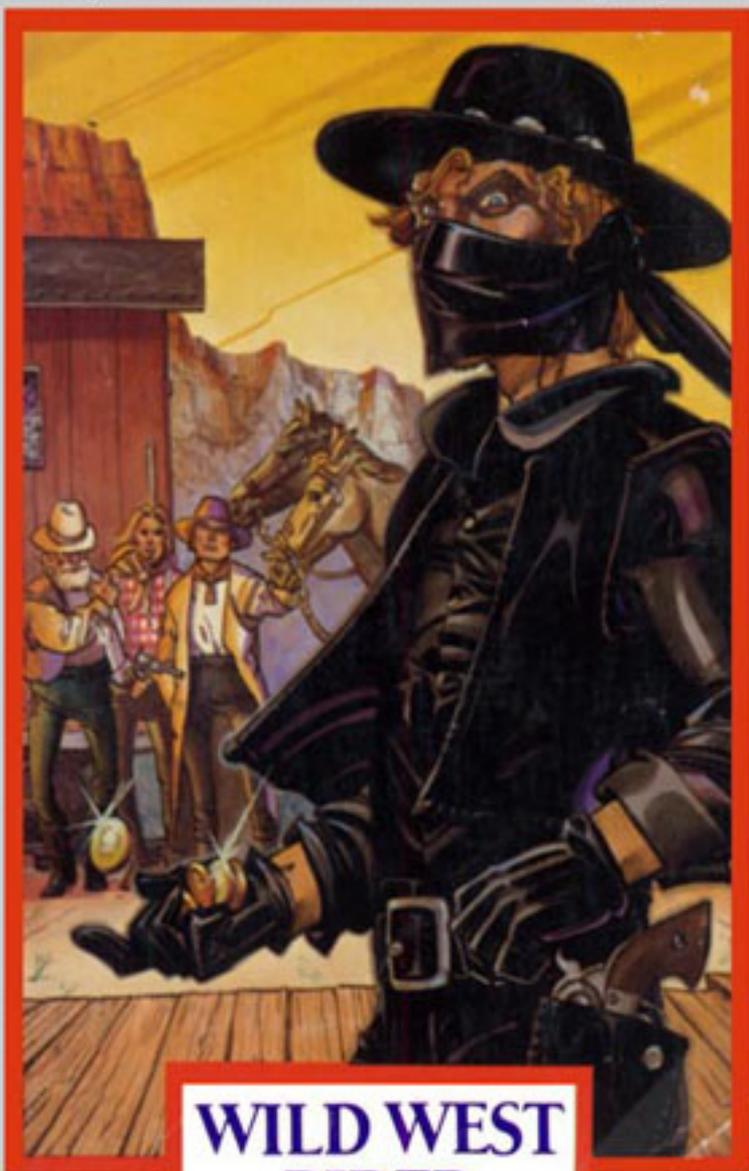


TIME MACHINE 9

This book is a time machine. Travel back
125 years and become a rider for the Poay Express!



**WILD WEST
RIDER**

**This book is
your passport
into time.**



**Can you survive
in the
Wild West?
Turn the page to
find out.**

TIME MACHINE[®] 9

Wild West Rider

by Stephen Overholser

illustrated by Steve Leialoha



A Byron Preiss Book

Copyright @ 2001, 1984 by Byron Preiss Visual Publications

“Time Machine” is a registered trademark of
Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc. Registered in the
U.S. Patent and Trademark office.

Cover painting by Richard Hescox.
Cover design by Alex Jay.

An [ipicturebooks.com](http://www.ipicturebooks.com) ebook

[ipicturebooks.com](http://www.ipicturebooks.com)
24 West 25th St., 11th fl.
Y, NY 10010

The [ipicturebooks](http://www.ipicturebooks.com) World Wide Web Site Address is:
<http://www.ipicturebooks.com>

Original ISBN: 0-553-23601-6
eISBN: 1-58824-431-8

ATTENTION TIME TRAVELER!

This book is your time machine. Do not read it through from beginning to end. In a *moment* you will receive a mission, a special task that will take you to another time period. As you face the dangers of history, the Time Machine often will give you options of where to go or what to do.

This book also contains a Data Bank to tell you about the age you are going to visit. You can use this Data Bank to travel more safely through time. Or you can take your chances without reading it. It is up to you to decide.

In the back of this book is a Data File. It contains hints to help you if you are not sure what choice to make. The following symbol appears next to any choices for which there is a hint in the Data File.



To complete your mission as quickly as possible, you may wish to use the Data Bank and the Data File together.

There is one correct end to this Time Machine mission. You must reach it or risk being stranded in time!

THE FOUR RULES OF TIME TRAVEL

As you begin your mission, you must observe the following rules. Time Travelers who do not follow these rules risk being stranded in time.

1. You must not kill any person or animal.
2. You must not try to change history. Do not leave anything from the future in the past.
3. You must not take anybody when you jump in time. Avoid disappearing in a way that scares people or makes them suspicious.
4. You must follow instructions given to you by the Time Machine. You must choose from the options given to you by the Time Machine.

YOUR MISSION

Your mission is to uncover the reason for the sudden disappearance of the Pony Express.

In 1860 the Pony Express was a daring experiment that promised to carry the mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco, California, in only ten days—less than half the time it took by stagecoach. Despite predictions of failure, bad weather, and hostile Indians, the Pony Express made good on its promise. The experiment made headlines and captured the imagination of people all over the world.

Yet the Pony Express was in operation for only eighteen months. Why was it discontinued so soon after it had been started? You must travel back in time to the Old West and find out. To do so, you may have to become a Pony Express rider yourself!



To activate the Time Machine, [click here](#).

**TIME TRAVEL
ACTIVATED.
Stand by for Equipment.**



[Click Here](#)

EQUIPMENT

For your mission you will wear the clothes of a cowboy—a wide-brimmed felt hat, a buckskin shirt with fringe on the sleeves and shoulders, denim trousers, and cowboy boots. You will also carry a water canteen and a map of the Pony Express route.



To begin your mission now, [click here](#).



To learn more about the time to which you will be traveling, [click here](#).

DATA BANK

These facts about the United States in the 1860's will help you complete your mission:

1) The Pony Express proved that an overland route through the mountains was superior to the southern route in the desert. Before 1860 the route through the mountains was thought to be impassable because of weather conditions and hostile Indians.

2) In the 1860's the United States government awarded contracts to private companies to carry the mail. Two freighting companies, the Butterfield Overland Mail Company and Russell, Majors & Waddell, were in competition for a \$1-million mail contract in the West.

3) Starting in April 1860, the Pony Express operated for eighteen months, carrying 34,753 pieces of mail.

4) Mail and freight were carried by rail cars after the transcontinental railroad was completed at Promontory Point, Utah on May 10, 1869.

5) A stagecoach averaged 100 to 125 miles a day, whereas pony riders could cover 250 miles.

6) Relay stations on the Pony Express were 35 to 75 miles apart. Riders changed horses at each station.

7) The Pony Express mail was carried in a *mochila*. These leather saddlebags were fitted with four locked pouches at each corner, and were placed over the specially made lightweight saddles used on Pony Express horses.

8) The Civil War lasted from 1861 to 1865. The war began when eleven southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—seceded from the Union and formed their own nation, which was called the Confederacy. Southern soldiers were often called rebels; Northern soldiers were known as Yankees.

9) Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President in March 1861. He promised to complete the construction of the dome on the Capitol Building as a symbol of preserving the Union.

10) Indians inhabited many territories throughout North America in the 1800's. Though peaceful by nature, Indians often fought with the settlers. Wyoming and Nevada were dangerous areas as a result.

11) In the late 1860's the Union Pacific Railroad hired men to battle train robbers that roamed the West. These hired gunmen often joined forces with lawmen to chase outlaws.

12) Great Britain's Royal Navy relied on the Pony Express to communicate with Britain's China Fleet via San Francisco.

13) The telegraph was invented by Samuel Morse in 1840. Morse was also the creator of the Morse code used to send telegraphic messages. In this code, letters and numbers are represented by a system of dots and dashes (or long and short signals).

14) Plains Indians used *travois* to carry their possessions across the prairie. A travois consisted of two poles, or shafts, which were rigged to a pony. A blanket or animal hide was stretched across the shafts, and tents or other belongings were lashed to the travois.

15) A sutler was a civilian who sold provisions to soldiers stationed in the forts of the West.

16) One of the important stops on the Pony Express route was Fort Laramie. This military outpost in Wyoming provided safety from the sometimes hostile Indians.

17) The last relay station of the Pony Express was in Sacramento. From there, the mail was ferried across the bay to its final destination, San Francisco.



**Western Territories,
1860**

CANADA



Ft. Laramie

NEBRASKA

Ft. Kearney

Pony Express Route

St. Joseph

Kansas City

COLORADO

KANSAS

St. Louis

MISSOURI

Ft. Smith

NEW
MEXICO



*Butterfield Overland
Mail Route*

Ft. Belknap

Ft. Chadbourne

MEXICO

El Paso

TEXAS

DATA BANK COMPLETED.
CLICK HERE TO BEGIN
YOUR MSSION.



**Don't forget, when you see this symbol,
you can click it to check the Data File for
a hint.**



You are alone in a desert. The water canteen over your shoulder is empty, and your mouth is dry.

Far in the distance you see a cloud of dust rising toward the hot sky. You break into a run as you hear the musical clink of harness chains and the steady clip-clop of horses. Topping a hill, you see a rutted road. The sound of horses grows louder, and then a stagecoach rounds the bend.

Rolling on large spoked wheels with iron tires, the bright red coach is pulled by six horses and piled high with luggage. On the side of the stagecoach in bold gold letters are the words “Butterfield Overland Mail Company, El Paso, Texas.”

You sprint down the slope to the road, raising your hand to flag the driver. He is a shaggy-bearded man whose hat and clothes are covered with fine dust. In the seat beside him is an equally dusty man cradling a double-barreled shotgun in his arms.

The driver sees you and lets out a whoop. He hauls back on the reins to bring the big vehicle to a halt. The other man quickly raises the shotgun and aims it at you.

“Whoa!” the driver shouts to his horses. “Whoa!”

Dust settles over you as you look up into the faces of the two men and the barrels of the shotgun.

“What would your business be?” the driver asks suspiciously. “Bandits will have to answer to my partner here,” he adds with a gesture to the armed man.

“I’m not an outlaw,” you say. “I’m looking for the Pony Express.”



“The what?” he asks. “What’re you talking about?”

A passenger in the coach lifts the canvas side curtain and leans out the window. “What’s the trouble, driver?”

“No trouble, sir,” the driver answers quickly.

The passenger is a man wearing gold-rimmed spectacles. He looks at you and then calls up to the driver. “We’re late enough as it is. All of us back here are hot and dusty. Give the youngster a lift to the next way station, and get this coach rolling.”

“Yes, sir!” the driver answers. He jerks a thumb at you. “Climb on top.” He raises his long-handled whip, ready to snap it over the backs of the horses.

The stagecoach is piled high with leather luggage and wooden crates. You thrust the toe of your boot into the spokes of the rear wheel and step up to the top of the iron-tired rim. Just as you reach up and grasp the luggage rack, the driver lets out a shout and pops the whip. The stagecoach takes off with a sudden lurch.

Your feet go out from under you. You’re hanging on to the luggage rack with one hand, dangling there as the coach picks up speed. You look down and see the big rear wheel churning dust in the desert road. Lose your grip now and you’ll fall in front of that wheel!

Frantically you wave your free arm, swinging yourself up. You grab the metal bar of the luggage rack. You pull yourself up an inch at a time, as if you were doing a chin-up. Then you get a foothold on the sill of a side window. Grabbing one of the straps that secure all the suitcases, trunks, and boxes, you pull yourself all the way up to the top. You lie on top of the luggage, breathing hard.

That was close!



[Click here.](#)



The outlaws ride away with their gold, and the train starts up again. The trainman's courage returns as soon as Big Nose Phil and his gang leave. He slaps the handcuffs back on your wrists.

"I'm not the Wyoming Kid—" you start to explain.

"Quiet!" Pinkham, the trainman, says. "You were identified by Big Nose Phil. That's good enough for me, and that will be good enough for Sheriff Carruthers in Rock Springs." He takes you into the baggage car and shuts the doors. This time he stands guard over you. Soon you feel the train slow and jostle to a halt. Shouts come from outside as the engineer reports that the train has been robbed.

Oliver throws the sliding door open. You see a steep-roofed depot and loading platform. You can tell that the arrival of a passenger train is an important event in a frontier town.

People crowd around the open doorway of the baggage car and peer in at the dynamited safe.

Oliver struts back and forth in the doorway, telling how he ran off the outlaws. "Sheriff," he shouts, "over here, Sheriff!"

