

SYNOPSIS

Arizona Ames

SYNOPSIS OF ARIZONA AMES
BY ZANE GREY (1932)

A young son with a penchant for trouble kills his twin sister's rapist, necessitating his flight from Arizona following which he seems to find others with troubles that require his unselfish attention. He wanders from state-to-state dispensing his own brand of Western gunslinger harsh vigilante justice on behalf of damsels in distress, abused wives, and rancher-victims of unscrupulous villains. In the end, following his last good Samaritan rescue, he discovers his well-deserved reward in the form of a woman whose love rescues him from his wandering life.

LIST OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

(XX) INDICATES THE PAGE WHERE EACH CHARACTER FIRST APPEARS
IN THE WALTER J. BLACK, INC. EDITION OF ARIZONA AMES

- Cappy Tanner (2)** - a trapper who arrives to the Tonto basin from the south
- Rich Ames (4)** - 18-year old twin brother of Nesta Ames, both friends of Cappy Tanner
- Nesta Ames (4)** – twin sister of Rich Ames, single and fancy-free
- Mescal and Manzanita Ames (6)** – 6-year old twin girls, younger sisters of Rich and Nesta
- Sam Playford (6, 13)** - homesteader who lives near the Ames ranch, sweet on Nesta
- Mother Ames (6)** - under 40-year old mother of the Ames children, a widow whose husband had been killed during the Pleasant Valley Tonto war between cattlemen and sheepmen
- Lee Tate (7)** – a man who pursues Nesta, a man whose family is thought to have possibly killed her father
- Tommy Ames (7)** - deceased Ames brother, possibly killed by Tate
- Lil Snell (14)** - daughter of the Snell family that lived nearby to the Ames family, Nesta's friend, with whom Nesta sometimes stayed
- Hall Barnes (29)** – a schoolmate of Nesta who marries her friend Lil Snell
- Jess Ames (35)** – a fighting Texas Ranger twin brother of the father of Rich and Nesta
- Madge Low (41)** – Tate's sweetheart who spreads rumors about Nesta and Lee Tate
- Slink Tate (52)** – nephew of Lee Tate, a man with a bad reputé involved in fatal shootings
- Sheriff Jeff Stringer (53)** - a friend of the Tates who threatens to arrest Rich
- Crow Grieve (80)** – an outlaw gang leader
- Lany Price (81)** – 19-year old partner of Grieve
- Red (84), Slim Blue, Blab "Mac" McKinney (85)** – other members of Grieve's outfit
- Amy Grieve (83)** – the 19-year old wife of Crow Grieve
- Jake Mendal, Boots Cameron (109), Sam Black, Jem Gutline (110)** – additional members of Grieve's outfit, men who warn Ames of Grieve's wickedness
- Mrs. Terrill (129)** – housekeeper for Grieve
- Nielsen (134)** – the only squatter remaining on Grieve's land
- Brick Jones (136)** – Grieve's man who built the fence to block Nielsen's cattle from water

Steele (164) – an infamous horse thief whose full name is Steele Brandeth, a Christian

Heady (164) – a Mormon, a member of Steele’s outfit of misfits

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Amos and Nogin (165) – Christians who are members of Steele’s outfit of misfits

Jim Morgan (179) – a Mormon rancher-homesteader who owns 200 head of cattle

Lespeth (190) – Jim Morgan’s daughter

Esther Halstead (229) – a 19-year old Colorado girl born and brought up in Missouri

John Halstead (230) – Esther’s father

Fred Halstead (230) – Esther’s 21-year old brother

Ronald (age 6), Brown (age 7) and Gertrude (age 9) (231) – siblings of Esther all of whom she helped raise following the death of her mother

Joe Cabel (231) – cook for the Halsteads

Jed (teamster) and Smith (farm manager) (241) - hired hands who worked for the Halsteads

Barsh Hensler (254) – a cattle thief hated by John Halstead.

