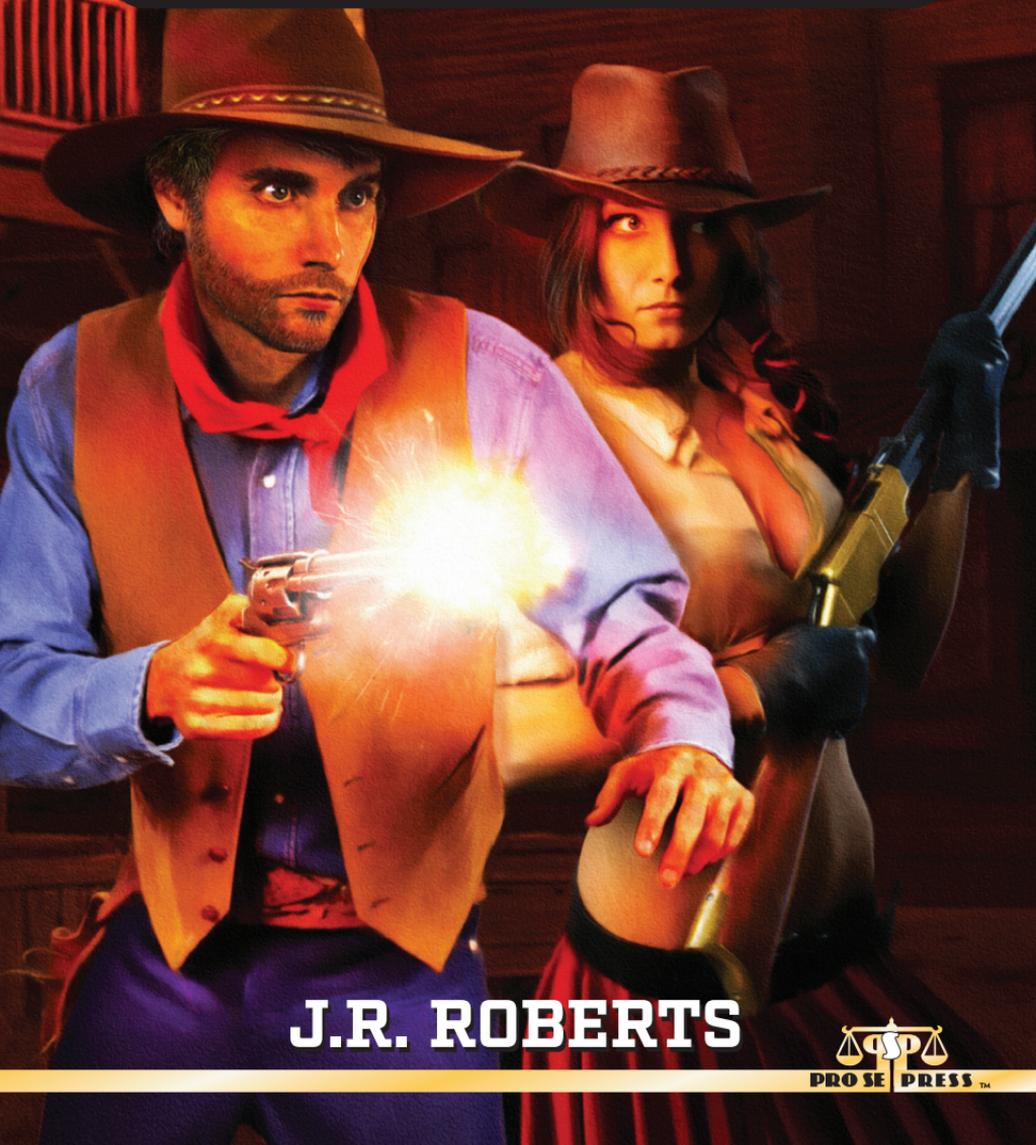


AN ALL ACTION ADULT WESTERN SERIES

THE

GUNSMITH

#401 NEW MEXICO POWDER KEG



J.R. ROBERTS



THE
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THE GUNSMITH #401: NEW MEXICO POWDER KEG
A Pro Se Press Publication

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New Mexico Powder Keg is a work of historical fiction. Many of the important historical events, figures, and locations are as accurately portrayed as possible. In keeping with a work of fiction, various events and occurrences were invented by the author.

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THE GUNSMITH #401: NEW MEXICO POWDER KEG © 2015 Robert J. Randisi

Published in digital form by Piccadilly Press, May 2015

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PROSE  PRESS

ONE

West Texas

When Clint Adams rode into Texas from Oklahoma, his intent had been to visit some old friends, toss back a few beers, and kick up his heels for a while. That jovial mood had followed him like fragrant smoke around a cooking fire and lasted almost as long. He'd made camp, fallen asleep while counting the stars, and woke up with his supper still warm in his belly.

