

The Code of the West

1. Don't kill no one who don't need killing.
2. Don't steal unless your children are hungry.
3. A man don't lie unless he is fishing.
4. A man protects women and children.
5. Your word is your measure. If it's bad, so are you.
6. Do not insult or injure others, and do not allow them to do it to you or yours.
7. A man don't ever pass up a good chance to shut up.
8. A man don't pick on the little guy.
9. A man minds his own business.
10. A man don't complain and don't need to Explain.
11. A man's word is his law.
12. Blessed be Samuel Colt, for he made all men equal.

Prologue

Ranger recruit Burton Adams, future Emperor of Texas, someday to be King of Kansas, Duke Of Arkansas and NewMex, and protector of his people, turned 18 years old sitting on a pile of rubble in the roofless ruins of an abandoned gas station. It wasn't surprising, as all the emperors of Texas began their working lives as "Ranger Adams." Tonight, he scanned a moonlit panorama of rubble through the empty window frame. Abandoned for 400 years, most of the wooden buildings in Old Lubbock were just piles of grass covered termite food. Some of the concrete and brick buildings had done better and had recognizable walls and even a few roofs. On the horizon, a few short stubs of sky scrapers could be made out against the background of stars. More than buildings had been lost. Even with a sharp intellect and the best education in Texas, Recruit Adams had no idea what a gas station was or that the building he was sitting in had been one.

His friend and fellow recruit, Wilson, watched the shadows from a side window, resting his Winchester on the empty sill in front of him. They were in this town, this night, because bandits had been raiding the mining companies in this area. West Waco Mining was burrowing into an ancient skyscraper for its steel frame and copper wiring. Two other nearby companies had been attacked by bandits who came after dark, overpowered the guards, and drove away with the ore wagons. It wasn't a fast way to get rich, but robbing a Texas bank was as close as a man could come to legal suicide, and ore rustling must have seemed safer. During the last raid, they had simplified their getaway by killing the guards, and that got the undivided attention of the local Rangers.

As with all night duty, the real problem was not fear, but fatigue. Adams fought to keep his eyes open and his mind on the shadows outside. There were several other two-man teams in the ruins around him and the lieutenant watched with four men on a surviving roof behind him. This was their second night of waiting and watching. It would be their last. Adams glanced around at Wilson and whispered, "Think they'll come tonight?"

Wilson's nodded slightly. "Unless that's a pack of the biggest and quietest dogs you ever seen." He gestured with his rifle. "Look over there."

In the bright moonlight, the bandits were moving down an overgrown and rubble-strewn street. The movement that Wilson had seen was the leader stepping over a fallen concrete lamp post. Behind him, five men were doing a bad job of crouching, tip toeing, sneaking and stumbling through the semi-darkness. Eventually they reached the point where they were spread out in a line in front of the troopers.

The Rangers watched the group as it drew close to their position. Wilson joined Adams at the front window, and after a moment, nudged his friend. "Something's wrong. Watch for some more of 'em."

Adams kept his eyes on the bandits. "I don't see any more out there."

Wilson scanned the darkness. "They took more than a dozen ore wagons on their last job, and they didn't do it with six stumblebums, so watch for the rest."

Their conversation was interrupted by the flares rising from the lieutenant's position and arcing down behind the bandits. When the flares hit the ground, the bandits were brightly back lit and the Lieutenant's voice rang out from the darkness, "Drop 'em or die with 'em".

Dazed by the light, the bandits froze momentarily, and then dove for cover and started shooting into the dark. The Rangers' plan was to wait out the first volley from the bandits, and then the Rangers at ground level would flank the intruders while the men on the roof kept the bandits' heads down. The plan lasted exactly as long as most battle plans do, until they met the enemy. With their backs to the front wall, both Adams and Wilson could see the rooftop their lieutenant was on, and suddenly realized that it was taking fire instead of providing it. Adams cocked his head first to one side and then the other, and then pointed through the side window that Wilson had been at. "There. The shots are coming from there. They've flanked us and they watched where the flares came from."

Wilson, no longer bothering to whisper, shrugged, "Yep, but they don't know where we are. Time for a walk?"

