

# STORIES

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ALEXANDER SAMALMAN, Editor

# King Lode Revisited



By  
**HERBERT D.  
KASTLE**

*The kid from the future said Tim King was his ancestor—  
but what would a time-traveler be doing in the Old West?*

**T**HAT day in June began like most any other day around the diggings, but it sure enough didn't stay that way for long. For one thing, Lon Warner got himself tanked-up by ten in the morning and went on a rampage down in town, and the next thing we knew he was being carried back to the diggings in a wheelbarrow. Not that he minded the

transportation. He was too full of holes to mind anything and he was also dead.

The sheriff came around later and built himself a smoke and squatted near the mine shaft and finally I turned around from where I was bolstering side-timber.

"Okay," I said. "So you shot my pard. That ain't no reason you had to shoot

## KING LODE REVISITED

him dead."

Sheriff Anker smoked and then he said, "I didn't come here to talk about Lon. He tried to kill half the people in the Red Devil, including the dancing girls. We ain't got enough dancing girls as is, Tim. Anyway, it weren't me who done him in."

"Weren't you?" I bellowed. "Why damnation, that means I got to strap on my iron and waste time hunting down some fool and then shoot him dead, maybe getting shot dead myself in the process!"

"Now, now, Tim," the sheriff said in his best Sunday manner. "This ain't the old days, y'know. Eighteen-Sixty-nine, and we moderns don't have no call taking the law into our own hands. Fact is, I got the man who done it. That's why I'm here. I wanted to let you know, and then tell you I gotta set him free."

"Sure," I agreed. "You set him free and I'll be waiting outside, and I'll spill his guts all over Main Street. Thanks for the favor, Sheriff." I turned to get my Colt, but he stopped me.

"That ain't it either, Tim. Not that I wouldn't set him up for you if it was right and proper. But I was in the Red Devil when the shooting took place, and I got to tell you it was a fair and square draw. Fact is, this fellow didn't even have an iron—he borrowed one. Also, he gave Lon first shot, and a clean one, too, before he even drew."

"Now that don't ring silver-true." I said. "Lon, drunk or sober, got one of the best eyes in Colorado, or any place else. If he had a clean shot at that hombre, then the hombre's dead. You sure your prisoner was breathing last time you talked to him?"

Sheriff Anker said, "Breathing, eating and complaining. Reason I'm here is that he claims he's related to you." At this point the sheriff dropped his eyes and rubbed his jaw kinda thoughtful. "I could of swore that the first time I asked him what sort of kin he was, he said he was your great-great-great grandson. Or maybe there was three or

four more greats in there."

"Related to me? Great-great-great —" I peered at him. "Why Sheriff, you surely been drinking that poison at the saloon."

Anker said nothing.

"Well," I said, not knowing which way to jump now. "did he keep saying that, or did he turn sane?"

"Turned sane, I reckon. When I asked him to repeat what he'd said, he laughed and shook his head and told me he'd been funning. 'Just tell him I'm related on his father's side,' he said. 'Tell him I'm from the East.'"

"Well," I said, "I might have cousins back there. But still, he killed my pardner."

The sheriff got up and stood his entire six feet. "Said he done you a favor, Tim. Said now you own the King Lode clear of pardners. Reckon he's right, except when did you and Lon name it the King Lode? I heard you ain't got much more'n tobacco and beans outa this hole."

"King Lode?" I said. "He's dreaming. Sure, my last name is King, and this here shaft might bring out twenty dollars' worth of silver some day, but King Lode! That sounds like I'm up there with the Comstock!"

I ran to my shack and got my Colt and hurried back to the sheriff.

"Okay," I said. "Let's go see this . . . What's his name, anyway?"

Anker scratched his jaw again and looked at me and grinned. "King Seventy-three."

"What?"

"Honest Injun, Tim. That's what he said. King Seventy-three."

I didn't do no more talking to that loco lawman and it didn't take more'n an hour for us to walk into town—no one being able to ride a horse up my mountain. We came down Main and it was quiet this early in the day, almost discomforting quiet what with only two fist fights near the saloon and one dog fight, attended by the mayor and city council, in front of Mimi's Pleasure

Palace. I tipped my hat to Mimi, who stood with a few of her girls, and I winked at Lola, the one with the tight dress and red hair. And then the sheriff yanked my arm and I went along.

When we entered the calaboso, Sid MacIntyre, sometimes-deputy because it's only sometimes he's sober enough to pin on his star, ran up to us, his face whiter than a lime pit and with the same undertone of green.

"Lord, Lord!" he said, and grabbed each of us by the coat. "I'm glad to see you—both of you, even if I do hate your guts, Tim King. That prisoner, that King Seventy-five—"

"Seventy-three," Anker cut in.