Clive Bannard (261) – cattle thief, gambler, and head of a gang of outlaws

Stevens and Mecklin (264) – hired hands working for John Halstead

SYNOPSIS

(Ch. 1) An old trapper named Cappy Tanner returns to the Tonto basin after having spent the winter trapping in the area to the south. He reunites with his old friends, The Ames family, including the under 40-year old widow, the older twins Rich and Nesta, and younger 6-year old twin girls Mescal and Manzanita. He learns that a nearby homesteader named Sam Playford has become sweet on Nesta, and another fellow named Lee Tate has also been seeing a lot of her. Cappy presents all of the family members with gifts he had purchased in Prescott and Maricopa, including a dress for Nesta which becomes her motivation to attend the wedding of her friend Lil Snell, where she intends to shine above other girls who have been picking on her. Rich tells Cappy he is concerned about the relationship between Nesta and Lee Tate.

(Ch. 2) Cappy Tanner believes there is a connection between the murder of Rich’s and Nesta’s father and the name of Tate. Rich visits Cappy and informs him of Nesta’s recent “slippin’ out” to spend time with Lee Tate, a man he says he’d like to shoot. Nesta has been staying overnight with her friend Lil Snell, and that is how she has been seeing Tate. Rich is concerned that Nesta wants to attend Lil’s wedding, especially since Cappy had given her the new dress. Rich dislikes Lil’s husband-to-be, Hall Barnes, as Barnes is related to the Tates. Rich likes Sam Playford, with whom Nesta has become engaged, but he fears she will end her engagement as a result of the time she has spent with the better-looking Tate. Rich and Cappy agree to go to the wedding dance to keep an eye on Nesta. Rich is concerned about the gossip Tate has spread about his relationship with Nesta. Nesta’s mother tells Cappy that Nesta is simply wrestling with her first love, the same as she herself had done. She tells Cappy she fears what Rich may do, since he

seems to have the same fighting attitude as his uncle Jess Ames, a Texas Ranger who had a fighting streak in him. Cappy meets with Nesta and discusses her relationship with Tate. She

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tells him she is going to the wedding dance to show off in her new dress to get back at Madge Low, Tate's old girlfriend. Nesta says she is afraid she'll have to break up with Sam.

(Ch. 3) Cappy Tanner returns to his cabin and is encouraged by the amount of game he sees, promise of a good trapping season to come. He thinks about homesteading in the Tonto region close to the Ames family, so he can go into the cattle business with them. They discover Lil has decided to move her wedding up, and that Nesta has disappeared. Rich tells Cappy that he learned his mother had been a flirt in her youth, which may be why she tolerates Nesta's behavior. Cappy and Rich pledge to work together to break Tate's hold on Nesta. Cappy recalls the reputation of the Tate's for involvement in fatal shootings. Rich and Cappy and Sam go into town for the wedding and dance. Rich has to be put to bed in order to prevent his arrest by Sheriff Stringer. Sam says it's all over town how Nesta had jilted him for Tate, and that Tate is only playing with her. He fears Rich will do something violent to Tate. Cappy and Rich run into Tate and two cowboys at the dance hall that was set up for the wedding dance. Sam and Rich tell Tate that Nesta will be marrying Sam next week. Rich strikes Tate, then he tells the sheriff he will wait for him at the jail if he wants to arrest him. He does not arrest him.

(Ch. 4) Lil Snell attempts to buy Nesta's gown for her wedding, but Nesta refuses as she gets her revenge by impressing everyone at the wedding, boys and girls alike. Nesta returns home promising to marry Sam by having the parson to come to Mescal Ridge for the ceremony. The morning of the wedding Nesta is nowhere to be found. She is eventually found in the creek where she had attempted to drown herself. The sight of the parson had caused her to want to die rather than to reveal that she was pregnant, having been raped by Lee Tate. Sam agreed to marry her despite that tragedy, and Rich goes off to find Tate when he learns the particulars about the rape. The next day it is learned that Rich has killed Lee Tate, and the sheriff has shot Slink Tate, but has not killed him, all of the action having occurred when Rich caught Lee Tate cheating at cards, a good excuse for confronting and shooting him..