They shifted their rifles to their left hands and, waiting for a loud burst of gunfire to cover the noise, vaulted out the window side by side. Then, crouched almost to the ground, Winchester in one hand and Colt in the other, future Emperor Adams went to earn his crown.

The ruined city provided enough cover to allow easy movement in the moonlight. Ahead of them, Adams sighted two men ahead moving in the same direction as himself and Wilson. One he recognized as Jack, the squad leader. He whistled "whippoorwill" twice to let them know he was behind them in the near

darkness. Jack looked back and, after a moment, gestured to Adams and Wilson to catch up. When Adams got close, Jake whispered, "Going somewhere, Partner?"

Adams answered, "Moonlight stroll with Wilson. I don't think we have much time. Our guests aren't going to hang around when things get hot. "

Jack looked at the luminous dial on his pocket watch and whispered, "That'll be in about nine minutes. We left Ted behind a wall with a pile of grenades and a lot of ammo. He's gonna open up loud when we get in place. I figure everyone else'll take the hint and join in."

Adams pointed toward two lamp posts still standing and just visible against the stars. "I figure they'll go out the way they came...about that direction. We need to be behind them, about where those two big post things are."

Jack looked quickly over the trash pile between them and the bandits. "O.K. You can see it better than me. You lead. I'll take up the rear. Everyone keep quiet from now on. Remember nine minutes, we need to be there."

They moved quickly but quietly, bearing always a little to the right, trying to circle around the bandits. Adams suddenly stopped and gestured at the men behind him. He could see a bandit over the next row of debris. The man was looking away from Adams, probably watching the rooftop where he thought the Rangers were. Adams quietly drew his Bowie knife and crept forward. After a moment, he slowly put his knife back in the sheath and reached down for a heavy stick on the ground. He got all the way to the bandit and knocked him out with a blow to the head before the man even knew he was there.

He was putting cuffs on the unconscious bandit when the other three rangers caught up. Before they could say anything, he glanced up and said, "Better find something tall to stand behind."

When they looked puzzled, he pointed south, "Listen to the shooting. The roof is that direction, and so are the bandits. This guy must've been the rear guard. When Ted opens up, he'll be shooting at us, and there's no such thing as a friendly fire. The bad guys should be leaving right through here. Find something thick to stand behind and get 'em when they go by. "

The four Rangers each found a man-high section of block wall to stand behind and stood facing away from the bandits – and the Texans on the rooftop. Adams holstered his pistol and clutched his Winchester across his chest. Momentarily, he wished for a trip rope. Shoot to kill is a redundant phrase. If you shoot a man, you shoot to kill.

Wilson was hidden in the shadow of a wall fragment about 15 yards to his left, spaced out to his right, Jack and the other Ranger stood with their backs to their walls and waited for the shooting to start.

In less than a minute, the light of the first explosion barely beat the whoomp, whoomp of the first two grenades hitting behind them. Then explosions went on like a string of huge firecrackers. Ted must have thrown half dozen grenades in the time it took the first fuse to burn down. The rest of the hidden Rangers behind them took the hint and opened up. Lead flew everywhere, hitting the wall Adams was pressed against and the ground in front of him. It didn't take long before he heard the sound of men running. They ran by him without stopping. When he couldn't hear any more behind him, Adams stepped aside, out of the shadows and, in one motion, spun around to look behind him for more bandits, and, seeing none, continued his turn until he was crouched facing the fleeing bandits. He fired two quick shots just over the heads of the bandits and yelled "Drop or die. Now!" By now the other Rangers were each on one knee aiming at the dozen or so bandits near them. Five of the bandits immediately dropped to the ground, letting their weapons fly out of their hands. A moment later, the others were also on the ground, after the Rangers rapidly and methodically shot them. With the Rangers, there was never a second warning. No hurry, no problem, no armed survivors.

When all the bandits were down, the Rangers moved forward to handcuff the ones who surrendered, bandage the two others who were still breathing, and to check the dead. They could not see that the lieutenant, Ted, and the other Rangers had left their positions and were moving in on the six men Wilson had first seen on the street.

Burton Adams, future emperor of Texas turned over the first man he had ever killed, looked into the dead man's eyes, and wished he'd had that trip rope.

