

TEX RITTER

WESTERN

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POT LEAD FIND IN
"LOWEST STORAGE
RIDGE"

Edna ...
... ..



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Tex Ritter

IN THE LAWLESS FURNACE VALLEY

CHAPTER I - AMBUSH

IN THE BRAYING BOLD-CRAGED ROOMS TOWN OF FURNACE VALLEY LAW AND ORDER WERE WORDS TO BE SCORPED AT. LAWLESS PEOPLE WERE FLUNG AND ONLY THOSE THAT WERE QUICK WITH THE TRIGGER SURVIVED. TEX RITTER, THE HARD-BODIED THORN-BRED BARRON OF THE PLAINS, WAS CAUGHT IN THE WARE. POOL OF LAWLESSNESS AND NOT LEAD BUT TEX'S COURAGEOUS CHALLENGE BECAME A WINNING STRAT IN THIS MAELSTROM OF EVIL.



THEY KITTER BANG TO THE MUSIC...
LOOKING GOOD TODAY OF FURBACE VALLEY!

I HEARD TALK ABOUT
THIS PLACE BEING
WIDE OPEN FOR

WALK INTO IT PLEASE! THERE SEEMS
TO BE SOME SORT OF BUCKS
AROUND THAT AS A BONUS
OFFER. LET'S HAVE A LOOK!



(WALDOOPE AND GORRANS!)
I BELIEVE IT WAS NO
EXAGGERATION!



WHY
DOESN'T
SOMEONE
GET THE
BUCKS?

SHURE! YOU MUST HAVE JUST
DRIFTED INTO TOWN, WAGNER!
NO BUCKS LIVES LONGER
AROUND HERE TO BEAR A
BRAND. LUCKY MARLIN IS
THE LAW IN FURBACE VALLEY.
NOBODY BUT JOHN EVER
HAD THE NERVE TO BUCK HIM
AND HIS GANG!

WHAT'S
GOING ON
HERE,
MISTER?

IT'S LUCKY MARLIN AND HIS GANG!
THEY'RE GOING TO KICK JOHN MARLIN
BECAUSE HE'S BEEN WRITING THINGS
ABOUT LUCKY THAT DON'T FIT
WELL WITH HIM.



WELL, HERE'S
SOMEONE WHO
INTENDS TO BUCK
LUCKY MARLIN!

WATCH YOURSELF RANGER--
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO
HAVE YOUR FACE SLAPPED
WITH ONE IN
A GRAVE!

I WARNED YOU WHAT
WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU
KEPT ON WRITING THAT
STUFF ABOUT ME! NOW
YOU'RE GOING TO APOLOGIZE
IN HEAT!

AS LONG AS I RUN MY
FARM, I'LL CONTINUE TO
TELL THE PEOPLE HOW
YOUR FURBACE TOWN
OF THE BOLD CLAIMS
WITH YOUR CROOKED
SHARPLESS GAMES!







"DID YOU EVER SEE ANYTHING THE LIKES OF THAT? HE SHOT THE BIRD RIGHT OUT OF THEIR HANDS? NEVER DID SEE A NARFIN BLAZ LEATHER SO FAST IN MY LIFE."

"ANYBODY BLAZ FEEL LIKE SLAPPING LEATHER?"



"TEX BITTER IS THE HANDLE, AND I'M ORDERING YOU, JASPER, TO CLEAR OUT AND STAY OUT."

"WE WON'T BE FORGETTING THIS, BITTER."



"IN A BATTY CRATER, TO YOU, TEX, BUT YOU MADE A BAD BREAK, LUCKY AND HIS GANG MADE THIS TOWN IN THE PAIR OF THESE HANDS."

"WHAT'S THE STORY, BERNARD MARLIN? I CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW THE DECENT FOLKS IN THIS TOWN GO AND BY AND LET THOSE JASPER FISH THEM ARROUND. HOW COME HE HAS ALL THE POWER?"