A tall, lanky man makes his way through the crowd. His ten-gallon hat makes him look even taller. On his vest is a brass star, and he wears a Colt revolver strapped to his hip.

"Got a present for you, sheriff," the trainman announces.

"I hear you had some trouble, Oliver," the lawman says, looking into the train car.

"We ran off Big Nose Phil and his gang," Oliver says, "but I captured this one. Recognize this outlaw?"

The sheriff looks at you and shakes his head slowly. “No, I reckon I don’t.”

Oliver grins. “Meet the Wyoming Kid.”

The townspeople gathered behind the sheriff gasp and stare at you, wide-eyed.

“That a fact?” the lawman says.

“Sure is,” Oliver says. “Big Nose Phil himself identified this one.”

“I thought you ran that gang off,” the sheriff says, looking past you to the damaged safe.

“Well, uh, those outlaws did manage to rob the safe,” Oliver says. “They got away, but I captured the Kid.”

“That’s not exactly true,” you say.

Oliver gives you a hard look. “Nobody’s talking to you!”

“What is true—exactly?” the lawman asks you.

“I was locked inside the baggage car when this trainman found me,” you say.

“That’s just the way the Wyoming Kid operates,” Oliver interrupts, “sneaking into train cars. Right, sheriff?”

He nods but asks you, “Just what were you doing on this train?”

“I’m looking for information about the Pony Express,” you say.

Oliver smirks. “Is that the best story you can come up with, Kid? The Pony Express went out of business years ago. We carry the United States mail on the Union Pacific. And we protect it from outlaws like you!”

The sheriff takes you into town and locks you in a cell behind his office. “I hear you’ve escaped every jail in the territory, Kid,” he says, leaning back comfortably. “My jail is the one that’ll hold you.” He smiles.

You sit on the bunk, suddenly tired and discouraged. You’ll never complete your mission now. Maybe the Wyoming Kid would have some ideas about how to get out of here, but you don’t. This cage looks escape-proof. You might as well lie down and rest.

That evening, gunshots outside awaken you and the dozing sheriff. In the next instant the door to his office crashes open. A huge man stands there, filling the doorway like a grizzly on its hind legs.

In this light you don't recognize the man who speaks until he stands outside your cell door.

"Big Nose Phil!" you say.

"I'm here to bail you out, Kid," he answers.

You watch in disbelief as Big Nose Phil takes Sheriff Carruthers's gun and then lifts the ring of skeleton keys from his belt.

"Just can't tolerate the notion of the Union Pacific sending a personal friend of mine to prison—especially when you never got a dime out of that train job. You being locked away in here just didn't seem fair. Know what I mean?"

You nod as he opens the cell door. "I didn't like the idea, either," you say.

Big Nose Phil laughs heartily and motions to the lawman. "You can stay in your own hotel tonight, sheriff."

Carruthers does as he is told, but after he is locked in the cell, he says, "You'd better ride hard and far, mister, and keep looking over your shoulder. One of these days you'll find me on your back trail."

"Being chased by a law dog as ugly as you would throw a scare into anybody," Big Nose Phil says with a laugh. "Come on, Kid."

Outside, the street is empty except for the gang of outlaws. Some are mounted on prancing horses. The masked men have their guns drawn, and you can see that they are holding the town of Rock Springs at bay. One of them, dressed all in black, looks your way as he tosses gold coins in the air.

"Want to ride with us, Kid?" Big Nose Phil asks, swinging up into his saddle.

You have to decide in a hurry. Should you stay with the outlaws, or jump in time?



Ride with Big Nose Phil. [Click here.](#)



**Jump back in time to Washington, D.C.
[Click here.](#)**



You sit among the suitcases and steamer trunks strapped down on the roof of the stagecoach behind the driver's seat. This is a Concord stagecoach, suspended on thick leather straps called thoroughbraces. These thoroughbraces connect the coach to the axles like shock absorbers, creating a rocking motion when the coach is underway. As you travel across the desert, you soon understand why Mark Twain called this vehicle "a cradle on wheels."

The driver shifts the reins to one hand and looks over his shoulder at you. "What's this Pony Express you were talking about?"

You wave away the dust stirred by the horses' hooves and lean closer to the driver so he can hear you. "The Pony Express carries the mail on horseback over the mountains to California."

"Impossible!" he says with a harsh laugh. "Youngster, you must have been out in the sun too long. This southern route goes from Missouri all the way across Texas and due west to California. Freight, passengers, and mail are carried on this road year round, nonstop."

"But how long does it take for a letter to go from Missouri to California?" you ask.

"About a month," the driver replies. "I know what you're thinking—a central route through the mountains is shorter. Well, that may be true. But what about winter storms? What about that rugged country full of Indians? This southern route is the safest and the best. Get those other ideas out of your head!"

You lean back on a trunk as the driver turns his attention back to

the horses. You close your eyes and rest, hoping someone at the way station ahead can give you information about the Pony Express. This driver can't help you, that's for sure.

The rocking motion of the stagecoach and the heat of the day soon put you to sleep. The sun is lower in the sky when you are suddenly awakened by a violent lurch and shouts from the driver. You sit up, grasping a strap that holds down the luggage. The stagecoach leans far to the side, almost tipping over before the driver reins in the six horses.

"Busted wheel spokes!" he says in exasperation. "Now we've got a job of work to do!"

You climb down off the top of the coach while the passengers get out and stretch their stiff legs. The driver and his partner raise the front axle with a hand jack and then loosen the wheel nut. You stand with the other passengers and watch as the wheel is pulled off the axle. Several spokes are broken, snapped like match-sticks.

"Butterfield coaches are always late," grumbles one of the passengers.

"No wonder it takes over a month for a letter to get to California," says another. "We may never get there!"

The driver straightens up and faces them. "I was trying to make up lost time for you folks. That's why we were going too fast when the wheel hit a rock. Maybe if you'd been more patient—"

The driver returns to his work, grumbling about people who do nothing but complain. You move away, looking at the barren hills of this desert country. A lizard skitters over dry leaves, and a flock of small birds flies up into the air.

"Pardon me," a voice behind you says, "but I believe I overheard you talking about a new mail route to California."

You turn around and see that the man who has spoken is one of the passengers. He is tall and thin, dressed in a dark suit and narrow-brimmed hat. He wears gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Yes, I was," you reply.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he says, extending his hand. "My name is Rufus Haynes. I'm a newspaperman. I write for the



Courier in St. Joseph, Missouri.”

You introduce yourself and shake hands. Perhaps this man can give you information about the Pony Express.

“You have some progressive ideas,” Rufus says, “just as William H. Russell does. I presume you are familiar with the freighting company of Russell, Majors and Waddell?”

“Not exactly,” you say.

“Come now,” the newspaperman says with a smile. “No need to beat around the bush with me. I’m acquainted with Mr. Russell myself.” He adds in a lower voice, “It’s no secret to me that Russell has a plan for taking the government mail contract away from Butterfield. In fact, he’s on his way to Washington, D.C. right now to convince the United States Congress that he can open a new route across the West.”

Rufus pauses. “But I have a feeling you know all about that, don’t you?”

Before you can answer, the stagecoach driver asks for help from the passengers to lift the wheel back onto the axle. With new oak spokes in place, the big wheel is rolled to the coach. While the attention of everyone is on this job, you could easily slip away unnoticed. But should you?

You might learn something important by going to the next way station. Or you could jump to El Paso, Texas, and try to find out more about the Butterfield Overland Mail Company.



Jump to the Butterfield office in El Paso, Texas. [Click here.](#)



Stay here and ride this stagecoach to the next way station. [Click here.](#)



You wonder what crimes the Wyoming Kid has committed. In any case, the outlaws treat you with great respect, sharing food and water as you ride across the vast prairie. After two days of hard riding, you see a change in the terrain. The land dips into a valley that is lush with green grass. A river winds through the valley, blue as the sky. Big Nose Phil takes off his hat and gives a shout.

“There’s the Sweetwater River!” he says. “Time to pull off our boots and go fishing.”

You and the outlaws follow his lead and gallop down into the valley to water’s edge. The sight and smell of running water and knee-high grass makes this a paradise in the prairie.

“We’ll hide out here,” Big Nose Phil says to you, “until the Union Pacific posse get tired of sitting in the saddle all day and sleeping on hard ground all night. They’ll give up. Then we can ride out of here.”

That evening, while Big Nose Phil and the outlaws feast on fresh-caught trout, you ask about the Pony Express. The outlaw leader nods.

“Sure,” he says, “I remember that outfit. Used to gallop through this Sweetwater country on the old Oregon Trail.”

You’re in the right area to find the Pony Express, but the wrong time period!

“Why did the Pony Express stop delivering the mail?” you ask.

Big Nose Phil pauses as he thinks about that. “The mail’s been carried on the train for the past year now,” he says finally.

“But the Pony Express went out of business years before the transcontinental railroad!” you say.

Big Nose Phil shakes his head. “You’ve got me there, Kid. I never was much for writing letters. My folks figured the less they heard out of me, the better. So I don’t know how the mail got through the West after the Pony Express riders stopped carrying it.”

The sunset turns the sky red as blood, and then a sudden explosion of gunfire threatens to shed blood on the land. A posse must have crawled through the high grass and sneaked up on the outlaws.

“This is the sheriff. We’ve got you outnumbered, Big Nose! Give up!”

“We’ll never give up, law dogs,” Big Nose Phil shouts, lying flat on the ground.

“The river’s at your back,” the sheriff says. “You’ve got nowhere to run. Not even the Wyoming Kid can help you out of this fix!”

Big Nose Phil draws his revolver. “Well then, come and get us!” He fires several shots and then hugs the earth as the posse’s bullets whine overhead.

While the outlaws are firing at the posse, you slide back toward the river and slip into the current. The swift river carries you away from the battle raging between the outlaw gang and the posse.

You were lucky to get away from the outlaws alive, but you didn’t find out anything about the Pony Express. You need to find someone better informed than Big Nose Phil.



Jump back in time to Washington, D.C.

[Click here.](#)



You ride the stagecoach to the next way station. Unfortunately, you don't get a chance to talk to Rufus Haynes. At the way station a private coach is waiting for him, and he has barely enough time to wave good-bye.

This desert way station is a simple structure with a dirt roof and one small window beside the plank door. Nearby is a weathered horse barn with a corral and water trough.

A long-handled pump marks the well by the corral. The water is drawn from deep underground, and the only green patches of grass in sight are growing at the base of the pump and around the bottom of the trough. As far as you can see in all directions the land is barren, dotted with prickly cactus plants.

The door of the way station opens. You and the other passengers are greeted by a merry woman with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Howdy, folks!" she calls out with a smile. "Name's Cora Hawkins, and I'm here to welcome you to Hawkins City." She laughs, even though she must have repeated this joke to every load of passengers that's stopped here.

You follow the others into the station house. The room is dim, lighted by an oil lamp on a long table set with plates and cups and utensils. The passengers sit on benches on either side of this table.

The meal Cora serves is simple, but filling—beef stew, beans laced with molasses, and fresh bread with butter and honey. For dessert she has made pies from dried apples.

From overheard conversation you learn that Cora and her husband are the operators of this remote way station. The stagecoach



driver looks concerned about her. “You look a mite tired, Cora,” he says gently.

She nods but manages a bright smile for the passengers at her table. “Reckon I am. Sam got himself kicked by a mean horse a week ago. Caring for him and doing all the chores around here is almost too much for me. I’d hire a hand, but out here in the middle of nowhere folks are always passing through. Nobody wants to stay.”

In the shadows behind her you see a man on crutches. Sam Hawkins is a balding man who wears loose trousers held up by red suspenders. His right side bulges with a cloth bandage.

“I’m all right,” he protests. “Come on, let’s get a fresh team harnessed so you can get your passengers on to El Paso. If you’re late again, Butterfield just might lose the mail contract to Russell.” He moves through the room on his crutches and is followed out the door by the driver and his partner.

You leave the table and carry your dishes to the “wreck pan”—a tin basin filled with soapy water—on the rough kitchen counter where Cora is starting to wash pots and pans.

“Was that William H. Russell your husband mentioned?” you ask her.

She turns to you. “Why, yes,” she replies. “You know him?”

“No,” you say, “but I’ve heard of him.”

“Most folks have, I reckon,” she says. “His freighting company is in direct competition with the Butterfield Company for the mail contract. The only route across the West is this southern route through the desert, all the way from St. Joseph to El Paso and on to San Francisco.”

“Ready to roll!” shouts the stagecoach driver. The passengers thank Cora for the meal and her good cheer and file outside. You stay behind. Presently the driver pokes his head into the doorway.

“Buying a ticket to El Paso?” he asks you.