(Ch. 5) The following spring, gangs of desperado outlaws, including the Wind River gang, rode into the Wind River, Wyoming territory, a wide open, only sparsely-settled region, where there is not a drift fence in all the Wind River Valley. As Rich is riding to put distance between himself and his old Mescal Ridge home following his killing of Tate, he happens upon the outfit of the outlaw Crow Grieve, including Lanny Price, Red, Blab "Mac" McKinney, and Slim Blue. Slim Blue confronts Rich, who strikes Blue. Rich and McKinney recognize each other. McKinney calls Rich Arizona Ames, the name by which he will be known from that day forward. Grieve learns that Arizona Ames had killed a man named Rankin who had cheated Grieve out of his cattle. Grieve hires Ames.

(Ch. 6) Crow Grieve's outfit learns about the shooting skills of Ames. Ames learns about the disrespect Grieves has for members of his outfit, the delay in paying them, the refusal to pay back pay to those who leave, and especially the way he treats his wife Amy. Ames is warned by

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Mac to avoid Amy in order to prevent Grieve from being jealous of him. Ames learns that Amy and Lany Price have fallen in love, and that they have so far hidden their feelings from Grieve. Ames is warned about the wickedness of Grieve from some of his riders, including Jake Mendal, Boots Cameron, Sam Black, and Jem Gutline. Ames realizes he will have to do something about the bad luck facing him through Grieve. Ames catches the two lovers together.

(Ch. 7) Lany threatens to kill Ames to prevent others from finding out about him and Amy. Amy convinces Lany to not kill Ames. She explains the cruel treatment she receives from Grieve. She explains that her father sold her to Grieve, and that she has considered running away with her baby. Ames realizes how much Amy reminds him of his sister Nesta. Amy kisses him to remind him that someday he will also meet a girl he will love. Ames realizes he will have to draw on Grieve.

(Ch. 8) Ames confirms from the housekeeper, Mrs. Terrill, how badly Grieve treats Amy. He rides out on the range to talk with a Norwegian man named Nielson, the only remaining squatter remaining on Grieve's holdings. He learns that Grieve installed a fence to prevent Nielson's stock from reaching the river. He learns that Brick Jones was Grieve's man who put up the fence. Ames returns to the Grieves ranch to find Mrs. Grieves sitting in a buckboard, and he asks her to go visit the Nielsen's to help them. Grieve sees Ames talking with his wife, and he fires Ames. Ames says he quit before he was fired, and he demands his pay, which Grieves refuses to give to him. Grieve backs down from Ames and goes inside his cabin. Ames finds Brick Jones and tells him to go take down the fence at Nielsen's. The next day Grieves appears, carrying a rifle, and Ames shoots him as he raises his rifle. Ames rides off into the sunset, leaving Wyoming, leaving Lany and Amy behind to run the ranch, another Good Samaritan act..

(Ch. 9) His wandering leads him to Utah where he meets a gang of Nevada misfits led by a man named Steele, who is in reality a notorious horse thief by the name of Steele Brandeth who attempts to get Ames involved in a plan to steal a herd of horses from an unsuspecting Mormon homesteader. There is immediate dissention among the misfits including two Christians named Amos and Noggin and a Mormon named Heady. Steele attempts to purchase Ames' horse named Cappy, which Ames refuses, angering Steele. Steele believes he remembers Ames as a good Samaritan who rescued a bridegroom from arrest by a sheriff by claiming he, Ames himself, was the guilty steer rustler. Steele insists that Ames should consider joining the outfit, despite objections by Noggin.