"MARLIN BUILT A CROOKED GAMBLING PALACE. HE'S CREATED MEN OUT OF THEIR GOLD CLAWS AND HARD-EARNED MONEY--AND ANYONE WHO OBJECTS NEVER SEES THE LIGHT OF DAY AGAIN."

"WHY ISN'T A SHERIFF SELECTED?"

"STOP ME."



"WE'VE HAD SEVERAL, ALL OF THEM WIND UP WITH A BULLET IN THEIR BACK. NOW NO ONE WILL TAKE THE OFFICE, BUT AS LONG AS I CAN DRAW A BULLET IN PRINTING THE TRUTH AND LUCKY MARLIN WON'T."

"GOOD FOR YOU--AND YOU CAN COUNT ON ME TO HELP."



"I INTEND TO GET THE EVIDENCE THAT WILL PUT MARLIN WHERE HE BELONGS."



"WITH YOU AROUND, TEX, THIS TOWN ISN'T SET UP AND THIS NOTICE THAT YOU'VE GOTTEN TO FIGHT LAWLESSNESS."

"I'M GOING TO VISIT LUCKY'S GAMBLING PALACE. KEEP THE PRESSURE OPEN."

DEADLY SILENCE BLANKETS THE NOISY GAMBLING PALACE
& FEW MOMENTS LATER, WHEN TELLITTER STALKS IN!

LOOK WHO
JUST CAME
IN!

SOMEONE HE DOWN, THAT
YOU'RE SURE HAS MEANS
OF STEEL TO COME HERE.



BOSS, THAT
TIN SHAGS
BANDER,
JUST CAME
IN.

TELL THE BOYS
TO WATCH FOR
MY SIGNAL.



HOWDY, CARE TO SIT IN?
I SEEM TO BE HAVING ALL
THE BAD LUCK, SO YOU
MIGHT DO YOURSELF
SOME GOOD.

NO
THANKS.



WELL, HERE'S THE LAST OF WHAT
I HAVE. IF I LOSE, I DECIDE YOU
BOYS WILL OWN MY CLAIM, BUT
I THINK I'LL GET
YOU ON THIS
ROUND!

JUST PUT IT
IN THE POT
AND NEVER
MIND THE
PALACE!



THEY'RE
TAKING THE
BET FOR SLAMM
AND HIS GOAL
ENOUGH TO
SMILE WITH
THESE CARD
THINGS!

THE DIRTY
SAGE-WINDING
CROOK!



LEAVE THAT ACE
EIGHT UNDER THE
DECK -- JUST WASTE
IT HIS!

HUH-!!







STOP HIM! HE'S
WRECKING THE
PLACE!

WHAM!!



I SEE IN THE MIRROR
I'M ABOUT TO BE
BACK-STABBED!



CRASH!

WHAACK!

ALICE!



WE'VE GOT HIM
SURROUNDED! LET'S
SHOOT IT OUT
WITH HIM!

HOLD IT! PUT YOUR GUNS
DOWN! HE'LL BRICK
YOU OFF LIKE
DICKS!



ALL RIGHT,
RAMBER! YOU'VE
WRECKED MY
PLACE, SO CLEAR
OUT OF HERE!

I'M NOT FINISHED WITH YOU
YET MURLIN! NEXT TIME
YOU HAVE YOUR GUN
TRY TO TAKE SOME
INNOCENT RIDERS,
THEY GAVE ME
WAKE BARE I DON'T
HEAR ABOUT IT!

THEY GAVE ME
MY MONEY
BACK TEN!



LET'S GO! I SURE
NEED SOME FRESH
AIR AFTER BEING
IN HERE WITH
THESE
COMOTES!

ME TOO, BUT I'M SURE
THIS HAPPENED.
YOU'VE SHOWN ME
WHAT A FOOL I'VE
BEEN FOR GAMBLING
MY MONEY AWAY!



HOW COME YOU LET HIM GET AWAY? BOBBI HE'S TOUGH--BUT WE COULD HAVE SHOWN HIM!