It wasn't unusual for Clint's slumber to be interrupted unexpectedly. Any man who lived his life by the gun had his share of ghosts to contend with. The faces of all those dead men didn't fade like any other memory. They lingered and grew silent at times, only to come back and howl in the dark at others. On this occasion, Clint twitched and reached for his modified Colt, fully expecting to hear the remnant of some old nightmare rattling around in the back of his mind.

There were no ghosts vying for his attention and no echoes of gunfire from one of the many times in his past when Clint had nearly met his maker. For a moment, Clint wondered if the twitch had merely been the result of gobbling down that last bit of pork and beans from dinner he should have tossed aside. Rather than sit up or stretch his legs, he kept still and waited.

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Another few seconds passed and then he heard it.
Rustling.

It came from nearby and was just loud enough to catch his attention. More than that, it sounded as if whatever was creating the sound was trying not to be heard. When animals moved like that, they did so gracefully and easily. It was instinct. When men moved with the same intentions, it was more deliberate. The sound Clint heard was the latter. He'd had more than enough people try to sneak up on him over the years to know that sound better than almost any other.

His hand eased a bit closer to his holstered pistol while his eyes searched the shadows at the edge of his campfire for any hint of movement. He quickly picked out two shadows that hadn't been there when he'd rested his head upon his bedroll earlier that night. As his fingers curled around the grip of his Colt, Clint listened to every rustle in the breeze and stared through the slits of his eyelids at the men hunkered down over his saddlebags.

Since it seemed the intruders weren't aware that he was awake, Clint used that to his advantage and rolled away from his resting spot. Almost immediately, a shot blasted through the chilly air and a piece of lead scorched through the spot that Clint had just vacated. Dirt from the impact was still flying in all directions when Clint answered back with a shot of his own.

The Colt bucked against his palm, spitting its fiery retort in the direction of the sparks that had accompanied the first shot that had been sent his way. Knowing he most likely hadn't hit anything, Clint scrambled to his feet so he could move away from the dim light of the dying fire.

"He's awake!" a man said from the direction of the first gunshot.

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One of the shadows Clint had picked out from the darkness replied, "I can see that! Put him down, fer chrissakes!"

A second plume of sparks erupted from nearby, briefly illuminating the man who'd set this fight into motion. He was a skinny fellow with a long face covered in stubble and dirt. Clint stayed low and took a few quick steps before planting his feet and squeezing off another shot. While his first bullet had been meant to buy him some time, the second wasn't about to be wasted. Keeping steady even as a panicked shot was fired in his direction, Clint took aim to send his round straight through the skinny man's chest.

As one of the intruders spun on a heel and fell over after being hit, the other two answered back by pulling their triggers again and again. One of them proved to be smarter than the rest by hurrying to get behind solid cover. That left one of the strangers in the open and he took a rushed shot while wailing in a voice that sounded like rusty iron being dragged over dry slate.

"Where the hell you goin', Laird?" the stranger said as he pulled his trigger one more time.

"Leave my property where you found it," Clint announced, "or I'll drop you right beside it."

The man with the grating voice was short in height and thick around the middle. For a moment, he looked around as if he didn't realize he was the one still holding Clint's saddlebags in one hand. Tightening his grip on the hand tooled leather, he held the bags close and said, "You want your things? Come and get 'em!"

"Suit yourself," Clint replied as he stood up.

Obviously not accustomed to anyone calling him on that particular taunt, the man holding Clint's saddlebags gawked at him and took a step back. To his right, the

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third man poked his head up from behind the boulder he'd found and sighted along the top of his pistol.

Both of the remaining intruders moved at the same time. Clint was watching them carefully, waiting for a juicy target to present itself. When one of the men fumbled to thumb back the hammer of his pistol while the other straightened his arm to take a more careful shot, Clint's choice was practically made for him.

Clint took half of a second to steady his arm before squeezing his trigger. As soon as the gun went off, he immediately shifted his aim to the next target in line and fired again. Both shots came in quick succession and when they were done, the crack from the pistol's barrel rolled through the air to disperse into the night like so much thunder.

The intruder that had been hunkering behind a rock had been the recipient of the first of those last two shots. He flopped backward to land sprawled on the ground, his brains leaking out through the hole that had been freshly drilled through his skull. The man who'd tried to lay claim to Clint's saddlebag gnashed his teeth and slowly wilted as he reached down to his right leg. Blood from the wound he'd just received glistened in the dim moonlight as the pain slowly seeped in.

Clint was about to tell him to drop his gun, but the pistol slipped from the intruder's hand to land heavily at his feet. As he stepped forward, Clint looked around for any other shadows that might have been trying to creep in on him. Although he couldn't find any other shapes in the darkness, he quickly realized one shape wasn't where it should have been.

Eclipse, Clint's Darley Arabian stallion, was gone.

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