You shake your head. You got an idea when you were talking to Cora. This place might look forbidding to everyone else, but it will be a good place to learn more about Russell and that mail contract

that's so important.

"If Cora will hire me," you say, "I'll stay here and work awhile."

"Well, of course I'll hire you," she says. "Welcome!"

"Looks like you've come to the right place at the right time," the driver says with a parting wave.

"I hope so," you call after him, knowing that as a time traveler you can't explain exactly what you mean.

You start to work right away as Cora sends you out to the corral where Sam is laboriously pumping water into the wooden trough. Water gushes out of the spout and flows into a plank gutter that angles down to the trough and the waiting horses. Those are the six horses that have just been unharnessed from the stagecoach.

"While they're taking water," Sam says, "go into the corral and wipe them down. Then we'll lead them into the barn and get them out of this blamed sun."

You climb through the pole corral, but as you approach the horses one suddenly rears, pawing the air. You dash back, out of the way of those shod hooves.

"Blamed jughead horse!" Sam shouts. "That's just about the way I got kicked. Good thing you can move fast. No telling when one of these critters is going to spook like that. Try him again, and see if you can make friends with him. Be careful now."

You move slowly toward the horses. The one that reared is gray with splotches of white on his back. He watches you but does not rear up as you come close.

"Talk to him in a low voice," Sam advises. "You'll calm that jughead. Careful now."

You hold your hand out to the horse and then reach out and stroke his neck. The horse tosses his head once but then dips his nose to the water trough.

"You've done it," Sam says. "Now we can get on with our work."

Work is right. With all the chores around here, you work from dawn to dark. You learn to care for the horses. You feed and water them and dress harness sores so they'll be ready for the next stagecoach. But more importantly, you talk to Cora and Sam about

William H. Russell.

“There’s talk of a new overland mail route through the mountains,” Cora says one evening after supper.

“Rumors,” Sam says sourly.

“Sure, but Russell’s a man with new ideas,” Cora says. “I know he’s trying to run Butterfield out of business, but I admire him, sort of. Newspapers are always writing about him.”

“If we’re out of a job,” Sam says, “will you still admire him?”

Cora laughs at his joshing.

“Where will this new route be?” you ask.

“That’s what a lot of folks are wondering,” she says. “My guess is that it will follow the Oregon Trail across Wyoming, and then strike out through the Great Salt Lake all the way across the Sierra Nevada to California.”

“That’s rugged country,” Sam says, “and full of wild Indians.”

“From what I read in the newspapers,” Cora says, “Russell has experience freighting in that part of the country. He just might be the man to pull the whole thing together.”

“Then we’ll have to find another way to make a living,” Sam says. “The government mail contract is our lifeblood. There isn’t enough money in passenger travel alone to keep this route open.”

This time Cora does not laugh at her husband’s prediction.

In a week Sam is feeling better. He’s able to do most of the chores himself. You start watching for the Butterfield stagecoach that will take you back to St. Joseph, Missouri.

“Reckon you’ll be moving on soon,” Cora says one morning. “Here, I have something for you.” She digs into the pocket of her calico dress and pulls out a stagecoach ticket. She hands it to you.

You turn the ticket over and see “Free Pass” printed in large letters.

“That’ll take you anywhere a Butterfield coach can go,” she says, looking at you warmly.

Two days later the stagecoach bound for St. Joseph pulls in. After the team is changed and the passengers fed, the driver is ready to roll. You are delayed when Cora gives you a big hug, and as the

driver's whip cracks over the team, the stagecoach pulls away.

“Hurry!” Cora says, pushing you toward the door of the way station. “You can catch it!”

You run outside and sprint down the desert road after the lumbering coach. You could easily overtake it by running hard, but you decide to travel the fast way. Remembering what Cora said about the Oregon Trail, you could go there. Or you can go to Washington, D.C., and learn more about plans for the government mail contract.



Jump ahead in time to the Oregon Trail.

[Click here.](#)



Jump to Washington, D.C. [Click here.](#)



You shiver as you stand with a group of men bundled in heavy coats against the cold air of winter. Looking up, you see wide granite steps leading to the United States Capitol Building. The dome on top is under construction, but even so you recognize it. You're in Washington, D.C.

"I remember you!" one of the men says to you.

You recognize him, too. He's Rufus Haynes from the *Courier* in St. Joseph, Missouri. The other men in overcoats are newspapermen, too, holding pads of papers and pencils in gloved hands.

Rufus gestures to his pad of paper. You notice that he has written today's date on it: January 27, 1860. "We're here to interview William H. Russell," he tells you.

"Here he comes!" says one of the reporters.

Down the steps bounds a plump, bearded man wearing a round wool cap and heavy black coat with a fur collar. Judging from his patent-leather shoes and many diamond rings, he is clearly a man of wealth.

"Gentlemen," Russell welcomes the newspapermen, "thank you for coming out here on a cold day. This is a momentous occasion. I have just announced to Congress that I will open a new overland mail route that will connect St. Joseph, Missouri, with San Francisco, California. I will deliver the mail between those two great cities in ten days' time."

"Ten days!" one of the reporters exclaims.

"How do you propose to do that?" another asks.

"By what route?" a third reporter asks.



“Year round?” Rufus Haynes asks.

William H. Russell smiles and raises both hands in front of him. “Gentlemen, please. I will give you all the details, one at a time. First, I have printed copies of a map that will show the route I will open.” He brings a sheaf of papers out of his coat pocket and hands them around.

The newspapermen fall silent as they study the maps.

“That’s right, gentlemen,” he says. “I’ll have relay riders stationed across the West, one after the other, carrying the mail from St. Joseph to San Francisco. They’ll ride the fastest horses money can buy, and they’ll carry the mail like the wind!”

Russell is a dynamic speaker, and you feel the growing sense of excitement as he describes his plan. These reporters are witnesses to a historic event. Russell says the Pony Express will begin on April 3, 1860, when the first riders leave St. Joseph and San Francisco. One will gallop west, the other east.

“After I prove that the mail can be carried on this new route,” Russell says in conclusion, “the government will have to award the one-million-dollar mail contract to me!”

“Speaking of money,” Rufus Haynes asks, “what about your financial backing? It’s rumored that you are deeply in debt. This Pony Express will be an expensive enterprise—”

Russell’s expression suddenly sours, and he interrupts, “I have been talking to Secretary of War John Floyd. The government owes money to my freighting company for army contracts, and he has promised payment.”

“But, Mr. Russell,” another reporter says, “if you’re in debt now, how will you raise money for the Pony Express?”

“Leave that to me,” Russell says curtly. “Good day, gentlemen.” He turns and strides away, clearly angry.

As the newspapermen leave to file their stories, Rufus Haynes says to you, “This is a big story for the country, and especially for St. Joseph. I’m on my way to the telegraph office to send this one by wire!”

You watch him rush away. St. Joseph is the place to be, but not

at this time.



Jump ahead in time to April 3, 1860.

[Click here.](#)



You move to the shady side of the street in El Paso, Texas, a frontier town on the border between the United States and Mexico. The sky is clear, and the temperature must be over a hundred degrees. Squat adobe buildings dot the street along with some red-brick structures. Few people are out at this hour. You see a mongrel dog asleep in the shade, and on the next block a man wearing a sombrero crosses the dusty street.

On a brick building ahead you see a large sign:

Butterfield Overland Mail Company
Regional Office
El Paso, Texas

You open the door marked Office and enter. A young clerk seated at a rolltop desk turns to look at you. He seems not much older than you.

“Something I can do for you?” he asks, looking up at you through the green visor perched over his eyes.

“I’m looking for information about the Pony Express,” you say.

“The pony what?”

“The Pony Express,” you repeat.

“Never heard of it,” the clerk replies. “Dozens of express companies are operating around here. Who owns this Pony Express?”

“A man named William H. Russell,” you answer.

“Russell!” the clerk says, his voice rising. “*The* William H. Russell?”



As his voice echoes through the office, a door is thrown open, banging against the wall. A man comes charging out like a bull from a chute in a rodeo.

“What’s going on out here?” he demands. He wears a vest over his white shirt and black garters on his sleeves. “I’m the regional manager. What’s this about Russell?”

The clerk leaps to his feet. “Russell is sending out spies now!” he reports.

“I’m not a spy—” you protest.

Before you can explain, both men advance toward you. Their expressions tell you that you’d better get out of here quickly!

You should have stayed with the coach. Rufus Haynes is the only lead you’ve got.

You run out of the Butterfield offices into the deserted street. You see a shaded passageway. Time to jump.



Click here.



You are sitting on a heap of canvas mail sacks inside a train car. This train is speeding across the prairie at twenty-five miles per hour. You look around and see a large floor safe. A waterfall and forest scene is painted on the door of the safe, and on the top is lettered “Union Pacific Railroad.”

The wheels click rhythmically over the rails as you stick your head out of a small window. Sagebrush prairie dotted with herds of antelope is all you can see from here. The steam engine at the head of the train is pulling a coal car and a few passenger coaches. Black smoke pours out of the diamond-shaped smokestack, and cinders blow back into your face.

Quickly you turn away, blinking against the flying cinders. When your eyes clear, you look back at the yellow caboose at the end of the train. A trainman is leaning out of the window. He scowls and shakes his fist at you. You duck back into the baggage car.

The door at the far end of the baggage car swings open, and the trainman you saw in the caboose enters, still scowling.

“There’s no free rides on this train,” he growls. “Thought you could fool Oliver J. Pinkham, did you?”

“I’ll buy a ticket!” you tell him.

“Too late for that,” he says. “You just broke a federal law by sneaking into this mail car, and I aim to turn you over to the sheriff in Rock Springs, Wyoming. He doesn’t like bums any more than I do. Now, turn around and cross your wrists behind you.” You feel cold metal snap tight over your wrists as you are handcuffed.

“That ought to hold you, young outlaw,” the trainman says with



a tight smile.

With a sudden squeal of steel wheels, you and the trainman are knocked off your feet and thrown to the heaps of canvas mail sacks. The train comes to an abrupt halt.

You pick yourself up, wondering what's happened. You see that the trainman is dazed, but when you hear a commotion outside—shouts and gunshots—his eyes grow large and he sits up.

“Robbed!” he whispers. “We’re being robbed!”

Outside you hear the stamping of horses’ hooves and more shouting. A man with a deep voice is giving orders.

“I want this baggage car door opened right now,” he says.

“But I don’t have the key to that lock,” a frightened voice replies.

“Shoot it!” the man with the deep voice says.

Seconds later a gunshot thunders through the baggage car. Then the door slides open. Six masked outlaws on horseback are out there, standing over a train engineer wearing oil-stained overalls.

“Well, look what we’ve got here!” The leader of the masked outlaws steps out of his saddle and hops into the baggage car. He stands in front of you, hands on his hips over his gunbelt.

“Please, mister,” Oliver J. Pinkham says, cowering, “please don’t hurt me.”

“I’m not here to hurt anyone,” he says, gesturing to the safe. “I’m here to make a withdrawal.”

The outlaw looks at your handcuffs, then says to the trainman, “Maybe you’d better tell me what’s going on here.”

“This sneak thief is under arrest,” Pinkham replies in a quavering voice.

“Sneak thief?” the outlaw says, taking a second look at you. He pauses. “If I remember the picture on that Wanted poster I saw in Cheyenne, this isn’t any sneak thief.”

“Wh . . . what?” the trainman says.

The outlaw pulls his mask down and grins at you, showing missing front teeth and a nose the size and color of a stewed tomato. “You’re the Wyoming Kid, aren’t you?”

“The Wyoming Kid?” the cowering trainman repeats. “I . . . I

didn't know—”

“Well, now you do,” the outlaw says, “and instead of sitting there on those mail sacks like a bunny rabbit, get those wrist irons off the Kid. And after you do that, I want you to open up the safe.”

Too scared to move, Pinkham only stares until the outlaw shouts, “Be quick about it!” Then the man leaps up, digging into his pocket for the key to the handcuffs.

When your hands are freed, the outlaw holds out his hand to shake. “Kid, they call me Big Nose Phil. I’ve heard a lot about you. We’re in the same line of work, but what the heck, there’s plenty of trains to go around now that the transcontinental rail line is finished. And you can bet there’ll be more in the future—railroads all over the West just waiting for you and me like fruit on a tree.”

Before you can explain that you aren’t a train robber, the outlaw turns and grabs the trainman by the lapels of his uniform.

“I could have sworn I told you to open that safe, Oliver,” Big Nose Phil says. “Didn’t I politely mention that a minute ago?”

“Ye . . . ye . . . yes, sir,” the trainman stammers.

“Well, you might want to get that job done before I quit being polite,” he says.

“But . . . but I don’t know the combination,” says the trainman.