I GOT TO THINK, BUTTER IS OUT TO GET EVIDENCE THAT WILL HANG US. WE'VE GOT TO GET RID OF HIM, BUT IN A WAY THAT HE CAN'T FIGHT BACK!



WHAT YOU GOT IN MIND, LUCKY?

HELL, HEAD BACK TO THE NEWSPAPER OFFICE TO TELL RAWLEY WHAT HE FOUND OUT HERE TODAY. WHEN HE DOES THE ONLY WAY TO GET THERE ORDN HERE IS THROUGH ROGERS' ALLEY.



YOU HEAR THE PLACE WE GOT THE LAST SHOT AT?

YEEH! IT'S DARK NOW AND HE WON'T SEE YOU. GUY CARE THERE FAST AND MAKE SURE HE DON'T COME OUT OF THAT ALLEY HOLE!



AW BAWWILE... I'VE LEARNED A-BOUT GAMBLING THANKS TO YOU!

I'LL NEVER FORGET!

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS MAKING EASY MONEY, SON. REMEMBER THAT AND YOU WON'T GO WALKIN AWAY FROM PLACES LIKE LUCKY'S GAMBLING PLACE!



WELL, IT BETTER BETTER TO THE NEWSPAPER AND HAYES BY TOMORROW A FEW MORE FOLKS WILL LEARN TO STAY AWAY FROM MARLIN'S PLACE. GOOD NIGHT.

GOOD NIGHT... AND THANKS AGAIN!



AS THE FOOTSTEPS ECHO ALONG THE DARK, DIM STREETS, THE KILLERS FINALLY PRESS THEIR TOE LEAVES, READY TO SEND THE WILLY-NAUT RANGER INTO DEATH'S GRIP. READ CHAPTER 2 OF 'LAWLESS FORNACE VALLEY'!

RIDING THE RANGE

with
TEX RITTER

121 SOUTH GENESEE DRIVE
PHEASANT HILLS, CALIF.



MONDAY MORNING.

IT'S RAIN & RICE OFF TODAY, NO MATTER
WHAT THE WEATHERMAN MIGHT SAY; WHY? I
BECAUSE IT'S TIME, ONCE AGAIN, FOR REASING
UP AT YOUR CORRAL---TIME FOR MEETING
OLD FRIENDS AGAIN!

FURY AND I RODE OUT TO HOWARD BASSON'S
BIG HORSE-RACING TRACK LAST WEEK. HE BREEDS
AND RAISES SOME WON'T FOR HORSEFLESH OUT THERE,
AND WHY? I CAN TALK TO YOU THAT SOMETIMES HUMAN FOLKS
WERE NO SMART AS HORSES.



OUTSIDE HOWARD'S BIG DOUBLE GATE I WATCHED AN HORSEBE OVER-
LOADING HIS BACK HORSE, BUT THAT BACK HORSE JUST KNEELED
DOWN AND REFUSED TO GO ON. SHE KNEW SHE WAS CARRYING TOO
BIG A LOAD, WHICH SHE COULD NEVER MAKE IT THROUGH THE GATE
WITH IT, AND THE HORSEBE HAD TO TAKE SOME OF IT OFF ABOVE
SHE'D GO ALONG WITH ME.

THEN, AS FURY AND I WATCHED THE HORSE COGS FEELING
ABOUT ON THE NEW GAMES, I HAD TO NOTICE HOW, WHEN THEY GOT
TIED UP, THEY STOPPED TO REST, AND YOU DIDN'T CATCH
ANY OF THEM BATTING TOO MANY OF THE GREEN APPLES ON THE
SHADES OF DRINKING THESEBES'S SICK AT THE WATER TROUGH.
SO THESE HORSE BEARS' YOU'CAN'T LET THEM. YES, IT MADE ME
THINK OF HOW OFTEN I'VE BEEN YOUNG THE-LOADED COGS PLAY
THEY THEY WERE CONSIDERED AND DO A LOT OF SUCH OTHER THINGS
THEY DON'T DRINK MUCH WATER BECAUSE SO SOMETIMES, FRIENDS,
WHEN YOU'RE ON THE VERGE OF RUNNING OR PLAYING OR EATING
YOURSELF SICK, SLOW DOWN --- DON'T DRINK THINGS, IN SHORT,
USE A LITTLE 'HORSE BEARS' UNTIL NEXT MONTH, ACORN, PEARL.



