

CROOKED RIVER FLATS

A Town by James Ritter

PROLOGUE

Early in winter, word reached Bridal Falls that the Far West Branch, one of the few branches that still exist Back East, had been driven off its lands and was moving westward in the wake of an extermination order issued by the L. W. Boggs, governor of Missouri and commander in chief of the state militia. Many argued that they should stand and fight, trusting in the King's protection, but their aging steward, Ezekial Cross, overruled them, gathering all the faithful he could find and ordering a hasty march West with limited supplies and minimal preparation.

Along the way, the travelers walked into the worst blizzard seen in forty years, fully half the party perished including Ezekiel Cross himself. The Far West Branch has arrived in Crooked River Flats a broken shell of its former self.

The story begins in Bridal falls with a call to meeting in the central courtyard of the Temple. The head Steward of the Dogs will read the letter from Ezekiel Cross. The Far West folk are several months late and no word has been heard of their approach. Something has happened. Some of the Dogs are related to or have a history with the Far West people and will likely want to ride out to the borderlands to look for them. One of the Dogs has Ruth May White as an aunt. Another Dog is cousins with Prudence Taylor. Another Dog may have apprenticed for a time with Doc Breach.

THE TOWN

Crooked River Flats is a trading post which has grown up along the northern trade route that links California to the East. This route passes through Upper Deseret Territory and has started seeing much more traffic since gold was discovered in Sutter's Mill three years ago. The place is a den of iniquity, full unbelievers and sin. There is no branch of the faithful.

Jonathan Bullock, who founded the outpost, is a veteran of the war against Hidalgo. Bullock was drawn West by the lure of the yellow metal and invested, and lost, his entire pension on a futile quest for riches. On the way back, he found himself in the rough-and-tumble tent settlement on the bank of a meandering river opposite small Territorial Authority outpost known as Fort Buckner after its founding officer.

Bullock's fortunes changed dramatically. He opened The Morning Star Hotel and Tavern, a local brothel, and now owns all the land surrounding Crooked River Flats. He has little truck with the Faithful, but will treat them with courtesy, believing they can be controlled and manipulated through their naive beliefs. If they get in his way, he will kill them.

Alvin Warder, the town's Sheriff considers himself a neutral agent of the law, but nothing is neutral in Crooked River Flats.

Calgary Davis, the town smithy is a former slave. He frequents Samuel Bateman's services outside of the settlement.

William Two Knives a trader of furs who recently converted to the faith and worships in Samuel Bateman's cult. William is of the Mountain People.

Fanny Flame is a fiery, foul mouthed prostitute who works out of The Morning Star. She has struck up a friendship with Prudence Taylor, a fallen member of the Faithful.

THE FAITHFUL

Brother Adam: Ezekiel Cross died just before the blizzard hit but appointed his eldest son, Adam, steward before he passed. Brother Adam believes the branch's lack of faith and obedience caused his father's death and the storm that followed. His harsh criticism has turned many away from him. He is even harder on himself. He is at times paralyzed with guilt, believing that he could heal his community if he was half the man his father was. At other times he displays marked overconfidence. Raised in a city all his life, Brother Adam was completely unequipped to deal with the snowstorm. The campsite was poorly chosen and many died in an avalanche that buried most of the company's wagons and foodstores. He is angry that criticism from the popular Sister Ruth and the zealous Brother Samuel has weakened his authority in the community.

Samuel Bateman was the loudest dissenter during the trip, claiming that an Angel of God came before him rebuking them for their weakness and demanding that he turn the company around and face their persecutors, to "bleed the beast in its den." Following the blizzard he broke open Clinton Archer's stores in order to feed his friends, decrying Brother Clinton a sinner for withholding grain from the King's flock. Only the intercession of Brother Adam prevented bloodshed. Brother Samuel claims that the King speaks directly to him and he is the rightful steward. He certainly seems to have an uncanny knack for prophecy; he foretold of rescue successful when Brother Adam had given up all hope.