Texas was not always like this. At one time Texas was not an empire and there had never been an Emperor Adams. Then, about four hundred years before, the world had ended. The odd thing is that people were actually surprised. Every newsstand had books on global warming, the coming ice age, and the “Disease That Will Wipe out Humanity”. Bearded men wandered the streets carrying signs “The End Is Coming” and every Sunday, the evangelists warned their parishioners that the end was near.

People loved these stories. It gave them the same safe thrill as a roller coaster ride. Why were they so surprised when it happened? It even happened where everyone knew it would. The world ended where it began, in Africa.

Chapter One – The End Begins

Democracy is the damndest thing. It has never been proven that rule by popularity contest is particularly effective. It never takes long before the politicians start buying votes with other peoples’ money. They call it entitlement programs, which means that they take money from people who have earned it and who are entitled to it, and give to people who are not entitled to it to buy their votes. When the electorate is wide enough, you begin to realize that half of the people have I.Q.s under 100. They want to hear how good things are, they want simple solutions, and they don’t care if the plan is as realistic as Disney World.

President Thomas was elected in that era. He was tall, thin, grey haired and very fatherly looking. He had a soothing voice and a way of making you feel that he cared. He had been chosen as his party’s standard bearer because he was electable, and so prudish that no one could find any hint of scandal in his past.

He was not unintelligent. Stupid men do not get elected president, but he had never spent a single day of his life in the ‘private sector’. He had gone from Yale University to the Civil Rights Bureau, state service, the US Senate and then the presidency – without ever doing one single productive day’s work.

He was listening to a briefing by the NASA director. The meeting was large one. All of the secretaries were there along with several NASA scientists. The faint smell of hot coffee and pastries filled the room. This was a review. The problem had been discussed by several committees before being presented to the larger group.

The director was standing in front of screen that showed an Antarctic scene on one side and several large graphs on the other.

“It’s ironic that we spent so much time worrying about global warming – and now we find that cold will be our problem. Gentlemen, if you will open your folders, I will fill in the details of what we are facing. The first hint of a problem came four years ago. A glaciologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was running ice flow predictions on their new Sony Supercomputer. His data consisted of ice cores from Antarctica and weather information from other sources. Part of his test program was to go into the past and predict where the ice had been in previous centuries. At first, he thought he had made a mistake. The computer showed that Antarctica had been free of ice several times in the last one hundred thousand years, and that the last time was about twenty thousand years ago. It took him a year to verify the data and another year to explain it.”

The director glanced meaningfully about the room, and then continued, “It turns out that there is a maximum amount of ice a glacier can carry. When it gets too heavy, the pressure of the top ice makes the ice on the bottom melt. That forms a lubricating layer that starts the glacier sliding toward the ocean. In a few years, the ocean levels can rise by twenty feet, inundating vast coastal areas. Knowing that the problem that we were investigating happened once every twenty or thirty millennia, we funded a trip by the glaciologist to Antarctica primarily as a public relations move. We thought that it would be good for an article in Scientific American, or at least Popular Science and a good news conference. We supplied the scientists with Global Positioning Service devices. They went out onto the ice shelf, drove tall stakes into the ice at several positions, and measured the glacial movement with extreme precision. The results were unexpectedly bad. It verified their worst fears. The ice will slide off of Antarctica within our life times and, in the worst case, during this administration.”

Someone asked, “I am not certain that I understand. Is this a part of global warming?”

“No, just the opposite. This has nothing to do with global warming. just a matter of gravity. During cold periods, the ice on the Antarctic shelf gets thicker every year, and when it reaches a certain thickness, the weight of the ice on top melts the ice nearest the ground and the whole thing starts to slide off into the ocean. It doesn't melt. The thickness of the snow pack causes it to slide off into the ocean. Within a year or two, the ocean level can increase up to twenty feet. In addition, the world ends up warmer because there is less ice to reflect sunlight back into space and even more ice melts, raising the sea level more over the years.”

President Thomas was a delegater. He spoke the “big picture”, “laid out the expectations”, and picked the (politically) correct people to do the detail work. He had spent the previous two weeks reading reports, speaking to visiting dignitaries, and deciding on a scapegoat should the current plans fail. He would only be satisfied when they figured out how to blame the other party for the disaster.