YOUR SADDLE FRIEND,

Tex Ritter



LOONIE LES

SMALL OBSTACLE



OF COURSE! ANYBODY CAN TALK FROM A SUBMARINE! THEY DON'T EVEN LOOK ANYTHING ALIVE!

(GASP!!)

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT, STUPID! JESUS, YOU SMOKE ARE DUMB!

OH YEAH? I'M AS SMART AS YOU! EVEN SMARTER!

YOU'RE SMARTER THAN ME!

THAT'S RIGHT! THERE'S ONLY ONE THING THAT KEPT ME FROM GOING TO COLLEGE.....

.... I COULDN'T GET THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL!

(GASP!!)

Tex Ritter

THE LAWLESS FURNACE VALLEY

CHAPTER II - DEATH'S GUP!



AS THE MOON BREAKS THROUGH AN OVERCAST FOR A SPLIT SECOND...



A SHADOW...AND IT HAD A PRESENCE ONE LOOKS AS IF IT WALKS INTO A RIDE TRAP!



I RITTER GET A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF WHAT THIS ALLEY HAS IN STORE FOR ME.



MY HUNCH WAS RIGHT. LUCKY SENT A GUY TO THE RECEIPT ON COMMITTEE TO MAKE IT HOT FOR ME.



HOOBY! LOOKING FOR ME?

OOF!



SOBBY HONERS -- BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE THE PLEASURE OF FILING ME WITH HOT LEAD!

POW!

UGH!



OH, MY HEAD!

PLUG HIM!



ONE OF THEM OWN MEN IS GETTING THE JOB OF LEAD MEANT FOR ME!

Bang!
Bang!
Bang!



GREAT JUMPING HORNPOOK! WE'VE SHOT LEFTY!

POOR DEVL! THEY'VE SHOOTED HIM UNMERCERFULLY!



Soon afterwards...

Well, yes... did you get any news?

Plenty! I really have a story for you! It's a story that would open the eyes of every law-abiding citizen in this town!



Start taking 'em, well, get a lotta 'em, get 'em right out!

I have witnessed Lucky Marlin crooked game, his games -- his method of passing the money and how he sends his killers out to Subswack, anybody who stands in his way!



GREAT! GREAT! THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN HOPING FOR, WOULD YOU PAPER COMES OUT IT LL MAKE FOLKS SHY OF AND TAKE NOTICE!

That's what I am to do, make folks around here take notice about rats like Lucky, (is not leaving here until I see him and his kid getting the sentence they deserve!



The following morning...

The following morning...
LUCKY MARLIN OPERATES CROOK GAMBLING CAS...
KILLS OR GAMBLES FREELY FOLKS IN ATTEMPT AT MURDER AND SHY ON...
THEIR OWN



HE MADE A FOOL OUT OF ME AGAIN! IT'S GOING TO START PEOPLE THINKING--AND THAT'S BAD FOR OUR BUSINESS. WE JUST DO SOME THING--MIGHTY SAVVY!

WE SAVVY BORE, BUT WE'RE JUST ABOUT THERE EVERYTHING! THAT BUCKY-TOTER ISN'T TALKING!



THE BUCKY-CRABBER IS HERE, BOYS! HE'S ARRIVED TO SEE YOU!



SOME CRABBER? I HEARD-- I'VE BEEN EXPECTING HIM SINCE I WAS 10!



