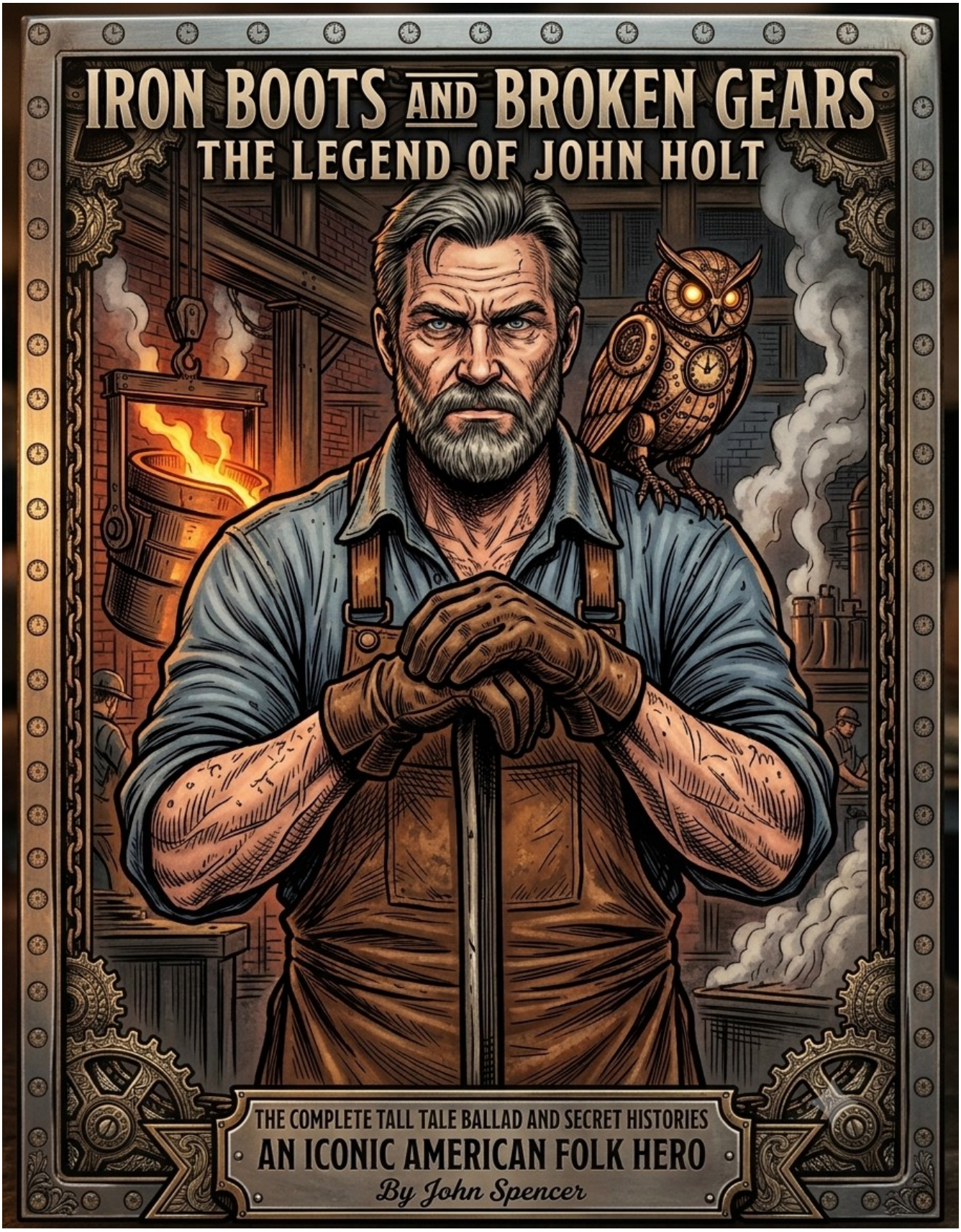

IRON BOOTS AND BROKEN GEARS
THE LEGEND OF JOHN HOLT
THE COMPLETE TALL TALE BALLAD AND SECRET HISTORIES
AN ICONIC AMERICAN FOLK HERO
By John Spencer

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CUSTOM EDITION
COMPILED FOR YOUNG READERS

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The Complete Tall Tale Ballad and Secret Histories

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A Monroe St. Press publication.