"Yeah, Seventy-three. He's been doing things, Sheriff. Awful things! I'm about gone outa my mind! I'm so glad to see—"

"Are you going to tell us," I said, "or aren't you? Just what is it this Seventy-three's been doing?"

MacIntyre waved his hands and rolled his eyes and made motions with his lips like a fish gulping on dry land.

"Terrible things!" he finally said, and then turned slowly and went down like a corkscrew and ended up in a nice neat pile at our feet.

The sheriff picked him up and dragged him to a chair and threw him into it. He slapped his face and rubbed his hands and then gave up.

"Must've been drinking heavy again," he said, but he looked worried. "Anyway, he's cold and won't come out of it till supper-time, if I know Sid. Let's me and you go back and see your kin, or do you think maybe we shouldn't?"

I looked into Anker's gray eyes, eyes that had stared down two-gun killers and one-gun killers and plain old pig-sticker killers, and he was scared.

"Well," I said, and turned and looked at the thick plank door leading to the three cells. "Well, we'll have us a drink first—"

I never got to finish because that door came open and this tall, thin kid dressed in homespun walked into the office and

smiled at me with the biggest, shiniest teeth I ever did see.

"Great-great-great-great—" he began, and then stopped. But he came right at me and grabbed my hand and shook it like I was supposed to give milk. "Good to see you!" he catterwalled. "You're just like your portrait in the Transgalactic Art Museum." Then he stepped back a little. "However, you smell better in the museum."

That really stung me. "You young whippersnapper!" I yelled "You—you pile of numbers! I wash more'n most people! Twice a month, sometimes! Where do you get off—" And then I got some of those other things he'd been saying. "What d'you mean, my portrait in the trans-something art museum? Except for a tintype, I ain't never had—"

"Hold it," the sheriff said, his voice cold as mountain snow. He had his .44 trained on King Seventy-three's chest. "I don't care for prisoners escaping from their cells, even if I was only holding you till your kin got here. You lope right back inside and then I'll let you out all legal proper."

Seventy-three smiled and nodded agreeably and took me by the arm and strolled with me through the plank door. He stopped in front of the first cage and looked over his shoulder and said, "I'm afraid you'll have to unlock the detention room, Punitive. I didn't avail myself of your lock mechanism."

I jerked my arm free of that young maniac and jumped back. "Hey," I said. "He's saying he got out without opening the door!"

"Impossible," said Anker. He waved Seventy-three to the wall and bent over carefully, ready for a side-shot, and examined the lock. His face grew kinda gray and he licked his lips and then put away his iron. "Reckon I don't have to be so pernickity," he said. "He's free. Take him home with you, Tim."

"Fine," Seventy-three said, and took my arm, making only a little wrinkle

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with his nose now. "Fine. We have innumerable things to discuss, great-great-cousin. The most important of which is your deplorable addiction to games of chance. You must never play poker again, great-great-great—" He stopped and shook his head, real angry at himself, and then he muttered, "I lack self-discipline. He's my cousin, for the moment."

"You talk to yourself often, bub?" I asked.

He flushed, and then nodded. "Yes. One of the reasons I was demoted to mere tactician status in World Symbiotics. But I won't have to worry about earning a livelihood, just as soon as I make certain you hold onto the King Lode."

"What kind of talk—" I began again, but he smiled down at me. He was a hell of a tall kid, maybe six-four, and his smile was just so cock-sure it stopped me cold.

"Shall we go, cousin?" he said. "What I have to say won't take long. I've already assured you of complete ownership of the Lode by disposing of your partner. But of course, that was just a whim, a desire to take part in an actual Western gun-fight. Lon Warner was scheduled to die about the end of August, or was it early September that the texts indicated?"

I got free of his hand and ran behind the sheriff and drew my Colt.

"Keep him away from me!" I yelled. "He's nutty, and I swear I'll nuke him if he comes a piddling step closer!"

With that, Anker also drew iron and stepped away so that we were siding each other.

"Same goes for me," he said, his voice cold again. "You may be a funny hombre, but you'll die like anyone else. Now get out of here and on your horse. If I ever see you in Big Strike again, you're a dead one."

"Bravo!" Seventy-three said, and slapped his thigh three-four times. "I always did like the Earth-Western thrillers. Much more viewer identifica-

tion than those Martian mysteries or Venusian romances. Who can identify with a thirteen-legged fowl or an amorphous blob of sentient vapor?"

The sheriff and I both reached the same conclusion at the same time. Our guns roared as one, and we waited for the smoke to clear, and for Seventy-three to kick his last. After all, he was a nut and he'd killed my pard.

The smoke cleared all right, but Seventy-three stood there, giving us that big-toothed grin like before.

