



THE TOMBSTONE EPIGRAPH

Special Perdition Supplement Vol. 5, No. 16

Tuesday, August 31, 1880

Author's Note

Less than one year ago, Clover Mesa had the reputation of a God-forsaken backwater, a dumping ground for the dregs of Maze society. It's said the only gainfully employed inhabitants of the place were bartenders and soiled doves, and just about any vice could be indulged without fear of reprisal. Some even whispered that the dead clawed out of their graves to gather in town, like flies on a buffalo's carcass.

Clover Mesa was known by a different name back then—Manitou Bluff.

Though it stood on a mesa only 15 miles or so from Lost Angels, Manitou Bluff largely eluded the baleful attention of Reverend Grimme and his Church of Lost Angels. Rail Barons and greedy warlords likewise ignored it; it seemed to offer nothing worthwhile in a Maze full of conspicuous riches. And yet, in the 11 months since the Battle of Lost Angels, this humble mesa has gone from repulsive backwater to what's arguably the single most contested nugget of real estate in the Great Maze.

As the Perdition branch of the *Tombstone Epitaph* struggles to organize various reports of the unprecedented Deluge which has just struck Lost Angels and environs, the odd tale of Manitou Bluff and its transformation into Clover Mesa has grabbed the public's attention. That's not a huge surprise, since the mesa somehow avoided total destruction despite lying

almost directly in the tidal wave's path. Some call it a bona fide miracle. Others mutter it's probably some kind of curse.

Until our full accounting of the disaster reaches print, we humbly offer this retrospective of recent news items regarding Clover Mesa and the factions struggling for control of it, in the hope that you, Dear Reader, have a mind that's fully informed before you make it up one way or the other.

Your Loyal Chronicler,
Lacy O'Malley

Down on the Bluff

For most of 1876-'79, Manitou Bluff enjoyed a universally foul reputation. "The Bluff," as some folks called it, got its proper name from Indian legends claiming the area was haunted. The majority of residents were just common thieves, outlaws, murderers, and the sorts of people referred to as "low-down varmints" in polite company. But persistent rumors insinuated there was a reason Manitou Bluff's populace was so notably ornery—some of them were *dead*.

No one could say how many residents were actually dead—or rather, undead—but judging by pure meanness witnesses swore at least half of them were. This reporter visited Manitou Bluff only once, in late 1878, and I can report that the rumors

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are at least partly true. Yes, Reader, I saw with my own eyes dead men who walked, talked, and ate copious amounts of meat—mostly beef. While not the most terrifying experience I've endured, it ranked among the worst in recent memory, and thus was not repeated since. Either the living inhabitants of Manitou Bluff were just as bloodthirsty and depraved as their unholy drinking companions, or they got that way over time.

The town's population, unlike its notoriety, only grew in fits and starts. Several reputable businesses opened their doors, including a livery, gun shop, variety theater, and so forth, and they even built a church as well as a clock tower with public funds. There was a lot of high-minded talk about bringing the light of knowledge to darkness.

But tensions—along with sporadic, bloody violence—between the new arrivals and the ruffians remained constant. The office of marshal was rarely filled, and even when it was, the law was relatively powerless to bring reform. This was pretty much the state of things until late 1879, when Hellstromme's bombs went off at Lost Angels and everything changed.

Bluff No More

By all accounts, the town of Manitou Bluff was ravaged by earth tremors during the Battle of Lost Angels in September, 1879. As all the Rail Barons' forces battled for the privilege of marching into the city to make a deal with Reverend Grimme—and secure at least one national ghost rock exporting contract—black airships appeared against the eastern sky, buzzing like hornets. Their deadly



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payload consisted of three “ghostfire bombs,” which struck the battlefield with unholy Hell-fire.

Only moments after the billowing, skull-shaped clouds rose up on the eastern horizon, a sudden quake hit the mesa on which Manitou Bluff perched. The ocean churned, a great spasm shook the earth, and the mesa tore into four parts, swallowing up people and buildings alike with a mighty roar. Walls of seawater rushed in to fill the new channels, and the shattered ruins of Manitou Bluff were consigned to a watery grave.

Most folks considered it good riddance to evil trash.