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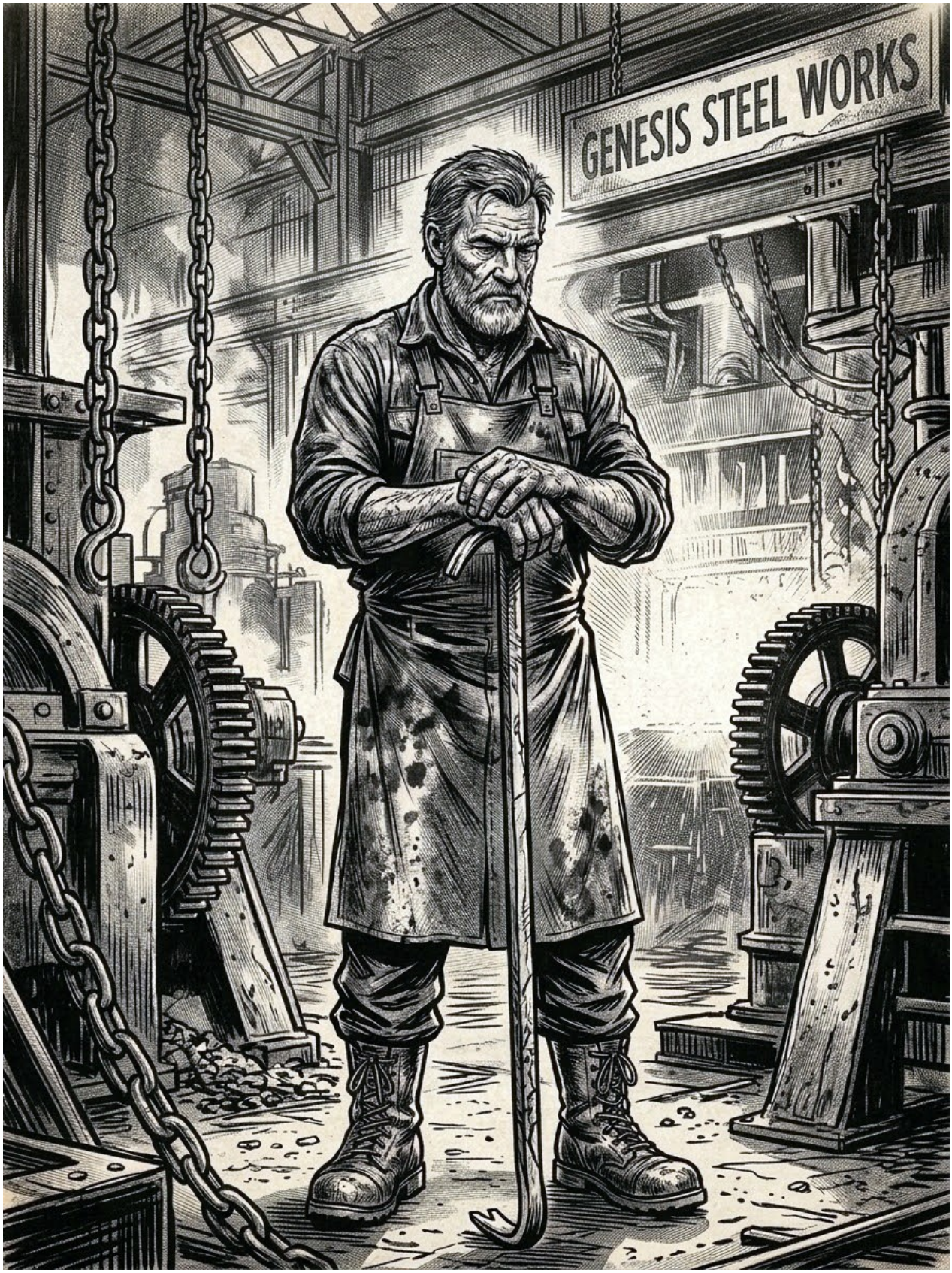
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Iron Boots and Broken Gears: The Legend of John Holt