Steven June, the Secretary of Health and Welfare was in danger of dozing off. The cabinet seemed to want only to repeat excuses, lay blame, and delay decisions. He felt his eyes drooping when he was startled by a tap on his shoulder. Looking back, he saw that it was one of his staffers with a message. He quietly accepted the message and waved off the staffer. Cabinet members do not interrupt the Tuesday meeting to receive messages.

Holding it down near the table, he opened the message as little as possible and glanced at the contents. He saw that it was from the office of the Surgeon General. Reading on more openly, he came wide awake by the end of the message. It was the update that he had feared. He stood suddenly and addressed the President, interrupting a discussion of the GPS devices being used to track the Antarctic ice flows. “Mr. President, I have news that requires our immediate attention.”

“Jesus, Steve, what can be more important than the fact that our coasts will be flooded in fifty years.”

“I have just received a message from Dr. Cary, the Surgeon General. We have disturbing news from Africa. Ebola, or something very similar, has mutated. It is now airborne, and in the last seventy two hours, three villages in Zambia have been totally wiped out. Several patients were moved to the capital city for treatment yesterday. Today there are eight hundred new cases in the capitol. This thing spreads faster than anything in history. It also remains one hundred percent fatal in spite of the mutation.”

The president stopped glowering. Looking concerned he asked, “Ok, Steve. What to you want to do? Do we send drugs, naval doctors, food, hospital ships? What do they need?”

“Need? Them? It's not them! They're all going to die, and we can't do a damned thing about that! We need to try to live. Us! This plague is going to make the Black Death look like a mild cold. Let me repeat – it is one hundred percent fatal, and nothing can be done to treat it. The first thing we have to do is to isolate Zambia. Stop all flights from Africa, send troops to seal their borders and keep the rest of our troops here to keep everyone out. If it comes, we die!”

“Steve, you can't be serious. I campaigned on the promise of human rights. We will not keep fleeing refugees out of this country. We simply cannot let people die because they can't leave their country. We have clear reciprocal visitation treaties with most African countries, and we will not be the first to break those treaties. In any case, our own laws, which I support, forbid discrimination based physical handicaps and health problems.”

June was clenching his fists. A bad thing to do in front of the President. In a tightly controlled voice he said. “Perhaps you don't fully grasp the situation. This is not a political campaign. It's the lives of your children, and your family, and yourself. One hour after the first infected passenger gets off the first airplane, the disease will be out of control. Six weeks later half the people in the country will be infected, and in three months, we will all be dead. I remind you; our predecessors in these chairs faced a similar but milder problem. They could have treated AIDs as a communicable disease requiring quarantine, but instead, they treated is as a ‘rights’ problem – and one million six hundred thousand Americans died before we finally found a cure. This will be much worse. You won't have to do anything but breathe to get this one.”

“Steven,” the president said in a reassuring voice, “Remember that this party supported those AIDs laws and that we are still proud of them. We will not let a virus change our values or our belief in human rights. Virtue always has a price.”

It suddenly dawned on Steve that no one was listing. His father had always said, “The only thing worse than being a fool is arguing with one. They ain't equipped to listen.”

He shook his head and spoke in a soft and sad voice. “Gentlemen, I will be leaving in a few hours. I have a remote cabin in Utah. My family and I will be there. We'll spend our last few months together and maybe get a little more time if we stay on our mountain top and away from people. You may consider this

to be my resignation.” He didn’t bother to pick up his briefcase, his cell phone, or the message. They were all now irrelevant.

He was wrong about a few details. It took more than six months, not three.

One of the first centers of contagion was Washington DC, brought in by a diplomat who got off the plane under his own power – and then convulsed on the way to the hotel. One of the first victims was President Thomas.

After his death there were serious attempts at containment which temporarily slowed the spread several times. Russia and Israel finally did what should have been done the day Steven got the message. They nuked Zambia. It slowed the contagion a little, but it was too late.

The good news was that it was not one hundred percent fatal. Around the world, almost one person in a thousand survived. And fifty percent of their children were immune.