

# West from Hell

By Matt Channen

*They say the sun never sets in the west. People called the vast land, stretching to the Pacific, a world created to mend broken lives with the promises of silver and gold. People from all around would journey the long and treacherous route in order to achieve better days. Some reach their destination, yet others do not. These others were called the lost folk. It was common for these folk to be attacked by bandits, Indians, or illness. Left to die, they would spend their remaining days in the desert, wondering if their goal was worth perishing for. But some of these folk don't die. While never reaching the glorious west, they would still live full lives. However, they would still never be heard of again. Living, but lost in the desert for the rest of their days.*

*Unlike the great west, the sun does set in the east. This meant for U.S. Marshal Thomas Cross, the end of a long day. Stationed in D.C., he was always searching for an escape. Day after day, schedule after schedule, order after order. Every day was the same. Quite, reserved, and intelligent, the only comfort he earned from his job, was knowing his occupation helped keep his family safe in arms.*

*The date was Monday, April 1, 1888. Thomas had arrived at work with a smile on his face. The sun was shining and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. It was one of the first sunny days they had encountered in quite some time. It was days like this that Thomas enjoyed working in Washington. Unfortunately, this happy thought only lasted during the horse ride to headquarters. With a friendly face, he approached some of his fellow peacekeepers.*

*"Gentlemen, what news does Washington bring this morning?" Said Thomas.*

“Well aside from the ongoing reconstruction from the rebel war, absolutely nothing.” *Replied one of the marshals.* “Oh they are selecting one of us to head out west.”

“Really now? Why’s that?” *Asked Cross.*

“I would think so because there isn’t a single, real government official out there. People live by their self-appointed laws and constitutions. They need someone to remind them that the only constitution worth reading is the U.S. Constitution.”

“Sounds interesting.” *Replied Cross*

“You don’t think they would select you for this job do you?” *Countered another.*

“Yea after that stunt you pulled over in Boston last month. It’s a surprise you still wear that badge.” *Said one of the men while pointing at the golden star badge pinned to Cross’s chest*

“Hey that lunatic had four people locked in that factory. They wouldn’t be breathing right now if I hadn’t acted the way I did.” *Said Cross, backing himself up.*

*The conversation then had an awkward pause after Thomas’s exclamation. It gave him the chance to collect his thoughts. Hmm, I wonder. Could this be my escape? The thought of traveling to the west never crossed his mind. Perhaps this is the opportunity he has always dreamed of. His train of thought was disrupted by a horseback messenger. He approached the group of marshals, bearing a message from their director, Benjamin Hirschcot.*

“Mr. Cross, you have been summoned by Mr. Hirschcot.”

“Is that so? For what purpose?”

“He did not say, but I believe it is briefing for a new assignment.”

“And why would you be given the deed in fetching me?” *Asked Cross*

“I am Mr. Hirschcot’s personal assistant.” *Stated the messenger*

“Heh, what a way to begin the week,” *He said sarcastically to his coworkers,* “Alright, lead the way.”

“If you would be so kind to follow me, Mr. Cross.”

*So Thomas mounted his horse, and by lead of the messenger they rode to the director’s office. The walk down HQ corridors seemed longer than usual. The sculptures and paintings looked gloomier and rather sinister, staring at Cross as they treaded upon the hallway’s blue and red carpet.*

“So tell me, how long have you been Hirschcot’s personal assistant?”

*He asked.*

“Around two months.”

“Two months is a long time. Haven’t you grown old of his schemes by now?”

“It’s a job, Mr. Cross. It puts food on the table, and in these troubled times that’s all that matters.”