Big Nose Phil sighs. “All of you train jockeys give me the same answer.” He lets go of the trainman and turns to the open door of the baggage car. “Jed, you and Mike come in here and blow the door off this safe, will you? Appreciate it.”

You leave the car with Big Nose Phil, who gives Pinkham a shove out the door. The two outlaws climb into the baggage car and quickly strap a stick of dynamite on each hinge. They attach a fuse, light it, and jump out of the car.

You and the others back away while the flame sputters toward the explosive charges. Then the prairie silence is shattered by a blast that rocks the baggage car and sends the outlaws’ horses rearing. When the smoke clears and the dust settles, you see the safe door ajar. Inside are sacks of gold and silver coins.

“Now there’s a job well done!” Big Nose Phil says. “Let’s make



our withdrawal and ride.”

As the outlaws climb into the car and start handing out the heavy sacks of coins, Big Nose Phil turns to you and says, “I know you had your eye on that safe, Kid. Maybe we can make a deal that will keep us both happy.”

“I don’t want any of that money,” you say.

“I understand,” Big Nose Phil replies. “And I admire you for it. I got you out of a fix with that trainman, and you figure that makes us even. I like you, Kid. You’ve got principles.”

Big Nose Phil gestures to the horses. “I’ve got a spare horse, all mounted and ready to ride. Me and the boys would be plumb honored if you’d ride with us, Kid.”

This is a tough choice. Should you stay here with the train? That means you’ll be arrested in Rock Springs and charged with the crimes committed by the Wyoming Kid. Or you can ride with Big Nose Phil and his gang of outlaws, who will probably be pursued by a posse.

One thing is certain: that trainman will not be interested in answering any questions about the Pony Express after what has happened here. At least Big Nose Phil likes you enough to be willing to talk.



Stay on the train. **Click here.**



Ride with Big Nose Phil. **Click here.**





You are in the midst of a wild celebration on the streets of St. Joseph, Missouri. April 3, 1860 is a day that will live in history. Now friends and relatives can communicate by mail across the West in only ten days. Such speed is unheard of among these people.

“This man is a modern-day hero,” the mayor of St. Joseph proudly proclaims as he introduces William H. Russell to the crowd. “He will get your mail from here to San Francisco in ten days, hurled by flesh and blood across two thousand miles of desolate space!”

The crowd parts at the sound of pounding hoofbeats. You watch as a Kentucky thoroughbred gallops past. In seconds horse and rider are gone, leaving behind the cheers of the excited onlookers.

You feel a tap on your shoulder. “Seems our trails cross frequently.” It’s Rufus Haynes! “This can’t be coincidence. I still think you’re working for Russell.”

“No,” you say, “I’m not working for him. I’m just trying to get some information about the Pony Express.”

“Hmmm,” Haynes says with a cocked eyebrow. “What sort of information?”

“When you interviewed Mr. Russell in Washington last January,” you say, “he got mad when you asked him about his financial backing for the Pony Express. Does he really have enough money to keep it going?”

“The Pony Express has been a very expensive operation,” explains Haynes. “Russell has borrowed money to construct relay stations and hire station masters. He’s bought high-priced horses

and hired the best riders. Carrying the mail even at the rate of five dollars for a half-ounce letter will never make enough profit to pay all those expenses.”

And you thought mailing a letter today was expensive!

“I don’t understand,” you say. “He *is* trying to make money, isn’t he?”

“He’s trying to make a fortune,” Haynes says.

“But how?” you ask.

“Once he proves the new route to California can be used, he’ll start carrying passengers and hauling freight—”

“And put the Butterfield Company out of business!” you exclaim, remembering what Cora told you.

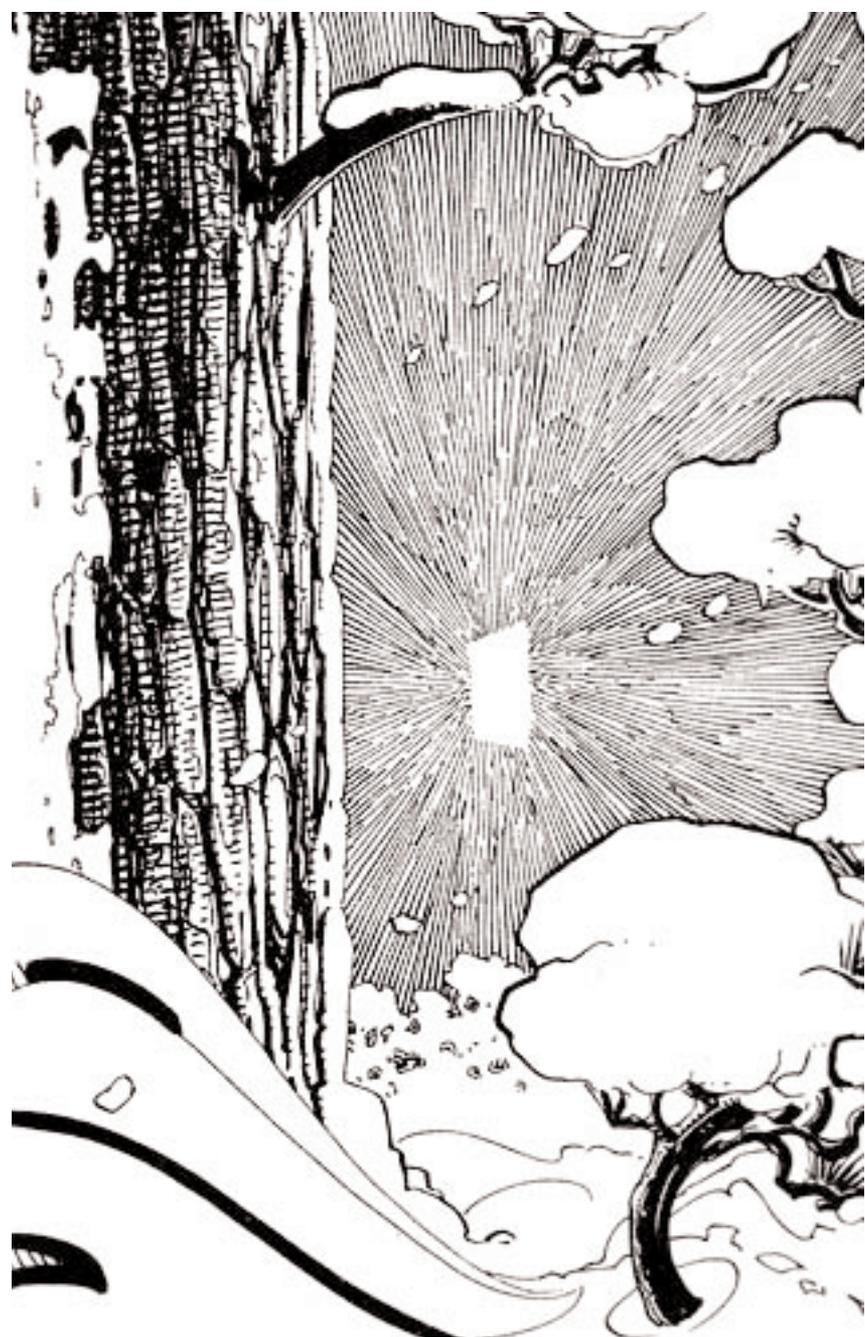
“That’s right,” Haynes says. “It’s a bold plan. The whole thing depends on the success of the Pony Express. Which reminds me, I’ve got more work to do. See you later.” Rufus shakes your hand and disappears into the crowd.

It’s time for you to get back on the trail of the Pony Express. There’s no substitute for first-hand experience.



Jump forward in time to the prairie.

[Click here.](#)





The wind-swirled snow high in the Sierra Nevada of California blinds your vision, and the cold air numbs your whole body. You are dressed for the prairie, not for winter. If you can't find shelter soon, you'll have to jump away from here before you freeze to death.

You plod through the deep snow, one lunging step at a time. You can see very little. The wind is steady, stinging your eyes like flying icicles.

The white world is briefly changed when you see a yellow spot ahead, like a warm beacon that beckons you. You struggle toward the beacon, losing sight of it as you nearly pass out. Eyes closed, you bump into a log wall.

You grope your way along the wall to the corner. That side of the building is protected from the wind, and you see a door there. Plunging toward the door, you open it and stumble inside. You feel yourself falling, but as in a dream you do not hit bottom. You fall and fall and fall. . . .

The soft, warm embrace of a bearskin brings you back to consciousness. Wrapped in the heavy fur, you are lying on a dirt floor strewn with straw. By the light of a lantern you see a potbellied stove. A crackling fire inside sends off heat that makes your cheeks glow.

You sit up and look around. Light from that lantern guided you here. You must have seen it through a window in the side of this building.

From your experience working for Cora Hawkins, you know

immediately that this is a horse barn. Stalls are on either side of the runway, and the iron stove is in the middle of the barn, providing life-saving heat for the animals.

“Thought you were frozen solid, I did.”

You turn around and see an old man striding down the runway toward you. He is dressed in heavy clothes, and his hair and full beard are as white as the snow outside. He is leading a saddled horse.

“I’m all right,” you say, pushing the bearskin away from your shoulders. “Thanks to you.”

“All I did was yank your boots off,” he says, “and roll you into that bear hide by the stove.” He stops, holding the horse’s reins. “At first, I thought you were Boston Upson, I did.”

“Who’s he?” you ask.

“Pony Express rider,” the old-timer says. “He should have been here three hours ago, but I reckon nobody’s getting through today, not even mule trains.”

“Mule trains use this trail in the winter?” you ask, surprised.

“That’s right,” he replies. “Any man who can haul food and supplies this time of year can charge five times the summer price.”

“But the Pony Express riders can’t make it?” you ask.

The old timer shrugs. “If any man alive can ride this trail in winter, Boston’s the man.” He casts a worried glance at the big double doors at the front of the barn.

“No,” he goes on, “the relay riders haven’t been turned back by storms in these mountains. The real trouble is with Sioux Indians in Wyoming. If the Pony Express gets closed down, that’ll be the cause.”

Outside you hear a muffled shout. The station keeper drops the horse’s reins. He rushes to the big double doors of the barn and flings them open. Now’s your chance to slip away and jump in time to Wyoming and find out if the Pony Express route will be closed by hostile Indians. Or you can stay here and find out who has arrived at the barn. If this is Boston Upson, he may be able to give you some valuable information.



Jump to Wyoming. **Click here.**



Stay here. **Click here.**



At Fort Laramie you find Slim Baxter with a herd of horses. Several men are with him, and when Slim spots you, he calls out.

“I need your help!”

“What are you doing?” you ask.

“You haven’t heard?” he replies. “We’ve got orders from Washington to do the impossible, that’s what has happened!”

“Then you need more help than I can give you,” you say with a laugh.

“Might seem funny to you,” the dour-faced man says, “but I don’t see no humor in it a-tall.”

“What are your orders?” you ask.

“William H. Russell says we’ll set a new record for getting the mail through to California,” Slim says. “The way he’s going to do it is to put a man and a horse along every ten miles of the Pony Express route from St. Joseph to San Francisco. Can you believe it? Every ten miles!”

“That ought to set a record,” you say.

“Why, sure it’s easy to talk about from some fancy office in Washington, D.C.,” Slim says in disgust, “but just how does a fella go about it? I’ve scoured the countryside for riders. I’ve bought a few good horses and a bunch of army plugs that might have ten miles left in them.”

“What are we going to be carrying?” you ask as you pick out a pinto and swing up into the saddle.

Slim answers over his shoulder, “The inaugural speech of

President Lincoln. Folks out in California are waiting to hear what this new fella has to say.”

“Why?” you ask.

Slim pulls out a folded newspaper from his hip pocket and guides his horse beside yours. “Read this,” he says, pointing to the front page. “Maybe you can figure out the politics back east better than I can.”

You take the wrinkled newspaper and unfold it. A headline in bold type reads:

WAR BETWEEN STATES?

South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, and Texas form a new nation to be called the Confederate States of America. California and other states may join. What will President-elect Lincoln do?

A second headline catches your eye:

PONY EXPRESS ATTEMPTS RECORD RUN

William H. Russell promises to deliver Lincoln’s inaugural address to California in the record time of one week. The eyes of the country will be watching as this seemingly impossible feat is attempted by the flamboyant Russell.

If the Pony Express gets Lincoln’s inaugural message across the country in time, perhaps California won’t join the Confederate States.

Slim takes a deep breath. “Well, are you with me, or not? I can’t stand out here all day. I have to get back to the Horseshoe station.”

With all the excitement here, it would be easy to slip away and jump to Washington to see Abraham Lincoln in person as he gives his inaugural speech. The whole nation is eager to learn what he will say—especially California, as that state considers whether to stay in the Union.