A Cloven, Clover Mesa

Life didn't flag in its hectic pace after the earthquake. More to the point, neither did commerce. It wasn't long before Manitou Bluff began to garner interest from a variety of powerful factions. Unsurprisingly, that interest was due to the usual reason why a particular mesa gets recognized in the Maze—ghost rock. Heaps and heaps of ghost rock.

Mere weeks after the quake split it open, curious prospectors landed on the newly shattered mesa to find whatever they could salvage for a profit. As the popular tale goes, a tinhorn from Back East took one look at the four regions of the mesa and

exclaimed, “Well, I'll be! It's like a *cloven mesa*—cloven into four parts!”

To which a salty West Coast miner replied, “The hell it is, mister! It's a *clover mesa*—a four-leafed, lucky clover!”

A spirited yet brief fistfight ensued, leaving the miner victorious. Thus the name of Clover Mesa was ensconced in popular lore, while that of “Cloven Mesa” was sent Back East on the Plutonian Express along with its disgraced, bruised originator.

Soon it was widely known that the middle of Clover Mesa consisted of an enormous lode of ghost rock, lying at the bottom of the flooded crater left by Manitou Bluff's destruction. Though the precious ore lay under 30 feet of shark-infested Maze waters, few factions were deterred from what they viewed as enough raw wealth to rule the Great Maze.

As it happened, the Union got there first, but they didn't win the ultimate prize. Not by a long shot!

Operation: Lucky Clover

According to an anonymous source, the Union Big Bugs at Fort Lincoln put their best man, Colonel Isaiah Curtis, in charge of the operation dubbed “Lucky Clover.” Curtis set out for Clover Mesa in mid-December, 1879, in command of two paddle-wheeled gunboats. His mission was not only to secure the mesa, but also to fortify it beyond any possibility of invasion.

To this end, he commanded a company of nearly 120 battle-tested Union soldiers, and a team of self-

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professed “steam engineers” from the coastal town of Progress. In his wake followed a small freighter, its hold empty, along with a pair of tugboats pulling six armored barges laden with munitions and construction supplies. They would use these to attempt a feat of engineering once thought impossible.

Curtis did one heck of a job. On the approach he sighted a small convoy of Wasatch vessels about to lay claim to the mesa’s riches. Believing time to be of the essence—and displaying the workings of a singularly ruthless mind—Curtis engaged and sank them all with an expertly targeted spread of Smith & Robards clockwork torpedoes. One Union gunboat was lost when it ran aground on the shoals and suffered a subsequent boiler explosion, but the crew was saved and the setback did little to slow Curtis’ advance.

Within hours he’d sailed his remaining ships up one of the mesa’s narrow, rocky channels to the deep waters at the center. That’s where he circled the wagons—in this case, the barges—and dropped anchor for the long haul.

Digging In

Curtis next dispatched a few squads of Marines to storm the fledgling settlement of Little Gibraltar on the mesa’s northwest shore. After the soldiers raised an intimidating ruckus, they told the prospectors of Little Gibraltar to pull up stakes immediately or risk the pain of arrest and imprisonment at Fort Lincoln.

Witnesses state that nearly all the miners agreed to vacate the area, but few complied for long.

With their prodigious military support, the engineers from Progress erected two steam lifts and established the outpost of Grantsville—complete with a working telegraph line to the coast—in no time flat. Then they set right to work on their great project: a giant, steam-powered sea gate intended to seal off Clover Mesa’s deepest, most easily navigable channel.

Curtis ordered his men to dynamite the other three sea channels, a maneuver that would soon make the sea gate the sole way in or out—*soon* being the operative word. Working with almost inhuman vigor, the corps of Union soldiers detailed to aid the scientists assembled and erected a working gate in just about four months’ time. By all reports Curtis’ brutal discipline was at least partly responsible for their speed.

A marvel of New Science, the sea gate stands 100 feet tall, with nearly half of that span submerged in the green Maze waters. A control tower stands at one end of the gate like a silent sentry, and the gates themselves bristle with Gatling weapons nestled behind ghost steel armor. Powerful steam engines open and close the gates—but they are almost always sealed, and guarded by Union troops. Though the gate prevents the passage of most vessels when it’s closed, all but the largest of sharks can swim under it, unhindered. The biggest ones try to get through from time to time, too!