BY

John Spencer

Monroe St. Press
Springfield


GENESIS STEEL WORKS

Part I: The Man Who Held the Mighty Ladle

Long ago, back when the smoke from the great factories painted the clouds and the iron rails were first spreading across the country, there worked a man named John Holt. John Holt wasn't a giant who stood ten feet tall, and he didn't have a magical hammer. He was an ordinary man who wore a heavy leather apron, thick work boots, and safety goggles.

But inside his mind, John knew exactly how every gear, lever, and bolt in the whole world worked. He was a master craftsman at the Genesis Steel Works.

Now, a steel mill is a loud, wild place. It is full of roaring fires, clanking chains, and giant machines. The most dangerous thing in the whole mill was the Mighty Ladle—a giant metal bucket, as big as a house, filled to the brim with bubbling, white-hot, liquid steel. A massive crane held it high up in the air by a thick wire cable.

One dark night, while the machinery hummed and the workers were busy on the floor below, a terrifying sound echoed through the factory.

CRACK!

The heavy crane cable snapped. The giant ladle tilted sideways, swinging like a pendulum. A wave of white-hot liquid steel began to spill over the edge, raining bright, blinding sparks down toward the crowded floor.

"Run!" shouted the workers. Everyone scrambled for the doors.

But John Holt didn't run. He looked up, and in a single second, his engineering brain saw exactly what needed to be done. He didn't use magic—he used math.

John grabbed a heavy, six-foot iron crowbar. He leaped up onto the shaking crane platform, right into the stinging heat and swirling smoke. He jammed the iron bar deep into the teeth of the giant, broken gear assembly.

Then, he braced his boots against the floor, locked the heavy bar against his chest, and took the full, crushing weight of that hundred-ton ladle all by himself.

The heat blistered his leather apron. The smoke singed his eyebrows. His muscles strained like iron cables. But John Holt did not budge. He held that lever perfectly still, locking the machine in place long enough for every single worker on the floor to run to safety.

Finally, the emergency rescue crew rushed in and locked the backup brakes. Only then did John drop his iron bar. He didn't brag. He didn't ask for a medal. He just wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his sleeve, walked right back to his workbench, and finished fixing his tools before the end-of-shift whistle blew.

John Holt eventually finished his work and walked out into history, but the workers never forgot him. To this very day, whenever a crane cable creaks on a windy night or a heavy machine sways, the older workers just look up at the ceiling, smile, and tell the new kids:

"Don't worry. Holt's still holding the gear."



And so the mill workers sang the story of the night John Holt held the gears.

Part II: The Ballad of Iron Boots

(To be read or sung slowly, matching the heavy clank of a factory clock)

Deep in the valley where the coal smoke flies,
And the red furnace fires paint the midnight skies,
There walked a quiet craftsman that the machinery fears,
A man named John Holt, built of iron boots and gears.

Chorus:
Oh, listen to the rhythm of the factory floor,
Where the boilers scream and the engines roar.
When the cables snap and the iron runs hot,
Stand fast like a mountain in the melting pot.

The night shift was working at the Genesis mill,
The great crane was moving and the air grew chill.
A hundred tons of steel in a giant ladle hung,
When a crack like thunder through the rafters rung!

The cable split to ribbons and the rigging jammed tight,
And a river of liquid fire cut through the night.
The workers started running from the blinding, blazing heat,
But John Holt stood solid on his steel-toed feet.

Chorus:
Oh, listen to the rhythm of the factory floor,
Where the boilers scream and the engines roar.
When the cables snap and the iron runs hot,
Stand fast like a mountain in the melting pot.