*“I see your point.” Said Cross after a pause. Without speaking another word, they continued their walk toward their destination. The messenger knocked twice on the door.*

“Come in come in!” *Yelled Hirschcot from inside the office, “Ah Mr. Cross. Please, sit down. Norman wait outside.” He instructed to his assistant.*

“Thank you sir.” *Said Cross.*

*The office was filled with antiques and collectibles. Many of which seemed to be left over from the war. On the wall was a large portrait of Hirschcot and Ulysses S. Grant, and in the rear of the room rested a desk that could have passed as one stolen from the Oval Office. Tall and forceful, Ben Hirschcot was a man who was not to be taken lightly. He served directly under General Grant himself during the Civil War. People say it was the General who gave him his rather bombastic personality. However that could not be true, judging how Grant was a quite and humble man.*

“How is the world treating you, my friend?” *Asked the director*

“I’m just enjoying the wonderful day, Sir.”

“And the family? How are they?”

“They’re good, Sir. Andrew will be turning fifteen in about a month, and Hannah just turned eleven.”

“Splendid! So tell me, Mr. Cross. What are your views on the west?”

“The west sir?”

“Yes, the west.”

“Well to tell you the truth I have never really thought about it too deeply. I’ve heard people have made quite a living outward bounds.”

“Well to some extent. The wealth of those lands has been more or less, exaggerated. But yes, some have been lucky enough to strike some gold or well some oil. The one problem that land encounters is

law and order. Twenty years has passed since the Civil War, and we are still in its reconstruction stages. Immigrants from eastern and southern Europe flood into our nation every day stealing jobs with their unfashionable life styles. The last thing we need is another rebellion.”

“I agree. Our nation could not withstand another war of the same magnitude.”

“Yes it would be quite disastrous wouldn't it? That is why you are here. I have been instructed by the President to select one of my finest to journey to Carson City, Nevada. There they will reinforce the rules and regulations this country as suffered so much to instate.”

“Sir I'm honored that you would consider me for such a job, but the chosen marshal would have to be quite forceful. And unfortunately I would not be able to use the desired methods due to last month's events.”

*The director rose from his seat and turned his back on Cross to look out the window to the world outside. He locked his hands behind his back, and began to speak again.*

“Tell me, your court martial hasn't softened you up has it, Mr. Cross? I'm surprised. I remember addressing you about your actions in Massachusetts. Quite vigorous tactics, if I do say so myself.”

“From what I remember you were against my measures.” *He replied*

“And I still am. The difference is, you are capable of doing what is necessary. I need someone like that to enforce the American government in the Nevada regions,” *He said. He then sat down behind his desk as before,* “So? How would you like to be relocated to Carson City for the next few years?”

“This is quite an offer, Sir. I am assuming my family can accompany me.”

“If you insist.” *Said the director*

“When do we depart?”

“Two weeks. That should leave you plenty of time to settle your affairs and other necessities.”

*The sensation of adventure shakes his bones, the chill of the unexpected shivers down his spine. This was it! His calling! His escape. His heart and soul wanted to scream yes and accept this delightful offer! But his logic was deliberating quite differently. My*

*family. How could they leave their lives behind? All our friends and family. Our home. Everything they know and understand is here, right here. And nowhere else.*

“Sir you have to understand I have a family. Although the offer is quite tempting, I am not so sure they will be fond of us leaving our lives and jumping ship to Nevada.”

“Then convince them, Thomas. Use some of your impressive measures we have all seen.” *He replied ever so boldly*

“My wife and children are not some lunatic locked up inside a textile mill with hostages at gun point.”

*And with that remark, the bombastic director, full of personality leaned across his desk toward the marshal. He lowered his voice, and said with a smile on his face,*

“Well, than try harder. I expect your answer tomorrow.”

*With an awkward handshake, the conversation was over. Thomas then left the room with a feeling of confusion and paranoia. He walked down the long corridors, filled with immaculate art. He walked, and did not look back nor did he talk to any of his fellow marshals. He left the building and walked at a rather fast pace to his horse, awaiting its next trip. He mounted his steed and swiftly rode home to his awaiting family. Resting in their family room were his beloved children, waiting for his return from a long, hard day’s work. I wonder what their reaction will be, he said to himself. He would have to wait and see.*