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In April of 1880, his sea gate completed, Col. Curtis sent a telegraph from Grantsville officially declaring Clover Mesa a territory of the United States. His men had already been dredging ghost rock from the bottom of the basin for months using diving suits, all the while deflecting enemy incursions and dodging shark attacks—for the most part. Things seemed just grand for Col. Curtis and his gang. Little did he know his treasure chest was about to become a prison sentence.

Maze Wars!

Maybe the other factions of the Great Maze didn't get the memo about Clover Mesa being Union soil now. If they did, they didn't much care. By the time Curtis dug in and began building his sea gate, word of the sunken mother lode of Clover Mesa had already spread far and wide. Folks talked about how it glows a faint and eerie green under the frothy, shark-haunted waters, daring any salvager with a diving suit to take his or her share. Assayers hypothesized the whole vein could be worth millions.

Soon the most powerful factions of the Great Maze were on the scene, along with a swarm of bit players, and they weren't about to take "Go pound sand!" for an answer.

Beachheads

Wasatch arrived first with a quartet of fully armed gunboats in January

of 1880, still smarting from the loss of their patrol vessels to Curtis' surprise torpedo attack. Dr. Hellstromme ordered the construction of a stone fortress on the mesa's southern shore, by automaton labor.

Called simply "Beachhead," the outpost was at first manned by several of Wasatch's infamous X-Squads and a full complement of the latest automaton combat models and clockwork tarantulas. According to battlefield reports, the clanking monstrosities immediately began to harry Union forces at Grantsville.

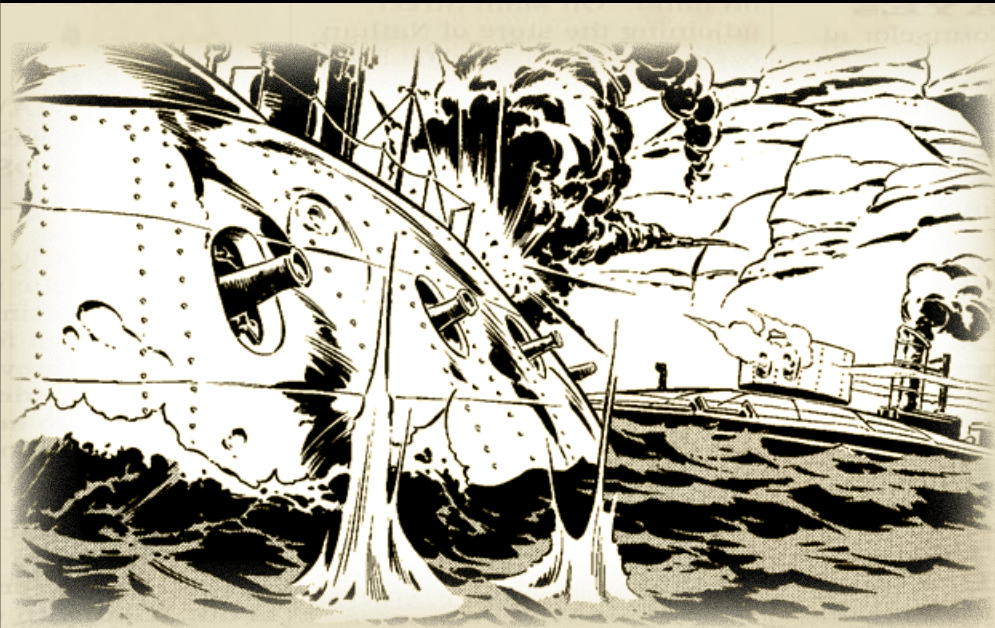
Sources tell the *Epitaph* it was February before Warlord Kang first got wind of the riches to be had. According to an anonymous advisor, Kang decided only a rail line could extract the ghost rock efficiently enough to make the scheme worthwhile, given the dangers of sea travel in the Maze.



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Although the approach was tricky, Kang's expert engineers were up to the task. After all, they had paved a way for the Iron Dragon line across the Continental Divide. Building enough trestles to reach a mesa 15 miles out in the Maze proved equally manageable.

By June of 1880, Kang's Maze Rats established a settlement called Six Hills Railhead on the mesa's northeast shore, featuring a functional rail depot. With the aid of ornithopters and whirligigs, they began a campaign of terror from the skies. According to witnesses, Kang's forces attacked targets indiscriminately, whether military or civilian. Clearly, Kang meant to have the mesa for his own.