(Ch. 10) Ames learns that Steele's plan is to steal a herd of two hundred head of cattle from a Mormon rancher-homesteader named Jim Morgan. Heady explains to Ames that Jim Morgan is an honest Mormon man with a daughter named Lespeth, and that Morgan will be destroyed if

he loses his cattle. Heady tells Ames he once worked for Morgan. Ames calls Heady all kinds of profanities. The thought of Lespeth decides Ames to linger with the horse-thieves and in some

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way or other circumvent them. Ames is further inflamed when he learns from Heady that Noggin's interest in the plot is to seize Morgan's daughter Lespeth for himself.

(Ch. 11) Ames learns that Noggin's real name is Bill Ackers, a high-hat gambler whose gang is known to be ruthless and always on the move. Ames takes advantage of the animosity between Noggin and Brandeth, pitting them one against the other, until Noggin discloses that he is indeed Bill Ackers, which results in Noggin shooting Brandeth and Ames shooting Noggin. Ames divides the money on the two dead men and their possessions with Amos and Heady. Ames retains papers he finds on Ackers. Amos leaves for Nevada, and Heady goes with Ames to visit the Mormon Morgan to tell him of the foiled plot to steal his cattle. The avoidance of justice for the two men forgiven by Ames is an example of Grey sometimes illustrating that bad men can become good and can be forgiven.

(Ch. 12) Ames and Heady visit with Morgan, and they tell him the villains are dead. Ames tells Morgan the debt he had owed the crooked Ackers is canceled, as the papers Ames had found on the dead Noggin confirmed he was indeed Ackers. Heady asks Ames to stay with the Morgans, saying Lespeth needs a Gentile to make love to her. Ames refuses. Morgan offers Ames a job. Ames and Lespeth visit privately, and she asks him if he will return to see his sister. He replies that seeing Lespeth has made him want to once again see his sister. Lespeth again asks him to stay, and he says he can't because if he did he would fall in love with her, and that would not be good for her or for him, as her Mormon people would never accept him. Ames leaves the next morning convinced he is doing what is right.

(Ch. 13) Ames rides into Colorado where he meets the family of John Halstead, including his 19-year old daughter Esther, his 21-year old son Fred, and siblings Ronald (age 6), Brown (age 7), and Gertrude (age 9), and their cook Joe Cabel. The Halsteads learn from their cook that Ames had saved his life years earlier. Esther begins to think she is indebted to Joe Cabel in some way for having Ames drop in on them from out of the blue. She is almost immediately clearly attracted to Ames.

(Ch. 14) Esther can not get her mind off of Ames. Brother Fred comes home with two strange men, something that had happened before following a night of drinking by Fred. Fred advises Joe to see to it that Ames leaves the ranch. One of the men who came home with Fred was Barsh Hensler, a man connected with cattle thieves hated by Fred's father. Joe tells Esther that the only thing Ames ever ran away from was a pretty girl. Fred asks Esther to loan him three hundred dollars to pay off a gambling debt. She refuses. Joe tells John Halstead that Ames is the man to solve the problems of cattle thieves and Fred's gambling. Joe tells Halstead that he has seen Fred talking with Barsh Hensler and another man. He also tells Halstead that he

believes Stevens and Mecklin are bad. Esther realizes that if her father can't make Ames stay on at the ranch, she would have to do so by using her womanliness.

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(Ch. 15) Trying to impress Ames, Esther appears dressed up for dinner, and her father says she reminds him of her mother. When Halstead explains to Ames how he has been losing cattle, Ames says it sounds like the cattle have been eating the poisonous Larkspur weed, and he tells him how to treat the stricken cattle by sticking them to release poison gases caused by the plant. Halstead also tells Ames about the cattle thieves Bannard and Hensler, and how they have corrupted Fred. Ames says he can cure Fred by scaring him. Ames offers to confront Bannard and Hensler. Ames tells Esther he intends to stay on to try to solve the problems with the thieves and Fred. Ames gets Fred to get his horse and guns and to ride with him.