Decide quickly. Slim is waiting for your answer.



Jump ahead to Washington, D.C.

[Click here.](#)



Ride with Slim. [Click here.](#)



The tent is real! As you approach, you hear voices. The tent is open on all four sides, and now you see a group of men sitting on folding chairs around a camp table covered with a white linen cloth. The table is set with silverware, a gleaming silver teapot with matching sugar bowl and creamer, and porcelain cups and saucers.

“I say, who goes there?” one of the men asks. He has a British accent. The other four turn their gaze toward you, too.

You wave hello and introduce yourself as you enter the camp. This is very strange. Out here in the middle of this flat prairie, five proper Englishmen are drinking hot tea and eating muffins with marmalade. Each man wears starched white clothes and polished black boots. All are freshly shaven, with short, neat hair-cuts—nothing like the pioneers and frontiers-men you have seen in the West.

You step into the shade of the tent. In a gun rack on the other side you see half a dozen high-powered rifles. Beyond the tent several buffalo heads lie on the ground. Trails of blood lead back to the headless bodies. The buffalo are too heavy to move; the hunters take only the heads as trophies.

Now you understand. This is a hunting party. These Englishmen have come to the American West on a “safari” and have collected their trophies from that large herd.

“Quite a run, wouldn’t you say?” one of the men asks as he unfolds a chair for you and pours you a cup of tea.

“Run?” you ask, sitting at the table.

“Stampede, I believe you Americans call it,” another says, offering you a biscuit from a tin with a hinged lid. “We shot several of the biggest bulls, and the herd began to run. Quite a sight, indeed.”

You nod agreement, sipping tea. Quite a sight—especially those hooves flying overhead, inches from your face.

“We’ve seen hundreds of thousands of the brutes out here on this wasteland,” one of the mustached Englishmen says. “I daresay there isn’t enough ammunition in the whole country to shoot them all.”

The others laugh in agreement, but you know better. In the next ten years, over four million buffalo will be killed and their bones shipped east for fertilizer. In just one decade the great herds will be gone, and the Plains tribes of native Americans will be starving.

“You’re not lost, are you?”

You look at the Englishman who spoke and see an expression of concern on his face. You realize that your being alone out here is as strange a sight to these men as they are to you.

“No,” you say, even though you are not exactly certain where you are. “I’m looking for the Pony Express.”

“I say!” he exclaims. “The Pony Express!”

“You’ve heard of it?” you ask.

“Indeed we have,” he replies. “The Pony Express is vital to the war effort.”

You are surprised to learn this.

“We are at war with China,” he explains, “and our government in London uses your relay riders to send messages to San Francisco Bay and on by ship to our China Fleet.”

“Speed is of the essence,” another man comments, and the others agree.

You knew that the Pony Express has been reported in many parts of the world, but you didn’t realize that it was actually used by a foreign government. Just think! Secret orders for a whole fleet were carried in a locked pocket of a mochila carried by Pony Express riders!

A moment later the Englishmen forget their quiet reserve when they sight a lone rider on the prairie. They jump up from their chairs



and rush from the tent to watch the galloping rider pass by from east to west.

“Look at that chap ride!” one shouts.

“On Her Majesty’s service!” says another with a wave of his hand.

After the Pony Express rider has disappeared from sight, you say good-bye to these men. You have found the Pony Express and discovered another obstacle—stampeding buffalo. But would that be enough to stop Russell’s entire enterprise?

You should check other parts of the Pony Express routes to see what obstacles are there.



Jump to Fort Laramie, Wyoming.

[Click here.](#)



Jump to the Sierra Nevada in California.

[Click here.](#)





In Fort Laramie, Wyoming, you are standing in the shade of the enlisted men's barracks when you see soldiers gathering on the parade ground by a tall flag-pole. A door to this building opens and a private steps out. As he heads for the parade ground, you catch up with him.

"What's going on?" you ask.

"Pony Express rider's coming in," he replies. "At least, he's due."

"You think he won't make it?" you ask.

The soldier glances at you without breaking stride. "New out here, aren't you? This is spring. The Sioux are out in force this time of year. No telling what kind of mood they're in."

You look around as you walk beside the private. Fort Laramie, alone on the grassy plains of Wyoming, is impressive. Around a rectangular parade ground the size of a football field are rows of buildings and tents—a large bakery, sutler's store, officers' quarters, barracks for infantry and cavalry, and administration buildings. Beyond the buildings the Laramie River lazily winds past this prairie fortress.

This is a part of the Oregon Trail, and over the years many fur traders and pioneers have passed this way. At first this was only a small outpost and meeting ground for trappers, but now it's an important fort for the army.

Drumming hoofbeats turn the heads of the gathering soldiers and a few civilians. Over a grass-covered rise to the east comes a lone horseman, traveling at full gallop toward the fort.

"That's Hank Avis!" a corporal shouts. "He made it from the

Torrington station!”

The pounding hoofbeats grow louder as the rider draws near. You see that the brim of his hat is blown back by the wind, and on his belt he wears two revolvers. When he reaches the edge of the parade ground, he reins the horse to a halt, and in one smooth motion he steps out of the saddle. One of the civilians brings a fresh horse, and the rider quickly transfers the mochila. He thrusts a boot into the stirrup and swings up, settling easily into the saddle.

“Not so fast.”

Everyone turns to see that the man who has spoken is a colonel in neat full-dress uniform. Beside him is a man dressed from head to toe in wrinkled buckskin.

“Before you ride out of here,” the colonel says, “you’d better listen to what I just heard from this scout.”

“No time for a long story,” Hank says, pulling back on the reins of the prancing horse. “I’ve got a schedule to keep!”

“You’ve got time to hear this, mister,” the army officer says. “Sioux hunting parties are out there. By now they’ve probably closed the Oregon Trail.”

“I’ll find out for myself, Colonel,” Hank says.

“You shouldn’t go out there alone,” the colonel says.

Hank laughs. “Anyone who can keep up with me, come on!”

No one volunteers, and you see your chance. “I’ll ride with you,” you say.

Hank looks at you in surprise. “I had in mind an experienced rider.”

“I’ve worked with horses at a stagecoach relay station in Texas,” you say.

The colonel chuckles sarcastically. “Sounds like we’ve got an experienced rider here, Hank.”

Hank looks at you approvingly, though.

“Maybe this rider is right for the job. All that’s needed is a horse that can keep pace with mine.”

The colonel pauses at this challenge. “Mine’s ready to ride. I was getting ready to inspect the cavalry when you rode in, and my horse

could use a good run.”

A moment later Hank Avis rides out. You follow, galloping to keep up. The colonel’s horse is very fast! You soon catch up with Hank, and the two of you gallop side by side for a distance. Then Hank reins in his mount to a high lope, and you do the same.

“We’d better save their strength,” he says, rubbing his horse’s neck, “in case we need it later.” You and Hank head for the Horseshoe relay station, less than ten miles away now.

The land flattens out into a treeless plain. On the trail ahead you see a dozen Sioux hunters on horseback. They carry bows and arrows as well as a few old rifles. When they see you, they halt and wait.

Hank glances at you. “Act friendly,” he says, “and hope they are.”

You ride side by side to the hunting party. Hank raises his hand in a gesture of peace. But the Indians aim their rifles at you! Several draw back their bowstrings, pointing flint-tipped arrows at your chest.

This is scary. None of the Indians shows any emotion. They only stare as you come closer to them.

“Howdy!” Hank calls out as though he’s greeting old friends. “How’s the hunting this season?”

When the leader of the hunting party only stares at you over his rifle barrel, Hank goes on, “Nice day for a ride, isn’t it? We ought to get together for a picnic. What are you fellows doing next week? We can roast a couple of turkeys, squeeze out some lemonade, and have a mighty good time.”

Hank’s smile and the friendly tone of his voice makes the leader lower his rifle. He utters a command to the others, and they follow his example. Then the leader raises his hand.

“Whew!” Hank whispers to you.

You pass within a few yards of the Indians and ride on. A glance over your shoulder shows that the Sioux are staring at you curiously.

“Did they understand what you were saying?” you ask.

“Nope,” Hank replies with a laugh. “I just kept talking until they knew I wasn’t out to do them any harm.” You’ll have to remember that trick!

“Wait until the colonel hears about our encounter.” Hank says, laughing again. “Come on. Let’s make up for lost time! Meet you at the Horseshoe station.” Hank touches his heels to the horse and takes off in a gallop.

In a few minutes, Hank is out of sight around a bend. Should you ride on with him, or jump in time?

You remember that Russell had a lot of trouble financing the Pony Express. Perhaps you should go to Washington, D.C., to see if Russell ran out of money after all.



Ride on to the Horseshoe station.

[Click here.](#)



Jump to Washington, D.C., in 1861.

[Click here.](#)



A Pony Express rider guides his tired horse into the barn.

“Boston!” The station keeper closes the big doors after him.

Crusted snow falls to the dirt floor when Boston Upson stiffly dismounts. His face is covered like a mummy’s, and you watch as he unwinds a heavy scarf that conceals his face and neck. The man who appears is grinning.

“A bit stormy out there today,” he says. “Or is it night?”

“No way to tell in this blizzard,” the old station keeper replies. “Boston, you’d best hole up here until this storm breaks. A few more hours’ delay won’t hurt.”

Boston gestures to the fresh saddle horse. “Now, you know I’m not going to take that advice. I’m paid to get this mail through, and that’s what I’ll do.”

“Figured you’d say that,” the old-timer says. He turns and moves to the stove, where he lifts a battered coffee pot and pours steaming black brew into a tin cup. “Stay long enough to drink this, anyhow.”

“According to regulations,” Boston says with a grin, “I can only stay two minutes at each relay station.”

“Stay ten minutes,” he says, “and get warmed up. I won’t report you to Mr. Russell.”

Boston laughs and pulls off his heavy mittens as he comes to the stove. He grasps the steaming tin cup in both hands and raises it to his mouth.

After Boston takes a long swallow, you introduce yourself. He shakes your hand in a strong grip.

“How will you make it through the snow drifts to the next station?” you ask.

“A mule train is headed this way,” Boston replies. “Nothing like a line of big, strong mules to bust open a snowbound trail. Soon as I meet up with them, I’ll have an easy ride.”

“Easy!” the old-timer repeats, shaking his head.

Boston Upson laughs. You can tell that he’s courageous—he takes chances, yet he is not reckless. You ask him how you can become a rider for the Pony Express.

“Just about everybody in the state of California who can ride wants this job,” he replies, taking a last swallow of hot coffee. He walks to his horse and pulls off the mochila. He throws it over the saddle of the fresh horse and then puts on his scarf and mittens. Before he covers his mouth, he adds:

“I hear riders are needed out in Wyoming, but that’s Indian country.”

Boston covers his face and swings up to the saddle. The old station keeper hurries to the double doors, and at a wave from Boston, he throws them open. You watch as the rider gallops into the swirling snow, and a moment later the doors are pulled shut.

You get permission from the old-timer to spend the night in the barn. When he takes his lantern by the handle and returns to his cabin, you’re alone. No one sees you jump in time.



Jump to Wyoming. [Click here.](#)





I'll ride with you," you say to Slim.

He manages a slight smile. "Well, that's the first piece of good news I've had today. Grab ahold of one of these horses, and come on!"

Slim signals the others with a wave of his arm. "Let's get these horses out on the trail. We don't have a minute to spare!"

You and the other riders follow Slim as he rides out to the trail used by the Pony Express. Slim leaves you on the high plains and rides off. You'll wait here for the relay rider from the east who will bring the mochila with Lincoln's inaugural address.

Alone here, you look around. The blue, cloudless sky stretches endlessly over the high plains of Wyoming. That sky seems to cast a deep silence on the land.

You think about how exciting the Pony Express is to the people of this time. Before the Pony Express, letters from friends and relatives took a month or more to reach their destinations. Sending a letter in only a week is as exciting to these people as space travel is to you.

You turn to face the east, your attention drawn by the drumming hoofbeats of a running horse. On the far horizon you see a man on horseback, riding hard.

Your horse is grazing in the high grass. You catch his reins and check the saddle cinch once more. The mustang tosses his head and whinnies at the approaching rider.

You give your hat a tug and get ready to transfer the mochila to your horse. Hoofbeats are growing louder. One hundred yards away



now, the lone horseman is coming fast.

He is young, his blue eyes bright with excitement. A dozen paces away, he reins his galloping horse to a halt and leaps to the ground. Snatching the mochila off his saddle, he quickly hands it to you with an eager shout: "Ride!"

You toss the mochila over your saddle. Your mustang prances with excitement. You grab the saddle horn on the run and throw a leg over the saddle. In the stirrups, you give the mustang the signal he wants—a tap with your boot heels—and he races away at full speed.