Not intending to be left out, in July the Confederate brass at Shannonsburg hatched a plan to seize the southwest

shore of Clover Mesa. Sources inform the *Epitaph* they believed access to the sea caves along the shoreline would provide an alternate source of ghost rock, eventually making the settlement self-sufficient and putting it in a better position to dictate terms to Col. Curtis despite his formidable sea gate.

With very little fuss, the CSA sent in a submersible ironclad and built a steam lift of their own, founding Fort Michele a few days later. Our anonymous source reports the sea caves were teeming with ghost rock... and other, *weirder* things as well. Half a dozen guards are reported to have vanished while exploring the caves under Clover Mesa, but we were not able to confirm independently as of press time the sketchy tales of intelligent, subterranean denizens.

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Despite promises to comply with Col. Curtis' orders, in 1880 the miners of Little Gibraltar clung to the plot of land beside the rock formation that lent the tiny burg its name. Led by a tenacious fellow with the unlikely name of Don Pedro Javier Suárez de Ramírez Antúnez-Núñez, they dug in and continued to erect new buildings in headstrong defiance of the Union's wishes. Before long Curtis had his own problems to deal with, and Little Gibraltar's been a fixture ever since.

Mining the formation's steep slopes provided enough ghost rock to pass the time and enough money to live on, but every miner in town was licking his chops for a good long while, waiting for a dust-up titanic enough to cripple one or more contenders so they could pick over the remains. They didn't have to wait long.

Naked Aggression

In July, 1880, a small group of Wasatch automatons laid siege to Grantsville and methodically reduced the outpost to ruins. Kang's auto-gyros ran weekly bombing raids over the Union flotilla, causing a good amount of death and destruction. According to various reports, at this point Curtis sent a squad of his best men on a secret mission.

In a stunning coup, Curtis' men infiltrated Fort Michele and commandeered the submersible ironclad *CSS Indomitable*. In a mocking show of superiority, they sailed it right through the open sea gate into Union custody. With the vessel's addition,

Curtis' fleet indisputably ruled the channels of Clover Mesa, though Wasatch vessels still dominated the waters all around.

Though the disposition of Col. Curtis' troops in this period is not known, it's suspected all was not well among his ranks. They'd had their share of victories to be sure, and ghost rock was plentiful. But starvation ran as rampant on the mesa as elsewhere in California, so food was running low with all the fighting going on. And in the midst of turmoil, the leader showed signs of faltering.

In mid-August, according to a Union soldier who escaped the mesa and shall remain nameless by request, Curtis' troops began to doubt their leader's mental state. After an Iron Dragon bombing raid left Curtis comatose and near death, doctors feared he wouldn't survive. To their surprise, he recovered with unnatural speed, but suffered from violent personality shifts in the weeks following. In a fit of pique, Curtis ordered Grantsville abandoned, and his forces withdrew to rally at the flotilla. Curtis sent a telegraph declaring,

WE ARE OUR OWN NATION
FREE AND PROUD STOP
CLOVER MESA IS OFF LIMITS TO
YOU STOP ANY AGGRESSION
WILL BE MET IN KIND STOP
COLONEL CURTIS

Minutes later, as incredulous operators in Progress decoded the Morse, another, final missive came

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over the wire from Grantsville. This one was more succinct:

*SEND HELP STOP CURTIS IS
DERANGED STOP ORDERING
US INTO A CORNER*

After that, the line went dead.

Deluge

Things weren't looking so good for the brave Union soldiers of Operation Lucky Clover. Starvation was running rampant in their ranks just as it was in the mesa's other settlements. But on August 23, 1880, everything got a whole lot worse in a nearly unprecedented way. Violent tremors shook the whole mesa for the second time in a year, and panicked lookouts reported a colossal wall of water rising from the Pacific and bearing down on them like an out-of-control steam engine. They had less than a minute's warning.

Waves crashed, surf boiled, the coastal settlements were swamped, and a flood surge struck Col. Curtis' flotilla and nearly submerged the sea gate. According to various experts consulted by this reporter, the tidal wave should have erased all life from Clover Mesa just as surely and swiftly as it scoured everything else in its path. But when the Great Flood passed, Clover Mesa was safe and sound, if a little worse for wear.