WELL, HERE I AM LUCKY. WE GOING TO MAKE ANOTHER CLEVER WRECKING THE BUCKY-CRABBER HERE? WHEN LUCKY BURNS FOR ME IT MEANS OUCH--

I WISH NEVER, SO I'LL GO TO SEE ANYBODY BUT HIM THESE BIG BAY!



I'M A GREAT SHARP AND READY TO TRY ANY BUCKY INTO A SHOT IF HE'S CRAZY ENOUGH TO TRY TO STAY WITH ME. THE WAY I FIGURE IT, WE CARRIED A HUNDRED DOLLARS TO ANYBODY WHO CAN LAST FIVE MINUTES AND--

WAIT A MINUTE! I HAVE ANOTHER IDEA--A BIG IDEA!



I DON'T THINK YOU'D TURN OUT TO BE THE ANSWER TO MY TROUBLE, AS MUCH I ASKED YOU TO COME OUT HERE, I NEED YOUR HELP AND YOUR FEAT!

ANSWER FOR AN OLD FRIEND LUCKY, WHAT'S UP?



YOU KILLED A COUPLE OF MEN YOU DIDN'T? I'VE BEEN HEARD TO BE THE KING, DIDN'T YOU, CRABBER?

SURE--I SWAPPED THEIR PLACES WITH YOURS, THEY'VE BEEN WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?



WELL, I HAVE ACCIDENT NUMBER THREE FOR YOU TO WORK ON, BUCKY-CRABBER!

TELL BUCKY-CRABBER WHO IS WHO IS HE?



A RANGER: I'LL GIVE ANYTHING TO GET RID OF HIM, GETTING HIM TO WHERE YOU WILL BE THE PERFECT WAY OUT FOR ME. AFTER ALL, AS YOUR ACCIDENTS DO HAPPEN!

FOR LIKE YOU! I DON'T COMMON SENSE MEN, I'LL BE BACK TO GET IT FOR YOU LUCKY! BUT HOW ARE YOU GOING TO GET HIM IN THE RING WITH ME?







THE HOUR OF THE BOAT HEADS, BASKETMENT
 RINGS HIGH IN PUDRACE VALLEY!

ALL RIGHT, WHO ELSE
 GOO, BANG, MURDER!
 THEY WANT TO GET ON
 BITTER? (HE TAKES
 ALL BETS.)

ARE YOU
 GOING TO
 MONEY ON
 THAT?!

I HAVE
 25 PPS
 COLLAS
 (AL BETON
 TEX.)



THAT NIGHT, AT THE APPOINTED HOUR...

THE BOAT IS TO GO FIVE MINUTES, IF TEX AVOIDS
 BASKING HIS SHOULDERS PASTED TO THE MAT. HE IS TO
 BE COIN-DEED THE WISER AND LUCKY MARLIN
 IS TO FIGHT THE SIXTY-
 SOUP CLAMS!



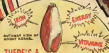
THE POWERFUL
 ARMS OF SOME
 CHIEF, FORCE
 TEX BACK AS
 HE HOUNDS IN A
 VISE-LIKE GRIP
 BUT THE FEAR
 IS UNWARRANTED!
 THE COMEBACK
 BASKET OF IN-
 CONSIDERABLE
 THREATS TO
 SURGE TEX AND
 HIS BLACKBOLD,
 IS THIS THE
 END OF THE
 TRIAL FOR THE
 COURAGEOUS
 PLAYBOY? (SEE
 CHAPTER 12 OF
 LANCELE
 PUDRACE
 VALLEY.)

STAR
ANNUAL
THE BEST OF THE YEAR
IN SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



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Fame ate too!



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COWBOY CAL



EXPERIMENTER
DELUXE



HOPEY, COWBOY CAL, WE HAVEN'T HEARD YER AROUND MUCH LATELY!

THAT'S RIGHT! WHAT HAVES YER BEEN DOING WITH YOURSELF?



OH, I'VE BEEN VERY BUSY!

BUSY?



THAT'S RIGHT! I'VE BEEN MAKING AN INTERESTING EXPERIMENT IN BREEDING!