During the fighting in Far West, **Ruth May White** lost her husband and eldest son. She traveled West with a teenage daughter, **Rachel** and her infant son, **Jacob**. Sister Ruth was Ezekiel Cross' assistant for many years and towards the end she essentially ran the branch single-handedly. During the storm, she kept the camp running and argued against many of Brother Adam's decisions, including his disastrous placement of the Wagons.

Sister Ruth went for help after the storm broke and "miraculously" won through to a nearby village of mountain folk. With their help she was able to rescue the surviving members Far West Branch. Her daring rescue is the only reason anyone made it through to Crooked River Flats and many believe she had divine help. Sister Ruth believes that women should be able to hold the office of steward and has openly criticized both Brother Adam (an incompetent) and Brother Samuel (a heretic).

Clinton Archer is living a lie. He was a wealthy man back in Far West, which earned him the enmity of many of the less fortunate parishioners. In the persecution, his wealth was seized and he fled with almost nothing, save for a goodly store of grain and seed with which he hoped to start over in the West. Of course, that was before Samuel Bateman and his crew ransacked his house and took everything he had. He has struck up a business deal with Jonathan Bullock, trading his good name for supplies which he sells to his community at inflated prices.

Joyelle Archer is ashamed by her newfound poverty. She does not know the extent of their indebtedness, but she senses things are desperate. Not one for hardship, she is increasingly turning toward Jonathan Bullock and away from her husband.

Paul Taylor is love with Ruth White. He is her most loyal supporter and her bidding in all things. For Sister Ruth's part, she is totally unaware of his affections.

Prudence Taylor is not so lucky. Her jealousy and rage consumes her. She has taken up residence at The Morning Star and spends her time drinking with Fanny Flame, a local whore.

Rachel White and Martin Cross are in love. However, they must meet secretly for fear of angering both of their parents.

SOMETHING'S WRONG

The weather started out mild and the company made good time for the first few days of its journey. Brother Ezekiel took this as a sign that the King of Life had smiled upon his decision. Halfway through a rugged mountain pass Brother Ezekiel died and the group was stranded by gale force winds driving hail and snow. Nearly half the company died from exposure and starvation, a goodly number were left with physical and mental scars they will carry for the rest of their lives.

When nothing further was heard from the Company, the Dogs were dispatched to the eastern border towns of Deseret, seeking any sign. It was in one of these sleepy border towns where the Dogs are approached by a messenger from Jonathan Bullock, a tavern owner in Crooked River Flats...

PRIDE

- Brother Adam believes he is rightful steward and demands unquestioning devotion
- Brother Samuel believes he is steward and prophet
- Sister Ruth believes she has proven herself fit for the office of steward.
- Clinton Archer believes he deserves the wealth and power that was taken from him.

INJUSTICE

- Brother Adam has legitimized Brother Clinton's marriage to a second wife.
- Sister Ruth and her group of supporters are stirring up dissention against Brother Adam.
- Brother Clinton has used the Company's remaining coin to buy goods from Jonathan Bullock and is selling them to the congregation at exorbitant prices.
- Sister Joyelle is turning to Jonathan Bullock in her shame.
- Prudence's jealousy has destroyed her marriage and turned her to drink.

SINS

Blasphemy: Brother Samuel believes he is the King's prophet.

Apostasy: Brother Samuel and his supporters meet outside of the town, where he provides prophecy and healing.

Apostasy: Sister Ruth believes that the King of Life is also the Queen of Life

Adultery: Sister Joyelle is sleeping with Jonathan Bullock. Brother Samuel has three unconsecrated marriages. Sister Rachel and Brother Martin will be driven to adultery.

Deceit: Clinton Archer is maintaining the illusion of wealth. Sister Rachel and Brother Martin carry on a secret courtship.

Disunity: Sister Ruth, Brother Adam and Brother Samuel all vie for power.