The galloping mustang follows this trail across the high plains. You bend low over his neck, feeling his muscular strength with every step. Warm air brushes your face as you watch the trail ahead.

The tracks you see here mark the old Oregon Trail—a trail of history in America. Trappers, prospectors, and settlers have passed through here, and more will come. You are racing into history, carrying in a locked pouch the inaugural address of President Abraham Lincoln.

No horse can run at full speed for ten miles, but every spirited horse will try it. You rise up in the saddle and slow this mustang down to a high lope. You'll save his strength and cover as much ground as you can at this speed, then let him run the last mile.

This is near the spot where you and Hank Avis encountered the band of Indians. In these hills you see no sign of them today. They may have moved on, maybe to get farther away from the white settlers who have invaded their hunting grounds.

You make good time through the hills, coming out on the plains again. The Horseshoe station is not far ahead. As if sensing that, the mustang breaks into a gallop, his hooves pounding the earth. You let him run.

Slim Baxter is waiting by the barn with a relay rider and a horse. They are ready to go, and when you rein up and leap out of the saddle, Slim grabs the mochila. He throws it over the saddle of the fresh horse, gives a shout of encouragement as the new rider mounts, and rides off, heading westward toward California.

“We’re going to set a record,” Slim says excitedly. “We sure are!” He jumps up and down, waving his arms.

You have to laugh. This is the first time you have seen him smile, and this may be the first time he has ever been excited about anything in his life.

You shake hands with Slim and say good-bye. He looks at you and blinks rapidly.

“I’m going to miss you,” he says.

“I’ll miss you, too,” you say.

“Where are you headed from here?” he asks.

“I want to see another section of the Oregon Trail,” you reply. You like Slim, but you can’t stay here. The only way to succeed in accomplishing your mission is to keep searching. You may find what you’re looking for on another part of the trail.

“Well, so long,” he says, and waves as you walk away.

As soon as you’re out of sight, you can jump to the Oregon Trail.



Click here.



On prairie land flat as an ironing board and nearly as hot as an iron, you see a huge cloud swelling up on the far horizon. From here the horizon is a straight line between land and sky. The only sound you hear is deep and distant thunder.

At least you think it's thunder. But as the rumbling sound grows louder, the earth under your feet starts to shake. An earthquake? No, but as you look at the swelling cloud again you see that it isn't a storm cloud. That's dust rising into the sky. The dust is stirred by a moving brown mass. That mass is heading toward you!

Shaggy, horned heads are bearing down on you, coming at you with surprising speed. The brown mass is a herd of buffalo—hundreds of them! They're in full stampede!

You angle to your right, running hard through the grass and sage, hoping you can reach safety at the edge of the great herd. But the shaggy-headed giants are rapidly gaining on you, their short, curved horns glistening in the sunlight.

You jump over a small ridge and fall into a gully. You roll against the bank, looking up in time to see one buffalo after another leaping over you. Hundreds of them jump this gully, their hooves flying inches above your head.

Then they are gone, and the land is still again.

You stand up, shaking. The land looks different. As far as you can see, the soil is churned up. Everything is trampled—every blade of bluestem grass, every sunflower, every clump of sage is flattened to the ground.

You climb out of the gully and walk toward the horizon, where



the stampeding buffalo came from. Presently you see another strange sight on this flat prairie: a white canvas tent with a group of people sitting inside. Is this a mirage? You haven't had a drink of water in several hours, and almost getting crushed by a herd of buffalo hasn't improved your state of mind. Maybe you should jump out of this prairie and look elsewhere for the Pony Express. The map you got from Russell shows that the Pony Express traveled through the Sierra Nevada in California. It would certainly be cooler there!



Stay here and investigate the tent.

[Click here.](#)



Jump to the Sierra Nevada. [Click here.](#)



In a few minutes you and Hank Avis reach the Horseshoe station. You decide to stay at the station while Hank rides to the next relay station on the Pony Express route.

You wait with the station keeper, Slim Baxter, for the eastbound Pony Express rider, who is long overdue. Slim is a worrier. He leans against the barn door, offering reasons why the rider hasn't come.

"Thrown from his horse and bit by a rattler," Slim says sadly. "That's what must have happened to him."

A while later, a single gray cloud floats by. "Struck by lightning, poor devil," Slim says. "Painful way for a man to die."

When the cloud drifts on, Slim says, "Indians got him. Yes, sir, Indians run him down and lifted his hair. Must have left him staked to an anthill, yes sir."

You hear hoofbeats in the distance—not the pounding of a fast horse at full gallop but the clip-clop of a walking horse. You leave the shade of the barn with Slim and see the lone rider coming. The Pony Express rider is bent over the saddle, barely hanging on.

You and Slim run out to meet him. Slim thinks he sees an arrow sticking out of the man's back, but when you reach him, you see that he is unhurt.

"Sick," the rider mumbles. "Never . . . never been . . . so sick . . . in my blamed life."

"What's the matter?" Slim demands, helping the rider down from the saddle.

The Pony Express rider is young, with curly black hair and a face as pale as a bedsheet. "Ate some tainted food, I guess." He draws a



deep breath. “I’m as weak as a cat.”

Slim’s face was lined with worry before the rider came; now he looks stricken. “You’re in no shape to ride, that’s for sure. How are we going to get that mochila to Fort Laramie?”

“I’ll take it,” you say.

“You’re not an authorized rider for the Pony Express, are you?” Slim asks.

“No,” you say. “But I know the trail, and I’ve got a fast horse.”

Slim pauses, then nods once. “Well, that’s the way it’s going to have to be. I’ll meet you there as soon as I can. Now get that black horse out of the barn, and ride!”

Mounted on the colonel’s horse, you make a fast ride across the prairie back to Fort Laramie. In the hill country you follow the example set by Hank Avis and scout valleys from hilltops. You see no Sioux hunting parties, and before nightfall you ride into the parade ground of Fort Laramie.

A Pony Express rider is waiting there, and in a fast exchange he takes the mochila and rides east.

The colonel congratulates you on the ride you made, and you thank him for the use of his horse. He runs his hand over the animal’s shoulder.

“I’ll be taking this one back east,” he says, “when I’m transferred.”

“You’re leaving Fort Laramie?” you ask.

He nods. “And a lot of these soldiers are going with me. There’s talk of war.”

War? Of course—he’s talking about the Civil War. You hadn’t thought of it before, but the war must have had an effect on the Pony Express. For one thing, there wouldn’t be as many soldiers in the West to protect the riders.

Could this be the reason behind the failure of the Pony Express? You should go back east yourself to find out!



Jump to Washington, D.C. [Click here.](#)



You are in Washington, D.C., in March 1861. You make your way to the front of the crowd gathered along Pennsylvania Avenue near the Capitol. A military parade passes by, and then you see a low-slung carriage draw up.

Seated in the glistening black carriage are two men wearing dark wool overcoats and silk top hats. They climb out, bowing to scattered applause among the onlookers. One man is tall and angular with a dark beard. The other man leads the way. He is white-haired and looks tired.

You recognize Abraham Lincoln, but not the other man. You turn to a bystander wearing a top hat and overcoat.

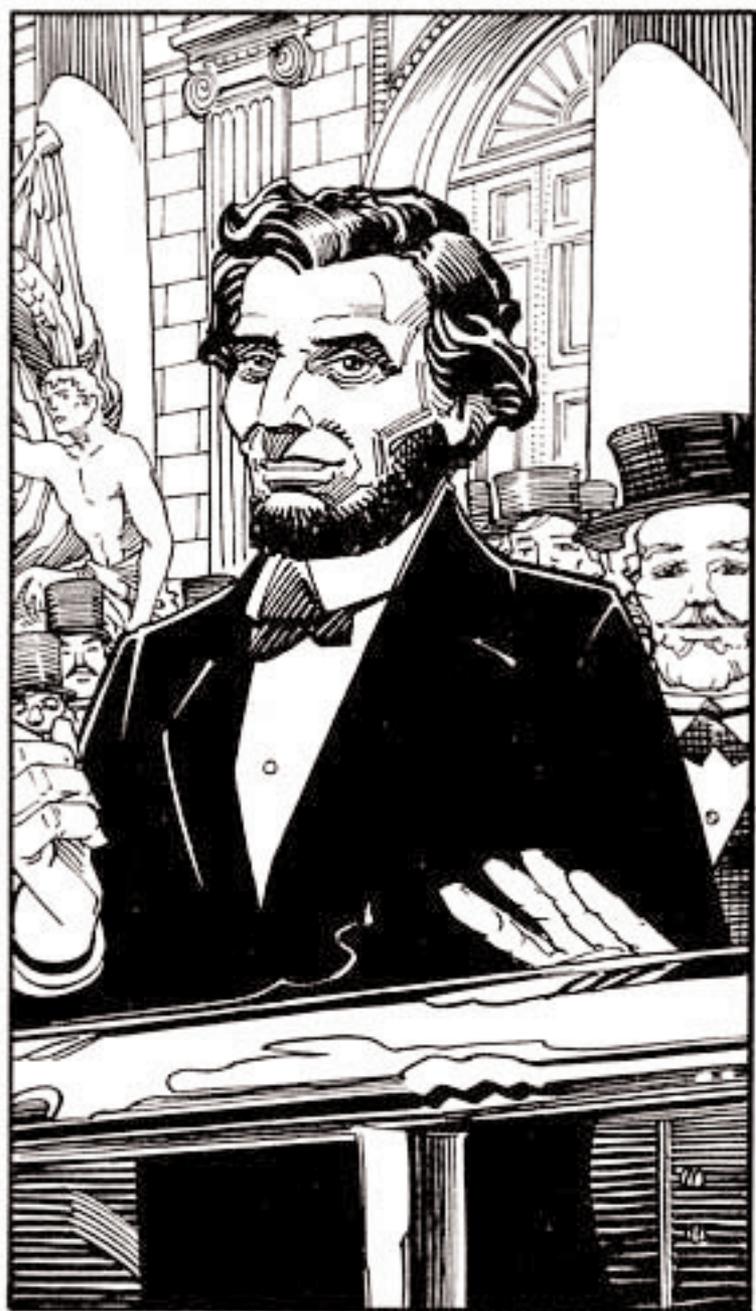
“Who’s that?” you ask.

“Why, that’s President James Buchanan of course,” he replies. “Or I should say, former president. Abraham Lincoln is assuming office today.”

“There go the exhausted energies of the old,” another bystander says, watching the historic scene, “followed by the vigorous strength of the new. If anyone can keep us from civil war, Honest Abe Lincoln’s the man.” You nod in agreement, even though you know it won’t work out that way.

You watch as Lincoln is sworn in as the new president of the United States. Surrounded by solemn dignitaries, he delivers his inaugural speech in a strong voice. You listen closely as he finishes his speech:

“I have the most solemn oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Union. We are not enemies, but friends.”



You realize these words are aimed at the states who have left the Union and others who might be considering the idea of joining the Confederacy in the South.

“Well, that settles it,” the bystander next to you says. “If the Confederates want a fight, they’ll get it.”

Other people nearby loudly agree. “If blood is to be shed, let’s get on with it—now!”

The crowds move away, and you spot William H. Russell. You move closer and hear him speaking intently to a group of senators. “A horse and rider every ten miles of the Pony Express route. Within the hour the first relay rider will gallop westward, and the words we just heard will be in San Francisco within a week. Think of it, gentlemen—a week’s time!” He adds, “Then no one in the House or the Senate will be able to deny my claim to that mail contract.”

“You make a strong case,” one of the senators says, “but we cannot overlook your declaration of bankruptcy. The firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell is broke!”

“But I still have the Pony Express,” Russell insists, “and I intend to use it to show that my route through the mountains is the best in the land. One day all westbound freight will be using my trail.”

“Perhaps,” another senator says, “but time will tell. Time will tell.”

You’ve learned one thing here. Russell is broke. All of his hopes now are tied to the success of the Pony Express.

You wonder what’s happening in the West. The riders are brave men on fast horses, but how are they surviving against bad weather and hostile Indians?



Jump ahead in time to the Oregon Trail.

[Click here.](#)



Jump to Fort Laramie to ride with Slim.

[Click here.](#)





A group of people is standing on the plank boardwalk in the frontier town of Salt Lake City, in Utah Territory. The date is October 24, 1861.

You move closer and see that workmen have dug a hole on the edge of the hard-packed dirt street. They lift a telegraph pole and set it down into the hole.

Another man climbs the pole and connects two wires at this pole. One wire comes from a line of poles that stretches out to the west. The other wire comes from the east.

A cheer rises from the onlookers, and they applaud as the crewman waves and comes down from the pole.

“Now this country can send telegrams from coast to coast!” he says, jumping to the ground.