I HEAR AN EXPERIMENT IN BREEDING?



YEP, I'M CROSSING A SNAKE AND A PARROT!

WHAT?

WHAT?



YOU'RE CROSSING A SNAKE AND A PARROT? SCIENTIFICALLY WHAT BOY WOULD THAT BE?

I DON'T KNOW.



BUT WHEN IT STARTS TALKING, YIMP BETTER LISTEN!

INCIDENT BY THE CREEK

By Dick Kross

SHERIFF CLINT EDWARDS rode hard through the scattered mesquite, lashing his buckskin with a stinging quart. As he reached the fork of the Mesquitar Creek, the sky was flooded with yellow-blue light. It was dawn in the cattle country. Down—and a man was dead!

Ahead of him, the sheriff saw three men standing, darkly silhouetted against the rising sun. They held their battered Stetsons in their work-hardened hands, and they stared down grimly at a speckled figure lying on the creek bank. Clint Edwards reined in hard, and flung himself from the buckskin. Stiff from the long ride, he hobbled over to the waiting men. He recognized them—Rancher Jed Blocum, a cattlemen along the Mesquitar, and two of his waddies.

"Handy, Blocum," the sheriff nodded. "One of your boys just rode into town. Told me you had trouble—a dead man! So I figured I'd come up pronto!"

He stared down at the corpse lying by the creek.

"Zake Dawson, eh?" he guessed. "Your old handyman! What happened? He fall in the creek and drown?"

Rancher Jed Blocum shook his high-cheekboned head, his eyes dark with anger. He was a man who had spent his long years out of that hard land for fifteen years with little more than his bare hands and a cheerful of courage. His lips relaxed and he spoke for the first time.

"Drowned? Not old Zake!" he barked. "He was on his way back from town last night—and he must have stopped here at the creek for a drink of water. It was his last! He was poisoned!" Blocum flung his head up at the disbeliever in the sheriff's eyes. "Yes, poisoned! If you don't believe me—sniff the water—and taste it!"

The sheriff dropped quickly to one knee. They were at a stretch of the stream where there was little current, and the water moved

stagnantly. He dipped a hand in the water, lifted it, touched it to his lips and stood up, his face expressionless.

"Arsenic!" he nodded slowly. "Someone must have poured a sack of it in there last night! But what? And why?"

Suddenly, the sheriff frowned.

"Hold on!" he grunted. "Isn't this the road that is used to drive cattle up from the Panhandle? And isn't Alamo Bates planning on coming through right soon with a parcel of steers?"

The Mesquitar rancher answered slowly, weighing each word.

"That's right! Bates and his Panhandle cattle are due any time. Maybe today! They aim to ship out on the railroad up the creek! Why?"

The sheriff stood stock still, but there was a world of thought going on behind his veiled eyes. Old Clint Edwards had worn the law-hat for thirty rock-ribbed years, but he still had a young man's imagination. He began to fit the elements together in his mind. Alamo Bates coming up from the Panhandle with a herd of beef cattle. Bates was hailed by every rancher in the creek country, and especially by Jed Blocum. And now, this arsenic planted in the creek, where Bates' herd would have to pass, where the thirty manure and meat would want to drink.

The sheriff talked softly.

"You don't like Alamo Bates, do you, Jed? You've been feeding with him for the last couple of years, since he ran his cattle across your spread. And you know he was coming through today?"

"Hold on!" Jed Blocum's face flushed darkly. "If you're saying that I planted this arsenic in the creek to poison his herd, it's a blamed lie!"

The words were cut off in the rancher's throat, as one of his cowboys caught his arm and pointed off in the distance. "Look!" the man broke in. "Dam! It's cattle coming up and—moving fast! It must be Alamo Bates and his

dogies!" Slocum's face clenched. "You're right!" he half-shouted. "They're coming fast and they want water. But if they drink from the creek anywhere along here they'll be poisoned! We've got to stop them!"