The most troubling thing is...not a soul knows why!

Current Events

For all the time that's passed since Manitou Bluff's heyday, the more things change the more they get worse.

Reports from Clover Mesa describe a strange phenomenon, all the more distressing for its familiarity. Everywhere else in California the gnawing effects of starvation seem somehow diminished in the flood's wake, but on Clover Mesa they've suddenly gotten worse. On its shores, people say, provisions begin to spoil in a matter of days, men's ribs begin to show a week after they arrive, and folks consider themselves lucky to escape the place's bony grip.

Fevered whispers of hauntings and poltergeists run rampant among the mesa's remaining settlements, and what the living inhabitants refer to as "hellmouths" are said to open up at random times and places all over the mesa. One witness described a "great shadowy hole in mid-air—like the gaping mouth of a devil!"

These are said to swallow men whole should they get too close. On the other side, the story goes, the poor sods are "tormented by horrible demons and devils with fiery pitchforks." According to a few witnesses, these strange phenomena are nothing new—they've been plaguing the place since the Battle of Lost Angels!

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Clover Mesa's Locales

Despite the constant warfare raging in the waters around Clover Mesa, its settlements have endured and, in a few cases, prospered. But visitors need to be aware of the facts before they set foot on the mesa's shores—their very lives may depend on it!

Beachhead

This outpost of the Wasatch Rail Co. isn't a welcoming place. With the aid of automaton labor the company's built its humble stake into a monolith of dark stone that clings to the mesa's cliff. Odds lights flash intermittently in the square tower's few windows, and at night an eerie radiance envelops the

foundation, staining the surrounding Maze waters an unhealthy yellow. Thick, black smoke assumes odd and unwholesome shapes as it oozes from a trio of stacks atop the tower.

Two gunboats are usually tied at Beachhead's pier, and an ironclad in Wasatch service—the *WSS Revelation*—is known to prey upon rival vessels in Clover Mesa's waters. The *Revelation's* captain is a particularly bellicose scientist by the name of Newton Hexam, and he's not known for his compassion or predilection for treating prisoners well. In fact, he doesn't take prisoners at all. Sailors beware!

Little is known of Beachhead's personnel, except for the presence of at least two of Dr. Hellstromme's clanking automatons, awful in their scientific majesty. Rumors persist

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that one of Hellstromme's top-secret "X-Squads" is in residence, but these tales could not be proven. A steam lift is believed to be in use, fully encased by the tower.

Stories are also told of the scientist who toils night and day in the bowels of Beachhead. Sources report a workshop beyond all imagining, carved from the mesa's heart. There the demented inventor does his work, they say, and when he's finished every soul on Clover Mesa will tremble. The *Epitaph* welcomes independent confirmation of these claims.

Fort Michele

Fort Michele's stockade stands tall on Clover Mesa's southwest coast, with Gatling guns conspicuously displayed by the patrolling Confederates. Certainly, the *WSS Revelation* gives the place a wide berth. And there is

little doubt as to the CSA's purpose in establishing the fort, given how close the Union may be to claiming Clover Mesa's riches.

Sadly, no visit to Fort Michele was possible during this reporter's investigative journey. As our humble steam launch approached the docks—where two gunboats were moored near a steam lift—we heard the distant chattering of a Gatling. They were firing upon us! Hot lead whizzing mere inches over our heads, we turned tail and chugged away, our vessel's hull miraculously unpierced.

We must advise travelers either to fly Confederate colors when approaching the fort, or simply follow Wasatch's lead and avoid it altogether.

Little Gibraltar

As hostile as Fort Michele can be to unannounced house guests, the settlement of Little Gibraltar is entirely the opposite. When we arrived there to interview the locals, it seemed like half the town turned out to greet us. But salty sea dogs should beware the riptide along the approach—it's a rough ride!

The small mining settlement of Little Gibraltar (pop. 72) sits in a narrow, bowl-shaped canyon that rises from the water's edge. The town's buildings are constructed all along the steep slope, a few them seemingly about to topple. A narrow road weaves between the buildings and up the canyon floor in a number of switchbacks. And unlike most places on Clover Mesa, that



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means one can step over the gunwale and into town, instead of having to use a steam lift to reach the top of a soaring cliff.

