

The Outlaw

By Roy E Edwards

Novels

Celtic Sunset

A Trace of Blue

Brotherhood of the Book

The Egyptian

Dark Wind in Eden

In Shadows Fall

The Gunfighter

(Vol I El Sol Rojo, The Red Sun Series)

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Forthcoming Novels

*Touch the Clouds Running*

*The Hidden Language of Blue Cranes*

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Work in Progress

Verkolis (a novel)

Darkly Dreaming Light

El Sol Rojo
The Red Sun
Vol II

The Outlaw



Roy E Edwards

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For Julie Ann who shares my life
and our sons and daughter who enrich it.

R E Edwards

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Part One



B W Harding
Mexico

One



*One day the Rascal hid in the Red Sun,
It fooled the Red Sun into thinking it could not shine less.
The Red Sun shone down like a bright star in the sky.
Everyone lived well, everyone lived happy.
Woman-Who-Sings-In-The-Summer-Valley, smiled.
One day the Rascal and his friend Hurricane Breath
Picked up the Red Sun and blew it away.
The Rascal laughed to see its light grow dim.*

*El Sol Rojo
The Red Sun*

The Boston writer B W Harding wrote dime novels, churning out a seemingly inexhaustible series of imaginative adventure stories with lurid eye catching covers. “Entertainment,” he was sometimes heard to say, “that’s what it’s all about, by god, entertainment and to the devil with your literary penmanship; and if any of my dear readers wish to enrich their minds, they can damn well do so down at the city library by god. Entertainment,” he would thunder and bluster, “is what I offer, entertainment do you hear, no more and no less and to the devil with your damn man of letters.” Boston society loved him.

The son of a hellfire and damnation Philadelphia preacher B W Harding left home in his late teens to exercise his god given talent to write whatsoever he felt inclined to write, with or without the approval of his father. He moved to Boston, where luck would have it, he quickly established a solid reputation as a dime novel writer. He wrote fast, colourful stories about mountain men, outlaws and gunfighters. He wrote about Indians and riders of the purple sage, cowboys and heroes of the old west, pirates and dashing swashbucklers rescuing damsels in distress, he wrote about marauding bears and mountain lions, lost treasure, Inca kings and knights in shining armour. He wrote what folks wanted to read and by god, he made a comfortable living doing just that and consigned his detractors, of which there were many, to whatever level of Hell happened to take his fancy at the time.

The odd thing was, as the years rolled by, he never once ventured beyond the city limits of his beloved Boston. He never strapped a gun belt around his ample waist or followed the sun across a distant plain. He never stood in a burning desert or made camp in the fading light by some old forgotten waterhole. He did not listen to the long wind sighing thorough the grass or inhale the peppery smell of the dry earth, or crush the grey sage just to inhale its aroma. BW never stood in fear in the heart of a raging

storm or gazed in awe at blue-white lightning exploding high in the mountains. “All he needed,” he was fond of saying, “was pen and paper and his own, by god, fertile imagination”; but sometimes imagination isn’t enough, sometimes imagination just doesn’t cut it at all.

And then as summer turned the corner into fall and the leaves outside his shady Boston home turned golden and russet, the safe and easy world of B W Harding came crashing down like a regular avalanche sweeping all before it.

He thought the dime novel to be a constant, a fixture in life that never changed. No one, least of all his publisher, told him about the variable in the so called constant that sometimes twists like a snake. Mark Twain could have told him or Jules Verne or maybe Edgar Allan Poe, but he did not move in their circles. B W Harding was a dime novel man and the devil take the rest. And yet for all his bombast he was not an unthinking man and despite the obvious fact that he was already sliding past his middle years B W Harding did not consider it was too late to change and you just have to respect a man who is willing to do that, maybe more so when he is in his late years and grown soft and flabby from too much food and drink and just plain living the good life more humble folk can only envy.

A serious young man, a writer down in El Paso had written a book titled *The Gunfighter* and claimed it to be a true and accurate account of the life and time of Harpo Kane the Colorado Gunfighter who had, since his long ago disappearance, passed into legend. The narrative was lean and sparse in direct contrast to B W Harding’s over the top lurid prose.