(Ch. Esther learns that Fred has turned around, and that he is seeing his old girlfriend again. Joe tells her there was a raid on her father's cattle by Mecklin and Hensler, a raid broken up by Ames who killed Hensler and Bannard and Mecklin. Joe says that at the same time mistaking Fred as a rustler, Ames had shot a hole in Fred's hat before realizing he wasn't in on the raiding, at the same time putting a scare into Fred that caused him to once and for all mend his ways. By doing so, Ames had cleared Fred's name separating him from the villains. Ames confesses to Esther that he purposefully shot Fred's hat to put a scare into him. Ames accepts a partnership in Halstead's ranch. As a result of Joe's encouraging her to be more aggressive toward winning Ames over to admit he loved her, Esther sneaks up on Ames in his bedroom, and standing behind him she covers his eyes with her hands and asks, "Guess who?", what she calls a game of "pretend". Then she whispers in his ear, "I love you for all you are!" Her brothers Brown and Ronnie catch the two of them kissing. Esther tells Ames that if he promises to marry her, she will go with him to see his sister Nesta.

HELPFUL RESEARCH AND STUDY SUMMARIES FOR *ARIZONA AMES*

Dr. Joseph L. Wheler, *Zane Grey's Impact on American Life and Letters: A Study In the Popular Novel* (George Peabody College for Teachers [Vanderbilt] – 1975)
References: (57, 58, 91, 199, 277)

(57) The virginal heroine stereotype does not mesh with Lanny Price's courting Mrs. Grieve in **Arizona Ames**.

(58) The one-love-of-one's life stereotype does not mesh with Ames falling for several women in **Arizona Ames**.

(91-92) Rape is an ever-present possibility in a Grey book, usually not consummated but often a likely probability. Grey calls it "worse'n murder" . In **Arizona Ames** it is described: "It

couldn't have been worse, ' she returned mournfully.....'until one day Lil double-crossed me – rode off and left me with him alone....He dragged me off my horse – threw me into a pine thicket – and – had his way.'”

(199-200) Arizona Ames (written in 1928, in only three and a half weeks) was first published by Harpers in 1932. Although one doesn't hear the book mentioned often, it is consistently read and should rank in Grey's top five. In the 1974 ZG library survey it ranked second only to **Riders of the Purple Sage** in terms of reader check outs. It is unlike anything else he ever wrote, in several ways. For one thing, it is a picaresque novel in that the hero keeps riding from range to range: Arizona, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado – always getting in trouble (similar in this respect to Hell-Bent Wade in **The Mysterious Stranger**) because he helps people get out of trouble. Another way it is different is that the heroine does not appear till the book is two-thirds over. Rich Ames leaves the Tonto because he avenges the rape of his twin sister Nesta by the unprincipled Lee Tate. In the course of his travels he meets Lespeth Morgan, a lonely Mormon beauty who is so openly attracted to him that he flees. The romance of Ames and Ester Hallstead is a similar story in plot and setting to that of **The Mysterious Stranger**. Other memorable characters are the other Ames twins: Mescal and Manzanita; the brutal cowman, Crow Grieve; Grieve's desperate unloved wife Amy; the lovesick Lanny Price; Joe Cabel; the swearing cook; and others. Richard Ames (Arizona Ames) is himself another of Grey's great gunmen. While Grey was writing the book, he wrote in his diary: “ARIZONA AMES. It is easy and thrilling to write. I get a strange ecstasy out of the creation of characters and the expression of my feelings for places”.

(277) Showing creativity was Grey's use of figurative language. Style is a very difficult thing to analyze. It cannot be measured quantitatively; so whatever yardstick is used, it cannot help but result in subjective evaluations and conclusions. Nevertheless, one important tangible is imagery, especially metaphors and similes...a fact that Grey took very seriously. In **Arizona Ames** the testimony of disinterested people, however, was what Ames required in the stern court-martial going on in his mind.