Disunity: Clinton Archer plots against Samuel Bateman and has hired two bullyboys from town. The community is divided into three camps.

Faithlessness: Many question their Faith and why the King of Life has turned his back on them. Brother Adam does nothing to stop Clinton Archer from exploiting his people. Brother Paul neglects his wife Prudence. Sister Rachel and Brother Martin are prevented from marrying.

Worldliness: Clinton Archer seeks to rebuild his wealth at the expense of his people. Clinton Archer recently took a second wife. Sister Joyelle's sleeping with Jonathan Bullock. Sister Prudence has left her husband and taken up drinking at The Morning Star.

DEMONIC ATTACKS

- Every decision Brother Adam makes is disastrous, enhancing his dependence on Clinton Archer.
- Every time Sister Ruth argues with Brother Adam, she is proven right.
- Brother Samuel's voices urge him toward a clash with Clinton Archer and Brother Adam.
- Clinton Archer's debts keep mounting but his confidence in himself is unshakable.
- Sister Joyelle finds her only solace in Jonathan Bullock's arms.
- Sister Prudence's rage and jealousy have destroyed her marriage and driven her to drink.

FALSE DOCTRINE

- Sister Ruth and her supporters believe that a woman can be a branch steward.
- Brother Samuel believes his is the "one strong and mighty" who the King has chosen to lead the faithful.

CORRUPT WORSHIP

- Brother Samuel and Sister Ruth both lead separate congregations in worship, essentially competing cults.
- Brother Adam's worship services are overseen by Clinton Archer, who makes sure no dissention is voiced.

FALSE PRIESTHOOD

- Sister Ruth has 30 or so followers, including several converted Mountain People
- Brother Samuel has 15 followers who follow him fanatically.

SORCERY

Each of the three putative stewards are attended by a demonic "handler." These demons are trying to destroy the town and create as much suffering as possible. They are not working in concert, however. The destruction of Far West Branch has become a sort of sport for them and they see it as a friendly competition to see who can wreak the most elegant havoc.

HATE AND MURDER

- It is only a matter of time before Brother Clinton and Brother Samuel come to violence.

- Somebody may kill Brother Clinton when they find out about his crooked business dealings.
- The rhetoric in both splinter congregations is getting more heated and violence will soon erupt against Brother Adam.
- Sister Prudence will eventually try to kill Sister Ruth.

WHAT DO THE TOWNSPEOPLE WANT FROM THE DOGS?

Brother Adam wants to be legitimized as steward and for the town to be united.

Sister Ruth wants to be steward, or at least for Brother Adam to be removed from office and Brother Samuel banished.

Samuel Bateman wants the dogs to recognize him as the King's prophet and to join him in bringing the faithful back to the light.

Prudence Taylor wants her husband's attention and Sister Ruth's death.

Clinton Archer wants his wealth and power restored and Samuel Bateman dead.

Joyelle Archer wants to be returned to her "rightful station" in life.

Jonathan Bullock wants to control and profit off of the Far West bunch.

Sheriff Alvin Warder wants the dogs to keep the peace and avoid violence.

Sister Rachel and Brother Martin want to be wed.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT?

The company to tear itself apart in the most interesting and artistic way. They want hatred, murder, despair and misery.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT THE DOGS TO DO?

Stir up everyone's passions, leading to more tensions, more suffering, and ultimately more bloodshed.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE DOGS DIDN'T COME?

The community would come apart at the seams. It would splinter into three warring factions. Clinton Archer's desperation would destroy him and every one with him.

WHO'S WHO

Adam Cross, appointed steward.

Martin Cross, his son. In love with Rachel White.

Clinton Archer, formerly rich man. Supporter of Adam Cross.

Joyelle Archer, Clinton's wife and Jonathan Bullock's lover.

Their three sons, Aaron, Martin, and Theodore

Hamilton Breach, Doctor. Friend and supporter of Adam Cross.