The Gunfighter turned out to be pure gold, going on to sell more copies than the combined lifetime output of B W Harding’s dime novels. It shocked him through to the core, and gave him pause to wonder if it wasn’t too late for him to change his style

and maybe come up with a golden one. He could write, such was never in doubt, to be sure he'd gotten a little complacent over the years and a little heavy handed with his prose but the bottom line was that he could write, and suddenly he wasn't too sure he had enough put by to see him through his remaining years in comfort. So maybe he had no choice but to go after the big one. A parting golden shot so to speak. Oddly the perverse idea of it appealed to him. He even had an old pistol locked up in a chest somewhere. Well, he would think on it for a while, maybe talk it over with his publisher and take it from there. After all, he thought moodily, there's no rush. He was wrong.

His publisher pulled no punches, stating outright as soon as BW walked into his office that he was no longer prepared to publish his stories. "Folks want flesh and blood heroes," he said, "dead or alive makes no difference so long as the story is centred around their life and times and that means research BW and lots of it, so you're going to have to go west and find a hero and dig around until you get the truth or something like it. Can you do that BW; can you go out west and find what I want? All it takes is one," he said, "and I can guarantee you'll be set for life, my word on it," he added. "You can write BW, no doubt about that, so will you do it, are you prepared to give up your soft city living and go west? Are you up to it BW, because if you're not our business relationship ends right here? I'll not deny I've made money publishing your stories, but the writings on the wall BW, dime novels are dead and gone and the way that young man down in El Paso writes, well," he eyed BW searchingly, "I don't have to spell it out for you BW, it's the coming style, its fashionable you might say."

BW Harding read and re-read *The Gunfighter*, ruefully admitting to himself that yes he did indeed favour the author's style, more importantly he knew who he wanted to write about.

The gunfighter was friend to an outlaw who had never been caught, never jailed and was rumoured to be no mean gun hand himself. There was also something of a mystery about him, something to do with Indians and a secret place deep in the desert, and according to the El Paso writer one side of the outlaw's face was caved in, the result of a brutal beating.

All B W Harding had to do was find the, by now elderly outlaw, and convince him to relate his story and by god, he chuckled, how hard could it be to find one man with a face like that. One golden one, he almost gloated, that's all I need to see me through my declining years, one golden one.

It's as good as done, he informed his publisher, I'll find him and write him up using that lean style you're wanting. The publisher wished him luck and privately thought he was going to need it.

So it was that early one fine spring morning B W Harding, late of Boston, Massachusetts, caught a train heading west, confident that within maybe twelve weeks or so he would be back in his beloved Boston writing an account of the life and times of *The Outlaw*, which was, all things considered, he thought with satisfaction, a fitting title.

Two Years Later

B W Harding was not the same man. Two years of sweat and dust crossing and recrossing New Mexico, Texas, Arizona and Nevada following clues, hunting down every whisper, listening to barroom talk, buying endless rounds of beer and whisky in the hope that he might catch a stray snippet of information no matter how vague, as to where he might find his man. What B W Harding did not know or even give thought to, was that he was asking the wrong questions about the wrong man.

Two years and he had nothing.

Finally out of sheer desperation he looked up the young writer in El Paso and asked if he could give him any information about the gunfighter's outlaw friend.

The young writer was adamant in his refusal. "Are you sure about that," BW queried "because by god, I'm drowning here and I could sure use a little help, two years" BW said "and I've got nothing."

The young writer gazed at him impassively and shook his head, "I gave my word," was all he said.

"And I respect you for it," replied BW, "but as one writer to another I surely could use a little help; and for what its worth I'll not speak of anything you say to another living soul, my word on it," he added.

The young writer seemed lost in thought then he said, "Maybe you should return to Boston, give up your search and find something or someone else to write about because its for sure there's nothing for you here."

BW shook his head, "I'm determined," he said, "I need one good story to retire on and by god; my publisher's getting tired of waiting for it. Besides," he added, "I've spent too much cash money and come too far to quit with nothing but whispers to show for it."

The El Paso writer sympathised, repeated that he could not help and suggested that as the sun was going down maybe he should return to his hotel. "Are you staying at Neely's he asked?"

"Yes," replied BW dejectedly. The young writer had been his last shot and maybe he was right, maybe he should return to Boston, but by god he thought, I'm damned if I want to do that.

The sun slipped away as he walked back to Neely's his footsteps dragging; dusk filling the alleyways with shadow. Reaching his room he opened the door and walked in, noticing as

he did so that someone had slipped a note under his door. He opened the single folded sheet and in the dim light of evening read his salvation. “Valle Perdido del Rio (Lost River Valley)” The note was unsigned.