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Charles G. Pfeifer, Zane Grey, A Study in Values – Above and Beyond the West
(Zane Grey's West Society, 2005) (ISBN 0-9768720-0-5)

References: (83, 171, 177, 405, 472, 522, 560)

(83) Whatever Grey's feelings may have been towards African Americans, and I recall no mention of this in his journal, he did put dialogue on the lips of his characters reflecting general stereotypes that are very offensive today to more than African Americans. Two examples from *Arizona Ames* are more than sufficient. Amy tells Ames of her husband's mistreatment of her: “But when he's half-drunk, then he's – he's – oh, what can I call him?...A beast who paws me – tears my clothes off! A dog! A nigger!” And when Ames tries to force Grieve into a showdown he minces no words: “Grieve, you're a drunkard – a sot! – You're a black-faced buzzard!...You're shore a nigger! An' you've got the soul of a nigger!”

(171) Friendship is usually defined with the use of words like “attachment”, “esteem”, “respect”, and “affection”. Since it played a significant part in Grey’s life, it is not surprising that it figured prominently in his writings, and that it is found in a variety of forms. It occurs between brothers and sisters in *Arizona Ames*.

(177) While the family is important to Grey, there is not a great deal of family life portrayed in his stories. Some that is portrayed is not too pleasant: wife abuse in *Arizona Ames*.

(405) Pfeiffer comments in regard to the lone gunman who rides into a bad situation, rectifies it, and rides off into the sunset alone – as most critics have him do. Grey normally vetoes such additions, but he can be unpredictable. Part three of *Arizona Ames* has Ames riding hurriedly off into the sunset after he routs the rustlers; but in the Fourth Part, while identifying and defeating the cattle thieves, he wins the lady’s hand and settles down.

(472) Contrary to the popularization of the climatic confrontations between the hero and his main rival with an even draw shootout on the dusty streets of a Western town, in Grey there is very little to back this stereotype. In *Arizona Ames* Lee Tate and Jess Stringer come together for gunplay in a saloon.

(522) Grey’s heroes and main characters may not achieve some of the distinctive characteristics of their female counterparts, but many are clearly distinguishable from their fellows. *Arizona Ames* is the only knight errant who kills the man who raped his sister and who sallies forth with gun, rather than lance, to rescue other damsels in distress.

(560) Grey’s sexy passages do not compete erotically with the writings of the realists of his own day. We are not told where Ester Halstead finally managed to corner Ames alone, but I suspect it was in his bedroom where she induced him to play the fatal game of “Pretend”.

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Dr. Carlton Jackson, ZANE GREY: Revised Edition, Published by Twayne’s United States Authors Series Edited by Kenneth Eble, University of Oklahoma, 1989 (ISBN 0-8057-7543-9)

Reference: (88)

(88) The difference between violent men who are good and violent men who are bad, Grey indicates are minute. This concept is pursued in Grey’s novel *Arizona Ames*...Rich Ames, from the Tonto country, knows the ways of violence, but he never uses them for ill until he shoots three men, one of whom raped his sister. The deed necessitates Rich’s flight from Arizona and dooms him to a life of wandering under the name of “Arizona Ames”. Rich becomes the Don Quixote of the West as he roams from place to place helping needy people, mostly females. He shoots Crowe Grieve for mistreating his wife and being, in general, a rotten human being. When Rich goes to Utah, he protects a Mormon from overbearing tactics of bad men. Finally

he wanders into Colorado where he meets Ester Halstead, falls in love with her, and accordingly plans to give up his travelings.

Arizona Ames, said Grey, "was a typical character of his period. Every range from Pan Handle to the Black Hills, and as far west as the Pecos, had its Ames." He fits admirably the role of the cowboy; "He (the cowboy) came from the four corners of the United States, and beyond. At most he was a boy not yet out of his teens; but then life of the range, the toil and endurance demanded by cattle raising, the border saloon, the gambling-hell, the rustler, developed him at once into a man, and one that eventually made the West habitable."