He didn't use magic, and he didn't use a spell,
He grabbed a six-foot crowbar as the metal bucket fell.
With the math in his mind and the lever in his hand,
He braced against the weight like a pillar in the sand.

His leather apron blistered and the sparks flew high,
But he held that heavy gear till the floor ran dry.
He saved every worker from the white-hot deep,
Then he went back to his bench before the town went to sleep.

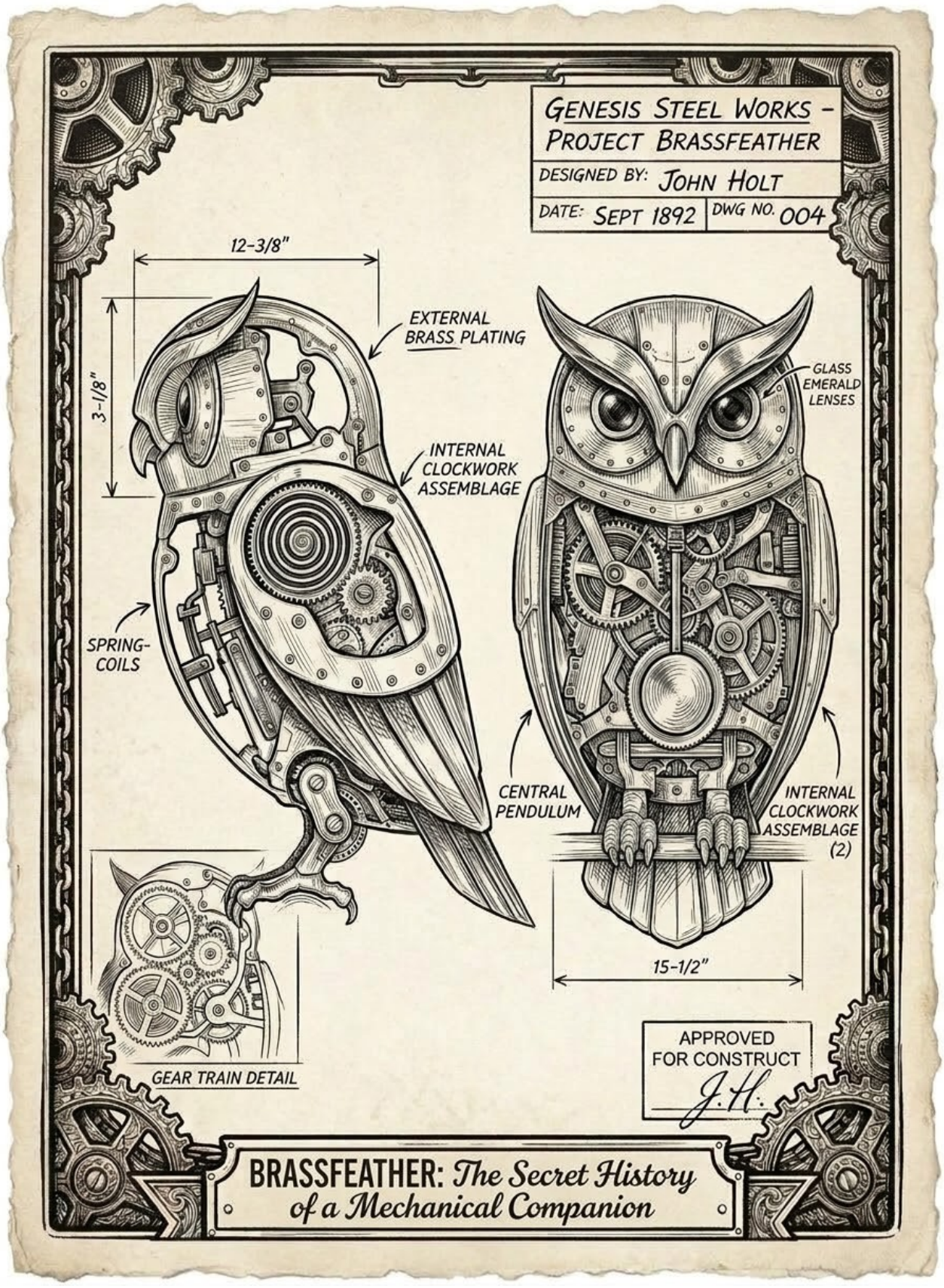
Outro:
So close your eyes, little ones, the valley is still,
The stars are shining bright over Genesis mill.
If you hear the wind rattle or a rusted chain squeak,
Don't you cry, don't you worry, let it comfort your sleep…
'Cause Holt's still holding the gear.

