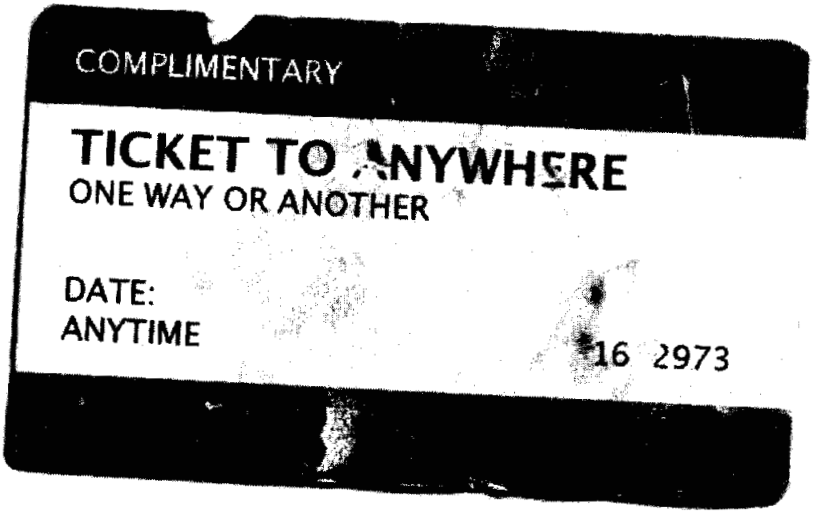
Now I'm ready for bed, camping out under a large, pale moon that floats in an indigo sky. My head is spinning from Wild Bob's tales, and I'm writing up my journal before I go to sleep.

Earlier today, back in Wild Bob's camp, I collected up the bits and pieces of my explorer's kit, checking they were all there as I put them back into my rucksack.

1) My multi-tooled penknife
2) A ball of string
3) A water bottle
   (full to the brim once more)
4) A telescope
5) A scarf







6) An old railway ticket

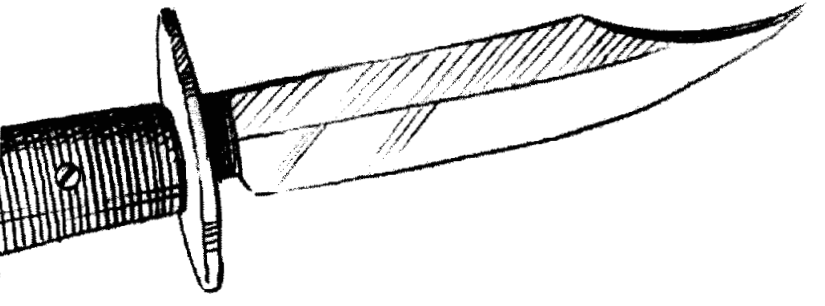
7) This journal

8) A pack of wild animal collector's cards

9) A glue pen (to stick any interesting finds in my book)

10) A glass eye from the steam-powered rhinoceros

11) The hunting knife, the compass and torch I found on the sun-bleached skeleton of a lost explorer





12) The tooth of a monstrous river crocodile
13) A magnifying glass
14) A radio
15) My mobile phone with wind-up charger
16) The skull of a Barbarous Bat
17) A bundle of maps, collected during my travels
18) A few doubloons from the *Betty Mae*