

## Caravan

By Ron Koppelberger

The romance of western ways and satisfactions of desert bloom were strong attractions for Victor Tuck. A balanced recollection of tides and sunshine mooted summer dustbowl, grass houses and wagon train exploration was the dreamy nuance in his consciousness. He had traveled from New York to Arizona, braving the winds and the heat of a sultry summer.

The polish on his shoes was still wet as he buffed and spat in tandem. Gnarled but still rippling with the baptism of strength, wiry tendons bulged in his aged hands. The expedition had been dauntless and they had ventured the promise of a new frontier. They couldn't have foreseen the fate that would define a sovereign rush of destiny.

It had been an indigo night in a vast savannah of grass; the wagons were in a concentric circle of protective grace. The sound of wolves howling had filled the air and the women hid deep in the caravan wagons. Enticed by the echo of danger, Victor had stood guard by the fire, tending it with scraps of tumbleweed and scrub grass. Victor heard the grass rustle in a peculiar fashion as he raised his Winchester. The thought of being scalped minded his fear. The rustling continued for a few more moments then all was silent. Leaning back against an arch of dead oak, he closed his eyes. Emma was fast asleep in the confines of one of the wagons and he was thankful for that. The fluttering flames traced vagrant shadows of spectral quandary across his eyelids. A strange restless unease overwhelmed him for a moment and then a deep dark drizzle of fog beguiled him.

He heard the screams of men in panicked frenzy and the sound of gunfire. The topsoil was worn and wet beneath his palms. He remembered looking at his hands with concern, they were bloody and slick. He watched the maelstrom of wolves, imposing lodgers in a ridiculous circle of travelers. Victor sighed and dismissed the vision of carnage.

Dusky twilight yield glowed an orange shimmering ember eyed flame in Victor's ancient eyes. He existed in the reflection of a sanguine beast. Undressing he waited for the change, the change that would bring dark divisions of man and wolf, human and beast. The wagon train had been there in his mind, a memory of ancient loss and willful gain, the gain of the wolf and the loss of his mortality. He waited for the moon and its lunacy, the sun and its salvation.

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