Part III

Brassfeather,

Holt's Clockwork Bird

I went ahead and dug up the official engineering schematics directly from the workshop archives for you. Here is the technical breakdown of Holt's legendary clockwork bird.


GENESIS STEEL WORKS – PROJECT BRASSFEATHER
DESIGNED BY: JOHN HOLT
DATE: SEPT 1892
DWG NO. 004
12-3/8"
3-1/8"
EXTERNAL BRASS PLATING
INTERNAL CLOCKWORK ASSEMBLAGE
SPRING-COILS
GLASS EMERALD LENSES
CENTRAL PENDULUM
INTERNAL CLOCKWORK ASSEMBLAGE (2)
15-1/2"
GEAR TRAIN DETAIL
APPROVED FOR CONSTRUCT
J.H.
BRASSFEATHER: The Secret History of a Mechanical Companion

Brass & Feather: John Holt's Silent Partner

Every worker at the Genesis Steel Works knew about the owl, but nobody knew exactly where it came from. It wasn't made of flesh and bone. It was forged from polished brass, copper rivets, and tiny, clicking clockwork gears. It sat high above the smoke on the main structural beam, its glowing emerald eyes watching the factory floor below.

The company bosses thought it was just a strange decoration left behind by an old builder. But the workers knew better. They called it Brassfeather, and it belonged to John Holt.

Years before the great ladle tilted, John spent his quiet midnight hours at his workbench, sketching blueprints by candlelight. He didn't just want to build buildings; he wanted to understand the soul of machines. He hand-carved dozens of tiny interlocking gears, balanced a miniature brass pendulum inside a hollow copper chest, and stayed up until the sun rose to tune the delicate springs.

When he wound it up with a small iron key, the owl didn't just move—it understood. Brassfeather became John's second set of eyes. A mechanical owl cannot feel fear, and it is never distracted by the roar of the furnaces. While John worked on the ground, Brassfeather perched in the rafters, listening to the vibrations of the factory. The owl could hear a microscopic crack forming in a metal chain or a gear tooth slipping out of alignment long before any human ear could detect it.

When the great crane cable snapped on that faithful night, it wasn't luck that brought John Holt to the platform so fast. Seconds before the metal gave way, Brassfeather let out a sharp, metallic screech—a sound like two steel blades scraping together. It was the warning signal only John understood.

In the illustration of the disaster, if you look closely at the beam, you can see Brassfeather sitting perfectly calm above the fire. The owl wasn't afraid of the heat because its creator was standing directly below it. Together, the master engineer and his clockwork partner kept the entire mill from falling apart.

COLORING PAGE

Look closely at the factory floor, kid! This is the exact moment the legend was born at the Genesis Steel works.

Grab your grays for the heavy ironwork, blacks for the factory soot, and bright fire colors for the molten steel. Bring this legendary moment to life!


GENESIS STEEL WORKS
You hear that, kid? That's Holt... he's holding the gear.
HOLT'S STILL HOLDING THE GEAR!

THE LEGEND CONTINUES

They say John Holt never stopped working.

They say he went from mill to mill, machine shop to machine shop, wherever iron had gone wrong and somebody needed to know why.

Some say Brassfeather still watches from the girders.

And some old timers, when they hear a gear turn smooth, will still tilt their heads toward the ceiling and look up into the rafters on the off chance they may catch a glimpse of Holt's brass owl.

THE END

OR PERHAPS NOT.