The landscape is dominated by the rock that gave the settlement its name: Lil' Gib. Miners in bosun's chairs, tiny in the distance, dangle from the heights. Viewed with one's own eyes, it strongly resembles the Rock of Gibraltar in Spain, so it's no surprise Don Pedro Javier Suárez de Ramírez Antúñez-Núñez named the town how he did. The founder, dressed in his Iberian fineries, was among the friendly folks who greeted us and welcomed us in.

Numerous services are available in Little Gibraltar, many of which we elucidate below—expect to pay up to three times the usual price Back East. But if the miners' tales are to be believed there are also grave dangers, so we reveal those as well. At the *Epitaph*, your safety is our paramount concern!

Cole's Boat's: At this establishment, the intense but competent Cole Sonnee repairs boats for a nominal charge. He has a full drydock, so there's no part of a hull he can't reach.

General Store: For hungry travelers who don't mind beans—lots and *lots* of beans—Harland Bernhagen's general store is a godsend. Most people can't afford to buy legumes in bulk, though, so they eat them a bowl at a time at the saloon.

Gibraltar Hotel: By all accounts this place was built quite recently, but

already it shows signs of teetering into disrepair. The owner, Horatio Beaufrat, and his saloon girls do their best to keep the miners happy and their own coffers full. The hotel itself is, in this reporter's judgment, shabby and a bit overpriced.

Mining Supply: This impressive, bunker-like structure is made of stone and timbers, and built right into the side of the canyon, about halfway up. It's used as a shelter for all the town's inhabitants on those occasions the *WSS Revelation* lobbs cannonballs into the canyon for sport.

Salty Gull Saloon: Beer, whiskey, and beans for \$1 a bowl can be had at the Salty Gull.

Tent Town: Most of the townsfolk—miners, by and large—don't have permanent residences yet. Given the constant fighting around the mesa, that's not surprising. For now, plenty of miners dwell in a tent town along the canyon's rim.

Thibedeau Outfitters: For work clothes, visit the mining supply or general store. If a customer desires any other sort of attire, Hattie and Archibald Thibedeau can help out.

Little Gibraltar also features an exchange office, land office for recording and filing mining claims, fishing supply store, and a pair of exporters—Tomblin & Pitt—who don't manage to do much business in the current climate.

Take care if you're out and about after dark in Little Gibraltar, Curious Reader. The locals spin tales of all the

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vessels that have succumbed to the riptide and sunk to bottom of the cove. On moonlit nights, it's whispered, the drowned sailors of those ships crawl forth, transformed into beasts festooned with oily green seawrack.

These malevolent dead, called "cove creepers" by terrified tellers, crawl up the sheer face of Lil' Gib looking for miners to ambush. Grabbing hold of a body, they drag the poor sod down to a watery death. It's said nothing can break the grip of a cove creeper once it gets its claws in a person...

Grantsville

Founded by Colonel Isaiah Curtis as part of Operation Lucky Clover, what's left of the Union outpost once called Grantsville is a grim, haunted place. The stockade walls on the cliff are unmanned and pierced by cannon fire, the steam lift is in disrepair, and its docks stand empty. But Grantsville is a ghost town in more ways than one.

We did not visit Grantsville due to its bad reputation, coupled with how difficult it would have been to reach it. We had no engineer among our ranks who could repair the lift, and journeying there overland seemed unwise.

According to local reports, the soldiers who once manned Grantsville and died enduring the withering fire of Wasatch ships now walk its lonely streets as ghosts. Needless to say, they have no love for those who live and breathe.

Although the ghost town might offer a fair amount of secrecy—none of the

mesa's factions are known to visit the place—it must also be viewed as a den of extreme danger. Go there at your own risk!

Six Hills Railhead

Like Beachhead and Fort Michele, visitors aren't generally welcome in Kang's town. But unlike those other places, this reporter was able to gain an exclusive glimpse of Six Hills Railhead's population and daily routines.

Which is not to say we were welcomed with open arms—unless by "arms" you mean rifles. Arriving at the Six Hills wharfs in our launch, the guards swarmed in to surround us and we feared all was lost. Luckily, a quick speech was delivered by Yours Truly—and helpfully translated by our skipper—informing Kang's men of our intent to make them famous in the *Tombstone Epitaph's* pages. Thereafter we found them far more collegial.