Clement Harper and William Barnet – Jonathan Bullock’s bullyboys. On loan to Clinton Archer.
Faith Bateman, Samuel Bateman’s ordained wife. A follower of Adam Cross.

Ruth May white, outspoken leader
Isabella White her daughter. In love with Martin Cross.
Jacob White her infant son.
Paul Taylor, Sister Ruth’s assistant.
Prudence, his jealous wife. She now lives at the Morning Star Tavern
Fanny Flame, Prudence’s friend. A local whore.

Samuel Bateman, self proclaimed steward and prophet.
William Two Knives, a local trader. Recent convert to Brother Samuel’s cult.
Calgary Davis, former slave and town smith. He attends Brother Samuel’s services.
Mary Two Knives Bateman, William’s sister and Brother Samuel’s second “wife.”
Elizabeth Two Knives Bateman, Williams daughter and Brother Samuel’s third “wife.”

Jonathan Bullock, founder of Crooked River Flats and owner of The Morning Star.
Alvin Warder, the sheriff.
Worthy Banks, a deputy.

THE DEAD

Ezekial Cross, original leader and Steward
John Fox White, husband of Sister Ruth. Of the Mountain People.
Barnaby White, Sister Ruth’s eldest son.

Bridal Falls Temple
Deseret Territorie, November 27, 1848

Dear Sirs—

It is my fervent hope that the King of All guides this missive to your reverent personages with all haste due such matters. As ye shall see in the letter sent from Governor Boggs to General Clark of the Missouri Regulars, a letter which I have strived to report in its wholeness and entirety below, things are not well in the East. All matter of cruelty and barbarities having been enacted upon the Faithful.

The letter as conveyed to me this morning by persons loyal to the Faith who I shall not name here reads thusly:

*Headquarters of the Militia
City of Jefferson, Oct. 27, 1848*

Gen. John B. Clark.

Sir:—Since the order of this morning to you, directing you to cause four hundred mounted men to be raised within your division, I have received by Amos Rees, Esq. of Ray county and Wiley C. Williams, Esq., one of my aids, ~~infomation~~ information of the most appalling character, which entirely changes the face of things, and places those who style themselves the Faithful and their idolatrous religion in the attitude of an open and avowed defiance of the laws, and of having made war upon the people of this State.

Your orders are, therefore, to hasten your operations with all possible speed. The followers of this evil must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary, for the public peace—their outrages are beyond all description. If you can increase your force, you are authorized to do so, to any extent you may consider necessary.

I have just issued orders to Maj. Gen. Willock of Marion county, to raise five hundred men, and to march them to the northern part of Daviess, and there unite with General Doniphan, of Clay, who has been ordered with five hundred men to proceed to the same point for the purpose of intercepting the retreat of the heathens to the north. They have been directed to communicate with you by express, you can also communicate with them if you find it necessary.

Instead, therefore, of proceeding as at first directed to reinstate the citizens in their homes, you will proceed immediately to Richmond and then operate against the sinners.

Brig. Gen. Parks of Ray has been ordered to have four hundred of his Brigade in readiness to join you at Richmond. The whole force will be placed under your command.

*I am very respectfully,
your ob't serv't,
L. W. BOGGS, Commander-in-Chief.*

Given the, as you will no doubt agree, tenuous nature of this humble branch, it is my intention to strike westward for Bridal Falls with as many of the Faithful as can be gathered. There we shall await your safe and wise council. I shall also dispatch a few brave soldiers of the True Religion to carry the news to our far flung brethren. I feel Diaspora may be finally upon us.

We shall travel immediately upon dispatching this correspondence to your Honored Personages. It is my wish that we will find ourselves, with the King's guidance and favor, safely through the passes before the brunt of winter be upon us.

Yours in humility and service,

Ezekiel Cross, Steward
Far West Branch
Missouri Territory