A second man pulls a large pocket watch from his vest pocket. “The first telegram should be going over the wire from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., right at this moment.”

The contents of that first message have been made public, and this man reads it aloud. The message is from California Chief Justice Stephen Field to President Lincoln. The chief justice congratulates the President on this achievement and pledges his state’s loyalty to the Union.

The gathered onlookers applaud again. You move away from the crowd. This is an important event in the history of the country, but it’s not as exciting as the Pony Express. The relay riders did more than carry mail across the western frontier. They opened a new route, one that the telegraph line now follows.

You remember the excitement felt across the country when the first Pony Express riders left St. Joseph and San Francisco. No one knew if they would reach their destinations, and people waited eagerly for news.

Now, with the telegraph line stretching across the open spaces of the West, messages can be sent and received in a matter of minutes. You wonder what effect this single strand of electrical wire will have on the Pony Express.

The best way to find out will be to jump ahead a few years and find out what has happened to a Pony Express relay station.



Click here.



The air is cool with gray clouds overhead, and the vast field of grass where you stand is dried to the color of buckskin. This is the autumn season on the Great Plains. Soon cold wind and snow from the north will hold this land in winter's icy grip.

A pair of deep ruts left by the iron wheels of heavy wagons tells you this is the Oregon Trail. You turn around, your attention drawn by the smell of smoke. There's a grass fire in back of you!

A lone deer, brown eyes wide with fear, leaps out of the wall of smoke and bounds past you. You'll have to run, too.

You turn and sprint away from the racing prairie fire. Heat from the flames hits your shoulders and back. Acrid smoke fills your nostrils.

Then, as the breeze shifts, you're suddenly surrounded by billowing clouds of smoke. Flames crackle at your feet, and now your clothes are so hot that they burn your skin.

You dash one way, then another. You find a patch of dried grass, but the fire quickly eats away at it. You're trapped. Your face feels as if it's on fire. Tears roll from your eyes, and the bitter smoke engulfs you.

You're about to jump away from here when you hear a man's voice. The voice comes from far away, but you answer with a shout. The reply is louder. "Over here!"

You turn in that direction. Through the smoky haze you see a strange sight. In the middle of this prairie, a man is sitting on top of a tall pole.

You burst through the smoke and jump over the racing flames. Heat comes through your clothes, and for a moment you think you won't make it through the wall of fire.

"Over here!"

You look in the direction of the shout. Your eyes have not deceived you. A man *is* sitting on a pole, and he waves at you.

"You all right?"

You wave back and run toward him.

"That was a close one!" he exclaims, climbing down from the pole to greet you. Holding out his hand, he says, "I wouldn't have seen you if I hadn't been stringing wire."

"Stringing wire?" you ask. You look up at the pole and see a glass insulator and loop of wire. The line runs to another pole thirty yards away, and another beyond that one. A wagon loaded with poles is there. You see two other men with the wagon, both armed with rifles.

"We're putting up a telegraph line," the man says. "Sioux Indians started that grass fire. They don't like the idea of a wire and poles going through their hunting grounds. We're lucky the breeze changed directions when it did. So are you!"

Arrows whiz overhead, and gunfire comes from behind the wagon. The two men there duck down and start shooting.

"Come on!" the telegraph crewman says. "Run for it!"

The gunfire is deafening, mixed with shouts and war whoops, and soon the air is filled with smoke again. The crewman becomes a ghostly figure sprinting for the wagon. You realize the Indians moved upwind and started another fire.

You lose sight of the crewman. Moments later you hear the sounds of a team of horses whipped to a run. The sound fades, away, and the shooting stops.

The danger now is not so much from this smaller fire, but from being discovered by the warriors. That war whoop was terrifying, and you'll never forget the sight of arrows zipping through the air.

You run blindly, trying to put as much distance between you and the Indians as possible. The ground drops away from under you, and



you run into a small valley with a creek meandering through the bottom. With the billowing smoke behind you, you stop and take a deep breath of fresh air. You wonder if you should stay here to find out more about the Oregon Trail, or jump in time to learn the effect of the telegraph on future communications.



Stay here. **Click here.**



Jump ahead in time to learn more about the telegraph. **Click here.**



Remembering how Hank Avis acted when you met Sioux hunters on the Pony Express route near the Horseshoe station, you raise your right hand in a gesture of peace and speak cheerfully to them. It worked with Hank; you hope it works for you too!

“How are you folks today?” you say, smiling. “Nice weather we’re having, isn’t it?”

The women and children of the tribe stare at you in silence for a long moment. Then they begin talking to one another and gesturing toward you. It seems that they are discussing what to do with you!

A square-faced woman in a buckskin dress steps forward and gestures for you to follow as she turns and leads the others to the far side of the encampment.

In the dried grass beyond the tepees you see a pair of footpaths. The paths are about fifty yards long, side by side in straight lines. The woman utters a brief command. Boys and girls of the tribe form two lines and line up behind the footpaths.

At a second command from her, an Indian boy and girl at the front of the lines race one another to the end and back again. Then the second pair takes off, running hard. You watch as the winners return to the back of the line. The losers drop out and move to the side of the paths, where they cheer on the runners.

You understand what is happening. Only the strongest and fastest runner will be left when the competition is finished.

Soon only one boy and one girl remain. With a barked command from the stern woman, they leap away from the starting line. You see



that the boy is ahead as the runners turn and come back. Cheers rise up from the women and children beside the paths, and the girl puts on a burst of speed. For several seconds the two run neck and neck, faces straining with their efforts. When they cross the finish line, the girl is half a step ahead of the boy. After the girl is given a chance to rest, she returns to the starting line. The square-faced woman turns and points to you. She gestures toward the other footpath.

You are caught by surprise. The woman is obviously telling you to move up to the footpath beside the girl. The Indians expect you to race their best runner.

The woman impatiently repeats her gesture, this time speaking harshly to you. You move toward the starting line. You are not prepared for a race, but you'll have to do your best. You wonder what will happen if you lose—or if you win!

You pull off your boots and step up to the line. The woman quickly barks out a command, and the girl at your side leaps away, bursting into her long-legged stride.

You run after her, wishing now that you had taken a few minutes to warm up.

But you do have one advantage. You are rested, and the girl has just run a marathon of foot races.

You see the girl reach the end of the footpath. She turns, and in the moment when she passes by, you see the strain of this race on her face.

You make the turn quickly and run back toward the finish line.

You start to gain on the girl. Cheering from the sidelines echoes in your ears. Ten yards behind now, you try to kick out your stride to close the distance. The smooth stride of the Sioux girl falters.

With the finish line rapidly approaching, you move up behind her. Two paces. One pace. Then you are running even with her. Both of you leap across the finish line.

You slow down and then stop, breathing deeply and bending down to brace your hands on your knees. You couldn't tell who won. Back in your time period, this race would have been a photo finish. You know one thing. If that Sioux girl had been rested, she'd have won that race. She's fast!

When you've caught your breath, you straighten up and look around. The women and children have left. You turn and see them hurrying to the other end of the camp. You pull on your boots and slowly follow.

You see two men riding double on an Indian pony. When they reach the edge of the camp, the second man dismounts. He walks straight to the pony you rode into camp and carefully checks the animal over. Then he looks at you. The other members of the tribe follow him when he comes toward you.

You hold your ground and smile, remembering once again how Hank Avis acted when you encountered a band of Sioux hunters on the Pony Express route.

"Howdy," you say. "How's the hunting this fall?" None of the Indians understand a word you're saying, but your manner and tone of voice are what counts. At least you hope so.

The leader stops a few feet away from you. The others gather around. All of them stare at you soberly.

You introduce yourself, still smiling. "Nice weather we're having these days, isn't it?"

Still no reaction. One advantage Hank Avis had when he talked his way past the Sioux hunting party was that the horse he rode did not belong to the Indians. Horses are important to these Plains tribes.

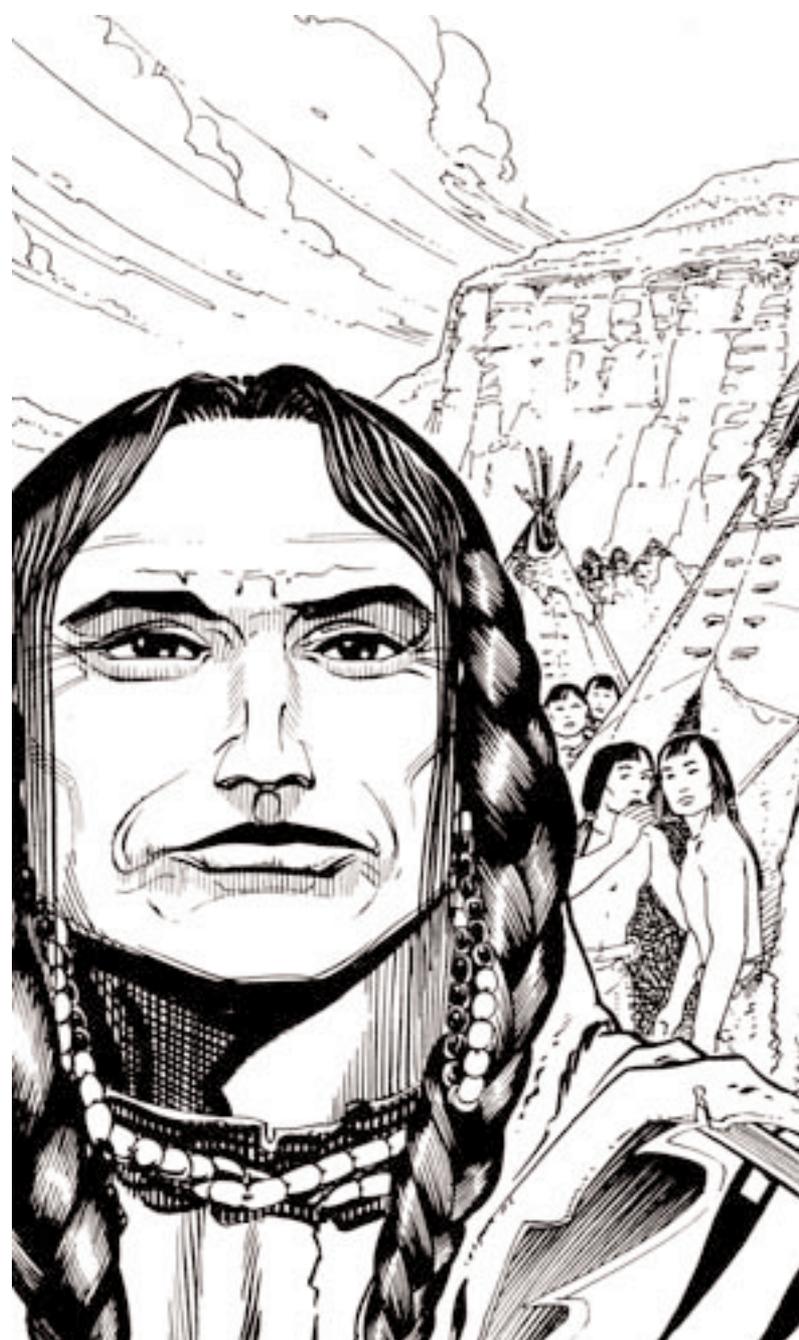
You are taken to a tepee and shoved inside. The flap is closed behind you. This tepee smells of leather and smoke. It's empty except for a furry hide on the ground. You hear chatter and laughing outside, but no one can see you in here. Time to jump out of here.



Jump ahead in time. [Click here.](#)



Stay on the Oregon Trail. [Click here.](#)





Outside a telegraph office on Pennsylvania Avenue you see a familiar figure. As you cross the wide street, this man sees you. He looks surprised and puts his hands on his hips.

“You again,” Rufus Haynes says. “Another coincidence, I suppose?” He moves to the doorway and peers through the window of the telegraph office. “Soon as the wire is clear, I’m sending a war story to the *Courier*.”

“War story?” you say.

“Haven’t you heard?” he asks, turning to look at you. “There was a battle at Bull Run today. It’s the biggest story since the rebs fired on Fort Sumter—maybe bigger. From what I hear, the Union troops took a thrashing.”

“I’ve been doing a few other things,” you say. “And I’ve still got a few questions about the Pony Express and William H. Russell.”

“Questions,” he says. “Is that all you ever do— ask questions? The famous Mr. Russell is lucky to be out of jail. He’s a ruined man.”

“What happened?” you ask.

“Turns out he financed the Pony Express on illegal government vouchers from the Secretary of War, John Floyd,” Haynes says.

“But isn’t the Pony Express still in operation?” you ask.

“Yes,” says Haynes, “because the federal government needs it. Another man was appointed to run the Pony Express under a government contract. The Butterfield Overland Stage Company is using the new route.”