Six Hills has much in common with Kang's other Maze towns of Dragon's Breath, Lion's Roar, and Bear's Claw. It's walled along the coast, populated mainly by sailors and soldiers loyal to Kang—collectively called "Maze Rats"—and its waters are studded with colorful sampans and junks. But that's where the similarities end.

Warlord Kang has established more than just a beachhead in the war for Clover Mesa, he's built the prototype for a new sort of commercial hub in the Great Maze. Rather than mining ghost rock in isolated claims and transporting it on dangerous barges,

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Kang's new model means ghost rock can be conveyed directly to the mainland, and beyond, via rail. But before he can put his system to work, Kang needs to take control of the mesa. Six Hills Railhead is designed to help him do just that.

The town's most conspicuous feature—a long, sloping trestle that spans the glittering channel below—is the foremost tool in Kang's kit. Barreling down a steep grade made necessary by the higher elevation of the opposite mesa, the Six Hills Express brings more men and materiel for the cause daily.

But the train engineers call the trestle "Big Slippery," due to the way trains tend to slide down the extreme grade. And if that wasn't bad enough,

at the bottom is a deadman's curve that's claimed its share of innocent lives. Locals tell of one locomotive that took the curve too fast and derailed, crashing into the shallow waters below. No one survived. Since then, Kang's drivers have been luckier, more skilled, or both, because there's been no wreck of the Six Hills Express since.

Within the walls of Six Hills Railhead stand a good 10 buildings or so, their inhabitants clearly girding themselves for war. Several warehouses, a pair of hangars for Kang's airfleet, and a large barracks dominate the scene. Those Maze Rats who can't fit in barracks live in an orderly grid of tents.

They all spend their spare time in a seedy and run-down establishment called the Palace of Unearthly Delights,



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where anything from a game of Fan Tan, to opium, to the company of the opposite sex can be had for a price. Apparently, Kang doesn't mind how his men blow off steam when they're not raiding nearby claims or bombing Clover Mesa's central basin from the air.

The Maze Rats don't eat much besides fish, so it was unsurprising that some men spoke of scurvy among the ranks. The trains bring in just enough fresh fruit to keep everyone on their feet, more or less. Fishermen living down by the docks provide most of the bounty, and in return they enjoy Kang's protection, for what it's worth.

Seemingly out of place in this armed camp is a Shaolin temple built in the traditional style, set off a ways from the main compound. That, sources said, is where Kang trains the martial artists who will accompany them when it's time to storm the Union line and seize the sea gate. Beside the temple sits a lone hut, not much more than a hovel.

We soon learned that the tiny hut's owner was not one to be crossed. The Chinese martial arts master called Du Fu confronted us as soon as he learned of our presence in Six Hills Railhead because, he explained, Warlord Kang had appointed him administrator of the place. We must leave immediately, he said, or risk imprisonment and prosecution for trespassing.

We represent the *Tombstone Epitaph* and the Free Press!, I cried. But Du Fu's chilly demeanor and piercing gaze were enough to silence this reporter's protests. We left with all due haste, our

steam launch tooling along beneath the gunwales of junks bristling with weapons, until the sharp breath of freedom hit our lungs. We did not look back.

The Union Enclave

At the time of this writing, the precise disposition of Col. Curtis' forces in the mesa's central basin was not known. No other faction brags of appreciable gains against them. Union spokesmen at Fort Lincoln remain tight-lipped on the subject.

The following is certain: Curtis wields at least a submersible CSA ironclad, a gunboat, two tugs, a freighter, and six war barges in his quest to thoroughly denude the basin of ghost rock. Although Curtis has undoubtedly lost some of his men, his forces remain potent and devoted to their cause.

The sea gate remains sealed and forbidding, and no word is forthcoming from Curtis' camp. We at the *Epitaph* are eager for news from any firsthand witnesses willing to relate their experiences, and promise to report any and all such information as soon as it coalesces.

Clover Mesa's reputation may have improved somewhat over the past 11 months, but its danger hasn't decreased one iota. If you go there, walk lightly and keep your revolvers oiled, amigos!

Clover Mesa

Six Hills
Railhead

Little Gibraltar

Ruins of
Grantsville

Sea Gate

Beachhead

Fort
Michele