"Energy shield," he said. "I'm not only the first time-traveler, but the first to devise a really compact atomoturbine. The ones sold by Universal Protection have to be worn strapped to the back, in plain view. I have mine right here in my pock—"

I reached the edge of town in about six minutes, which is pretty good for two miles; considerable under the world record. I heard later. But the sheriff was even better. He passed me at the crossroads of Main and Washoe. Even so, it did neither of us any good. King Seventy-three was waiting for us at my cabin, leaning casually against the door, not even breathing hard.

It was a mite too much for the sheriff, I guess, and he did just what Sid MacIntyre had done—corkscrewed like a belly dancer and fainted dead away. I was too tired to faint. I just looked at Seventy-three and waved my hands and gulped air and then said:

"All right. What is it you want of me, cousin?"

"Step inside, cousin," Seventy-three said, and led the way. He took the chair and I flopped on the dynamite crate. "Now, I'm going to tell you the truth," he said. "Don't interrupt and you'll soon understand. I'm here not only to assure my own future, but yours as well." He snickered a little to himself and said, "Though you're dead about eight hundred years, you know."

That got me boiling again. "If I'm dead eight hundred years, the world's a cockeyed oyster in a bowl of soup!"

"Very well put," he said. "And closer to the truth than you imagine, though that's neither to the point nor applicable in any way to the immediate problem. First, I am not your cousin. I am your great-great-great-great . . . Well, suffice it to say that I'm your grandson, eight hundred years removed. You are my grandfather, eight hundred years removed. Is that clear?"

"No," I said. "The only thing around here that's clear is that you escaped from some loony bin."

"You're fighting the realization that I'm telling the truth, Timothy," he said. "You know how I got out of the cell, and how I stood up to your crude weapons, and how I met you and Punitive here without running a step."

I did know those things, and I got kinda cold in my vitals. Then I looked at him hard and almost fell off the crate.

"I believe you," I whispered, and wondered if I was going to faint like Sid and the sheriff. "Now that I see your duds real close, I believe you. There ain't never been a shirt nor a pair of britches clean as your'n. Go on and tell me your story, Grandson-eight-hundred-years-removed."

He shrugged. "I haven't much credit rating—money—in my era, Timothy. In fact, I can just about manage a yearly space-cruise to Trid Four, and even then I have to go out of season, when the Mana Drops are sparse and the Tree Dances are almost over and all the desirable and wealthy females are back on Earth."

"Teh, tch," I tched, and tried to look like I understood. He went on like I wasn't allowed to talk.

"I need more credit, much more credit, to live the kind of life that I find rewarding. So, about two years ago—my era—I sat down in a solo-room and gave the problem serious thought. Having been a student of history, and having majored in Earth Secondary, I soon computed where the solution lay. I began devoting my time to the construction of a Lowahien-Caruthers amplifier, despite

the government restrictions, and made original experiments into space-time warps."

I must've looked as dizzy as I felt, because he suddenly stopped.

Then he went on:

"Suffice it to say, Timothy, that I managed to get here. I am descended from you, and am your only living descendant in my era. In mineralogical history, the King Lode was the second greatest producer of silver on the American continent. But before it became so profitable, and founded one of America's greatest family fortunes, one which exists even in my day, it passed out of the hands of one Timothy King and ended up the property of one Schyler Lorsh."

"Never heard of this Lorsh," I said, and then got excited just from thinking I was going to hit it big. This Seventy-three wasn't so bad, after all. "Now that I know how good the shaft is," I spouted, "I'll have to be torn apart by wild jackasses to give up a single square inch!"

Seventy-three stood up. "Good! I have accomplished what I set out to do! The big strike will take place in exactly"—he mumbled to himself a minute, figuring hard—"in exactly three years and two days, taking into consideration your antiquated calendar, Timothy."

My face must've fallen a little because he slapped me on the back and said, "Chin up, old man, and any man of eight hundred years is certainly old enough—"

"Don't start that again," I muttered, and then perked up. "Oh, well, I'm only forty-one. I got plenty of time. I can have some fun, too, along the way."

"There's the danger!" Seventy-three said, his voice cracking like a bull-whip. "It was in a poker game, the histories relate, that you lost the deed to the King Lode. You bet it against something called the Red Pip, which is thought to have been another mine too unimportant to have been recorded, or else it was lost in the shuffle of time and our texts merely carry the name. So re-

member, no poker until after the big strike. Then you're safe. Once you're rich, you'll just naturally get greedy and build up my fortune."

I didn't like him saying *his* fortune, but I let it pass. After all, he was like a son to me.

"Hey," I said, "can you tell me who it is I'll marry? Because I got to marry to keep the line going until you."

"The texts refer to your wife only once, and then they call her Mrs. King."

"That's a big help," I muttered.

