

BLAYLOCK: A FRAGMENT  
by Richard S. Crawford

"The first time I killed a man?" Joseph Blaylock took a long drag on his cigarette, then blew out the smoke slowly, pondering the glowing ash. "I was just eight years old."

Tomas narrowed his eyes. "You're shitting me."

"Nope. I was eight, all right. Forty years ago. You're not even twenty, Tomas, you have no idea what things were like back then."

"I've heard the stories. Marchand, Xiao Lu, O'Connell. The really bad guys."

"Who've you been talking to?"

Tomas shrugged. "I get around."

"Huh." Joseph took another long drag. "Sivers was the worst. Back then, there were a few people who started to have the idea that maybe this town didn't have to be so lawless, that maybe there could be a government, people in charge. I remember I was with my mom in Grant Park, that day we had the first elections. Huang Tsu was elected the first mayor, and that day was the biggest event I can remember from back then. There was a band in the old fountain, the

Buckingham, there were fireworks, and people dancing. Hell of a day."

"Different times, eh?" Tomas was grinning.

"I suppose." Joseph grinned himself, though he wasn't quite sure why. "My mom and I were standing right next to that fountain, right up in front of the fiddle player. They were playing 'Hog of the Forsaken'. You know that song?"

Tomas nodded. "The hog of the forsaken, he is the pork of crime," he sang. "That the one?"

"That's it. Anyway, they were playing that song when Silvers and his gang rode up on their horses, Silvers himself in one of those old metal wagons. He stood up and said, 'That was fun, fun times all around. But it's about time you stopped playing, and understand what's really true here.' Then he took out this big gun, and shot Tsu in the head."

"Just like that?"

Joseph snapped his fingers. "Just like that. Everyone panicked and started running, even the ones who'd signed up to be part of Tsu's militia. One of them, a big guy with red hair, dropped his gun right in front of me. I had no idea at the time, but it was really an piece of work. Classic gun, an old big-bore revolver. Well taken care of, too."

"So you shot someone with it?"

"Nope. Damn thing was heavy. I picked it up and tried to shoot it but the kickback was so hard, it damn near broke my shoulder. I fell over backwards and cracked my head on the cement."

"I thought you said you killed someone that day."

"I did. One of those fool men of Silvers's, he was running right by me. Tripped over my legs, fell down, and cracked his head wide open on a chunk of rock."

For a moment, Tomas said nothing. Then his eyes widened, and he laughed, loud enough to drown out all the other sounds in the bar.