Swiftly, the lanky rancher sprang onto his waiting bay horse, pulling a revolver from his hip holster. "Quick! Hit harder, you cowards! Let's cut those heads off!" Wheeling the bay, he sped toward the approaching herd with the other men and the sheriff close behind him. As the Parkhandle cattle approached, eager to drink the water they scented, Slocum fired his gun repeatedly in the air, and shouted, "Back! Get back, you cowardly critters! Stay away from that creek!" All along the line of encroaching steers, the other men and the sheriff did the same, beating their sombreros against the sides of the dust-stained herd and shouting until they were hoarse. Finally, paralyzed, bewildered, and discouraged, the herd slowed to a halt. The cattle stood there, legs apart, breathing heavily and howling with thirst.

Suddenly, a pair of riders appeared, riding hard through the dust cloud that had added behind the steers. The first man was Alamo Bates, and the second was his archrival.

"I heard shots," the Parkhandle man called sharply. "What happened? Were you getting running down my steers? Hi—"

"Take it easy!" Sheriff Clint Edwards raised a warning hand. "We just saved your herd! The creek was poisoned with arsenic and they would have died, every one, if they'd reached it!"

"Poisoned!" Alamo Bates swung toward Jed Slocum. "I'll bet you were behind this, Slocum! Trying to kill off my herd 'cause of that scrap we had a while back—and to keep my beef from competing with yours! I'll be you—"

"Wait!" Jed Slocum moved forward until he was some inches from the Parkhandle man. "I saw a track on the creek bank a while ago, but I didn't understand it! It was the print of a pack mule!" He pointed up at a ledge made that followed behind Bates and the other Parkhandle men. "Might have been left by that mule—last night!" Slocum reached a hand forward toward a half-empty sack that lay across the mule's back. It had white traces on it that might have been flour, or might have been . . .

"Arsenic!" whispered Slocum. He touched the sack with his fingers, brushed off a few specks of the white powder. "Mind if I taste

this?"

Alamo Bates sprang back, his face working in fury.

"Taste it! Don't bother," he snarled. "I'll figure an easier way for you to die, Slocum! This way!" His hands clenched at the trigger of the bang by his saddle. Swiftly, they pulled the snub-nosed weapon free, raised it, and slowy fingers tightened on the trigger! There was the sound of a shot, and then another—and a crow that had been nesting on the branches of a nearby tree flew away with a sudden cawing. Alamo Bates dropped the shotgun and slumped slowly forward, his a mound of sand with his legs splayed away by rushing water. His friend threw only long enough to raise his hands to the bright sky; then he stood still.

Jed Slocum thrust his self-wasting Colt back into his holster.

"Shotgun again? A weak weapon." He shook his head disapprovingly. "He gave me two seconds. Shouldn't have tried it. I almost hated to shoot but he'd have killed me. So . . ."

The Sheriff shook his head slowly.

"I don't get it," he said. "You mean that Bates came up last night and poisoned the creek himself—and then rode back to his herd? But why? Why would he want to poison his own cattle? What was in it for him?"

The Maricopa rancher made a gesture toward the waiting herd. "Look at his cattle and you'll see the answer," he replied. "They're sick, every one of them. Red eyes, bony, staggering, covered with ticks. They've got the Texas fever—and got it bad! Not half of them would last to the railroad—and then no one would buy them. Bates worked up this scheme to poison them . . . and then put the blame on me! Probably he planned some arsenic on my ranch, that he figured you'd turn up, when investigating the poisoning."

JED SLOCUM grinned momentarily. "He probably reckoned that he could prove I did it, and make me pay him for the entire herd—which was as good as worthless anyway." Then his face grew dark and sad again. "If it hadn't been for old Tate taking a drink of water at the wrong time, it might have worked! And Bates might have been heading for Easy Street right now instead of a grave in Boot Hill!"