"I'm going now, Timothy," he said. "Remember, no gambling. And watch out for anyone named Schyler Lorsh and something he owns called the Red Pip." He reached into his pocket and fumbled around there, then reached up under his right arm and did something there, and then he sort of wavered like he was off in the desert and shimmering in the heat. "Good-by," he said, his voice weak.

"Wait!" I shouted. "What was it you did to make Sid MacIntyre—"

His fading face showed a grin. And then he wasn't there, and then he was, and then he wasn't. And he kept popping in and out all over the room.

"Only this," he said from far away, and was gone.

The sheriff came to about an hour later and got back to town and packed his warbag and lit out. No one ever heard of him again. Sid MacIntyre went on the longest drunk in Colorado history, and when he died he stayed on exhibition for over a year, he was that well-preserved in alcohol. I kept working my shaft, waiting out the three years and two days, and keeping out of trouble.

But I slipped up once. Knowing I was going to make all that cash, and seeing no reason why I shouldn't spend a little of it in advance, I borrowed a hundred silver cartwheels from Emery Sparks, the gambler in back of Mimi's Pleasure Palace. I gave the shaft as security, but that was all right since the three years would be up in less than a week and I

had eight months to pay Emery back and besides, he wasn't a hard man. Also, I stayed away from the cards.

I spent a little of that hundred on a store-bought suit and a little on a new pair of boots and the rest I took to Lola, the one with the tight dress and red hair. She thought sixty dollars was fine and we had a very nice time in her private quarters and I remember passing out cold somewhere around Thursday, or was it Friday? Anyway, just before passing out I was calling her my Red Pip, and before I could remember what that meant, I was gone.

When I woke up it was dark and I was in the clink. I yelled for the sheriff. His name was Curt Davies, an ornery hombre, not at all like old Anker.

He came to the cell and looked at me and said, "All right, what would you like for your last meal? They got a special in sidemeat and hominy at the Greasy Spoon. I can even get you a pint of liquor, seeing as how you're going to hang come morning."

"Hang!" I said, and laughed. "You got it wrong, Sheriff. I can't hang. I got to get rich and get married and begat and begat for eight hundred years until I begat King Seventy-three."

He blinked his eyes and said in a real sad voice. "It'll all be over in a few hours, Tim. Good thing, too, now that you've slipped your cable. Would you care to see a visitor? That redhead from Mimi's is outside, waiting to see you. She wants to say good-by."

I must've nodded, trying to clear my head of the hangover and the crazy talk, because in rushed Lola and she flung herself at the bars and bounced back and cried like a sick coyote.

"Tim, Tim!" she squalled. "I'm so sorry. Why'd you have to shoot that damn Emery Sparks? All he did was walk in my room to ask if you wanted to join the poker game. He didn't know we was busy at the moment."

"I shot him?" I said, and then shrugged. "Okay, so I shot him while under the influence. Now, how can I

get out of here and back to the diggings?"

She wiped her eyes and nodded and said, "I got your mortgage note—the one you gave Emery Sparks. Mimi got it from Emery's trunk since he owed her three hundred dollars that he took out in trade while he used the Palace. Mimi sold it to me for ten dollars. I'll keep it as a memento of our love."

"Our love be damned!" I said. "Give me that note. The mine's going to be worth millions."

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, he's slipped his cable! That mine ain't worth my old red dress!"

That brought it back. "I called you my Red Pip," I muttered. "And you got the shaft, now that I can't ever pay back the hundred cartwheels. But how does that explain it ending up with a man named Schyler Lorsh?"

Lola stopped crying long enough to say, "Lorsh? How do you know about him? He came into town just yesterday. He's opening up a real deluxe dress shop, on Main. I gotta figure how to get some money—"

She said more, but I didn't listen. I could see it now. She'd get a dress all right, and Lorsh would get the note and the King Lode.

Seventy-three's history books were a little off. I didn't lose the shaft playing poker. And the Red Pip wasn't what he thought it was. But where those books were really off was in my begating and begating. How could I begat if I hung?

I gave Lola a long look. "Honey," I said, "would you like to marry me? We could get Reverend Holmes over here right away."

Her mouth fell open and she gaped and then said, "Why should I do a thing like that, ruin my career and all, especially since you'll be a dead man in three hours?"

I shrugged. "When you find out," I said, "don't throw fits. You'll manage to fake the papers and prove I was your husband. And Lola, take good care of him, will you?"

"Him?" she said. "Him who?"

I turned around and flopped on the cot. Pretty soon she left and I could hear her telling the sheriff how I'd slipped my cable, and he agreeing with her in the same words. I guess they liked that phrase.

Anyway. I hope there's a place where I can meet Seventy-three. I wouldn't mind waiting eight hundred years if I could only be sure I'd finally get my hands around his neck!