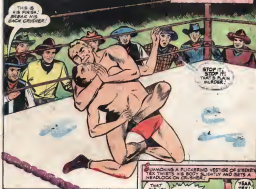
THE END

Tex Ritter

IN **LAWLESS FURNACE VALLEY**

Chapter III
SHOWDOWN

THIS IS HIS FURSE!
BRING HIS
BACK OFFER!



STOP IT!
STOP IT!
THIS IS A RING
BRAWL!

GRABBING A FLICKERING VESTIGE OF BREKED TEX THROWS HIS BODY SLIGHTLY AND GETS A HEADLOCK ON (CLOSER)!



I...JUST...BROKE...HIS...
NECK...HE...IS...TRYING...
TO...GRAB...MY...
SPINE!

HOW DO YOU LOVE IT,
HERBY?



TEEA
DID IT!

AHEE!

TEEA
TEX!







ALL RIGHT, YOU
YAKHONT! I'LL
SEE YOU TO THE END!

POW!



GET TO YOUR FEET, I LOVE YOU A LITTLE
MORE FOR WHAT YOU'RE DOING!

NO...
ENOUGH!
I GET IT!



YOU DID IT, TEX!
YOU DID IT!

ATTACH TEX! YOU SHOWED THEM!
WHERE'S LUCKY?



ALL RIGHT,
SEE YOU'LL
TAKE THOSE
BOULDER CLAIMS!

YOU MUST'VE BEEN
BORN WITH A LUCKY
HORSESHOE IN
YOUR HAND!



I DON'T HAVE THE CLAIMS
WITH ME, BE AT MY OFFICE
IN A HALF HOUR AND I'LL
GIVE THEM TO YOU!

WE'LL
ALL BE
THERE!



YOU MEAN YOU'RE
REALLY HANDING
OVER THOSE
BOULDER CLAIMS
LUCKY?

ARE YOU
CRAZY? I'LL
HAVE ONE
MORE TRICK
UP MY SLEEVE!



THEY'LL BE HERE SOON, SO
WE'LL HAVE TO WORK FAST, NOW
LISTEN, WE'RE GOING TO GIVE
THOSE FOLKS A LITTLE
SURPRISE! I WANT LIME
AND KERO AND RUST!









NOTHING'S GOING TO STOP ME NOW!

GOOD THING I CAME TO. I MUST STOP THAT BLOODSUCKER AND BELIEVE I CAN DO IT! THEY'RE SO ALLY-BIRD INTENT ON SETTING THAT DYNAMITE OFF, THEY WON'T NOTICE MY MOVE!



POW!



WE GOT THE WIRE WITH THAT SHOT!

CURSE HIM!



NOW BACK UP THERE, YOU CRAWLING FROGSKATE!

POW!



I'M SORTING MY REAR END! ANY ONE OF YOU WANTS A MOVE?

DON'T SHOOT! WE DON'T WANT TO GO TO THE HOOKY-HOUSE!

TEX HAS ROUNDED UP THE WAGGLE TO BRING OFF YOURS! WHEN?



AFTER TEX EXPLAINS...

WAIT A MINUTE, BEND! IT'S LAW AND ORDER!

LOOK HERE, I SAY, BRING THEM UP!

THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO GET RID OF THESE

WE WANT IN THE TOWN. THIS IS THE TIME TO START, IN TAKING THEM TO THE NEXT COUNTY FOR TEXAS. THE LAW WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM.



SOON AFTER...

THIS TOWN WILL REMEMBER YOU!

THIS JOHN, THE GOOD CITIZEN OF THIS TOWN...

FORGET YOU, TEX! THANKS TO YOU WE'RE GOING TO HAVE LAW AND ORDER HERE. THE BOMB WILL BUST A SHEBBY AND I SHOULD BE GOING TO BE A HARRY IN BRADLEY PLACE FOR OUTLAW!

WILL NEVER STAND THE LISS OF LUCKY WAGGLE AGAIN. YOU'RE LAW AND ORDER GUY. REALLY YOU CUT IN THE BUD!