So now the Pony Express is fully supported by the government. It has not been stopped by bad weather, hostile Indians, civil war, or Russell's bankruptcy. Your question is still unanswered.

As soon as you can slip away, you'll go out West again. This telegraph office has given you an idea.



Jump to Utah. [Click here.](#)



Jump back to the prairie. [Click here.](#)



It's early on Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and you're in Denver, Colorado. A woman comes down the empty street and hurries past you into an office. She is in tears. The sign on the glass door of the office reads Western Union Telegraph.

You look in and see that the telegrapher is asleep at his desk. He jumps up when the woman cries out, "Pearl Harbor has been bombed!"

You listen as she goes on. "I want to send an urgent message to the Navy Yards in San Francisco. My husband is stationed there. I have to see him before he goes off to war. The telephone lines are jammed. Can you get a message through?"

"Yes, ma'am," the telegrapher says, reaching for the telegraph key on his desk. You notice the key is connected to an electrical wire. As the woman gives her message to him, the telegrapher taps it out in Morse code.

That's a quick way to send an important message. You remember seeing the telegraph wire crew working on the high plains of Wyoming back in 1860. You can jump back there and find out more about them, or you can jump back to Fort Laramie. You still have more to learn about the Pony Express.



Jump back to Fort Laramie. [Click here.](#)



**Jump back 80 years to Wyoming.
[Click here.](#)**





Walking along the prairie, you see twelve or fifteen ponies ahead. These are Indian horses, all hobbled to prevent them from running away. No guards are here. The ponies can't go far, but with the smell of smoke in the air from the grass fire, they are restless. They keep trying to get away from you.

You finally catch one by grabbing his Indian bridle—a single rein of braided horsehair tied to the animal's jaw. Holding the rein, you bend down and untie the hobbles.

Freed, the pony tries to run, but you grab his mane with your other hand and throw a leg over his back. Riding bareback isn't easy, and when the pony bucks, you're nearly thrown. But you hang onto a handful of mane and pull back on the rein.

The pony is well trained. He comes to a quick halt. You soon discover that you can turn him by nudging him with either knee, and a light tap of your heels makes him run at a fast canter. Another tap, and he'll run like the wind.

You ride out of the shallow valley and look for the wagon of the telegraph crew. It is nowhere to be seen from here, and neither are the wheel ruts of the Oregon Trail. You're lost!

Suddenly the pony tosses his head and gallops up a hillside. You try to rein him in, but he fights and prances to the crest of the hill. When you look down into the next valley, you understand why the pony is acting this way. He wants to go home!

The wide valley is lined with tepees. This is probably an autumn hunting camp of the Sioux. No telling if this tribe is friendly. The band you and Hank Avis met weren't hostile. But many of these

Indians have been setting grass fires, unhappy that their lands are being invaded by outsiders.

Better get out of here, you think, before you are seen on this hilltop. You pull back on the rein and nudge the pony with your knee. But this pony has other ideas. Instead of turning back, he breaks into a full gallop and heads for the Sioux encampment.

You pull back on the reins with all your strength, but the pony simply runs at full speed while fighting the bridle. Ahead you hear shouts and a chorus of barking dogs. You look up to see everyone in the village gathering to meet you.

You lean forward and swing a leg over the pony's back. You let go of the rein and roll, falling to the ground, and come to rest against a clump of sagebrush. The wind is knocked out of you, but you're all right. You hear the shouts of the Indians running toward you.



Stay here. [Click here.](#)



Jump ahead in time. [Click here.](#)



You're back in Wyoming in 1861. You walk along the bank of the creek, seeing trout dart into the shadowed water near the edge. Ahead you see a sturdy cabin and horse barn. In the corral are several handsome saddle horses. That's a Pony Express relay station, all right.

As you approach, the cabin door opens. A woman steps outside and shakes out a tablecloth. Something about her looks familiar. You walk faster and then wave frantically. "Cora!" you yell. "Cora Hawkins!"

She lowers the white tablecloth and looks at you. Then her eyes widen in amazement. She lets out a shout and runs across the yard toward you, grabbing you in a big hug. When she lets go, you both ask the same question at the same time: "What're you doing here?"

You both laugh. "You tell me first," she says.

"No, you go first," you say.

She takes a deep breath. "Well, we had to leave Texas."

"Why?" you ask.

"Where have you been?" she asks. "Texas joined the Confederacy, and they cut off the southern route to California. Soon Butterfield stagecoaches will use this central route. Sam and I are keeping this Pony Express relay station open, but when the wagons roll, life will be busy around here."

That's good news for Cora, but bad for William H. Russell. He has lost out to his competitor. To find out what's happening back east, you'll have to travel to Washington, D.C.

After a bath and one of Cora's meals, you say good-bye and slip out back.



Jump to Washington, D.C. [Click here.](#)



The line of telegraph poles runs past the Pony Express relay station operated by Cora and Sam Hawkins. In the corral you see stout horses like the ones used to pull stage-coaches—not the fleet, slender horses owned by the Pony Express.

The weather now is different, too. The sky is gray with clouds. A cold wind blows out of the north. You hunch your shoulders and walk hurriedly to the house.

Your knock on the door is answered by Cora. Her face brightens with delight. “I never will get used to the way you appear out of nowhere!” she says. “Come in out of the cold.”

The interior of this small house is plain, with bare plank walls, the same table and benches you saw in her desert way station, and a large black cookstove on the far wall. Now that stove is sending off heat. You welcome the warmth and rub your hands together in front of the stove.

“Sam’s out in the barn with the horses,” she says, “but he’ll be in for dinner soon. Are you just passing through, or can you stay a spell?”

“I’m passing through,” you say, “but I wanted to see you before I left.”

Cora smiles. “That makes me happy.” She adds, “I need something to be happy about.”

“What do you mean?” you ask.

She opens a door to a back room and shows you a small desk with a telegrapher’s key on it. “We receive and send messages for homesteaders out here. Folks are getting news of the war back east,

and it's mighty sad. Americans are fighting Americans."

From outside comes a shout. You recognize Sam's voice. "Cora! Cora, we've got trouble out here!"

You follow as she rushes to the door and flings it open. The yard is filled with Indians. A whole tribe of Sioux men, women, and children are gathered here—fifty or sixty of them. Some are mounted on horseback, but most of the spotted ponies are used to pull travois loaded with their possessions.

The Indians on foot are wrapped in blankets and animal hides to ward off the cold. Several of the men hold rifles in the crooks of their arms. They are staring at Sam.

Sam is wild-eyed with fear. In his hands is a shotgun, and he holds it shakily. "You savages get out of here," he says.

You step out of the house. You recognize a horse and rider—the chocolate-brown pony with a white head and rump. You raise your hand to the rider who turns toward you.

Cora calls out for you to come back into the house. Sam does the same.

"If there's going to be shooting here," he says, "let me handle it!"

"I don't want any shooting," you say. "I'll try to find out why they're here." You raise your hand to the Sioux leader and smile. "Howdy! We meet again."

He is startled by your presence. His expression slowly changes, and he smiles. You have shown bravery by facing the whole tribe and have earned his respect.

"Going south for the winter?" you ask, pointing in that direction.

He nods. Then he turns and gestures to the ponies. You see that they are thin and tired, heads drooping. This time of year the grazing land is sparse, made worse by the prairie fires.

You turn to Sam. "Put the gun down. These Indians need help."

Sam is still obviously frightened. His hands shake and his eyes are stretched wide open. But he lowers the shotgun.

"Do you have any extra grain for their ponies?" you ask.

"Well, I reckon I do," he says slowly. "Is that all they want? I thought they were here to scalp us."

“Their horses need to eat,” you say, “so they can travel to their winter range.”

“I’ll be durned,” Sam says, grinning. “Say, I’ve got fifteen or twenty sacks of oats left over from the Pony Express horses. They can have it all.” He turns and goes into the barn.

Among the Indians you see a pair of familiar faces. One is the square-faced woman who first met you when you came into the Sioux encampment. She looks at you now without showing any sign of recognition.

The other face belongs to the girl you raced against. She smiles at you.

The Sioux are proud people, but they welcome the gift of these burlap sacks filled with grain. Now they will be able to travel to their winter hunting grounds.

After the tribe has left, Cora says to you, “You helped us out again. Funny how you have a way of showing up when we need a hand.”

You smile at her as you return to the warmth of the house.

“Sam,” she calls over her shoulder, “come in for dinner!”

Sitting down at the long table with Cora and Sam reminds you of the first time you met them in the remote desert way station. They always ate just before the noon stagecoach rolled in. When the hungry passengers arrived, the house smelled of freshly cooked food. That was how Cora, with a smile and a joke, liked to welcome her guests.

“You’ve got a faraway look in your eye,” Cora says to you as you take a bite of apple pie.

“I was thinking about the first time we met,” you say.

“I remember that well,” she says. She glances at Sam. “He was hurt, and we were both worried that Butterfield would go out of business and leave us without a job.”

“Instead, we were transferred up here,” Sam says. “Best thing that ever happened to us. This is fine country, and with your help today I believe we’ll get along with the Sioux. We’re neighbors with those Indians and with new settlers building homesteads in these



۲۴۰
بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



parts. The West is changing fast.”

“Too fast, I reckon,” Cora says.

“Now, Cora,” Sam says, “you can’t stop progress.”

“I know,” she replies. “But sometimes I get a feeling that time is passing by too fast. Ever get that feeling?”

You nod. As a time traveler, you sure do!

“Machines are taking over for human beings,” Cora says. “Take the telegraph—”

Sounds of hoofbeats and clinking harness chains brings Sam to his feet. He heads for the door.

“You take the telegraph,” he says to her with a grin. “I’ve got a stagecoach to take care of.”

You go outside and help Sam with the team. The tired horses are unhitched and herded into the corral, and fresh horses are put into harness. After the passengers have eaten Cora’s noontime meal, they climb back into the stagecoach.

You see Sam toss a gray canvas bag up to the driver. He drops a similar one down to Sam. The black stenciled letters on the bag read U.S. Mail.

With a shout and a snap of the whip from the driver, the stagecoach rolls away, headed east. Cora stands at the open doorway of the station and waves good-bye.

Now you realize what Cora was talking about when the stagecoach came in. “Mail from the local homesteaders travels by stagecoach now.”

Cora nods. “Those letters to relatives are the lifeblood of the pioneers out here. News from home, even when it’s war news, is eagerly awaited by our neighbors.”

“But if anyone needs an urgent message,” you say, “the telegraph is used. That’s why the Pony Express went out of business. No one on horseback can keep up with the telegraph!”

“That’s right,” Cora says. “And that’s what I meant when I said machines are taking over for human beings. When the mail was carried across the West by riders, the whole nation cheered them on. The whole nation worried about those young riders during winter

storms or when Indians were hostile. People all over the world were fascinated by the Pony Express.”

She points to the line of telegraph poles that carry the wire across the continent now. “Nobody worries about that wire.”

Sam says, “It’s a modern miracle.”

“So was the Pony Express,” Cora says with a smile touched by sadness.

You agree with Cora. For eighteen months in 1860 and 1861 the Pony Express provided a link of communication across the West. Day and night the relay riders carried mail to people who had no other means of communicating with loved ones. That was a part of the development of the West that would never be forgotten, a brief period of history when a man named William H. Russell saw his dream come true.

“There will be other miracles to come,” you say.

Cora turns to look at you. “Sometimes you act as if you know what’s in the future, the way you have of showing up at just the right moment.”

“See into the future?” Sam says with a smile. “Now, that’s funny, Cora. Very funny.”

You laugh out loud, and after a moment so does Cora.

If only you could tell her how close to the truth she is!

MISSION COMPLETED.

DATA FILE

- Page 6:** Is Big Nose Phil a reliable informant?
- Page 10:** Will the Butterfield Company want to talk about Russell?
- Page 18:** The action is on the Trail, but Russell may have friends in high places.
- Page 31:** What would the Wyoming Kid do?
- Page 38:** Will Boston have the information you want?
- Page 41:** A slim chance, or a capital idea?
- Page 45:** Is Fort Laramie an important way station?
- Page 50:** What's at the Horseshoe station?
- Page 60:** Do you think it is a mirage?
- Page 73:** What can the telegraph do?
- Page 83:** What more can you learn at Fort Laramie?

About the Contributors

STEPHEN OVERHOLSER's first novel, *A Hanging in Sweetwater*, won the Western Writers of America's Spur Award of 1974. Since then he has written nine novels and numerous short stories. His recent books include a Bantam Books series featuring the heroine Molly Owens, set in the intermountain West of the 1890s. He lives in Boulder, Colorado, with his wife and son.

STEVE LEIALOHA, illustrator, spends most of his time writing, drawing, and inking comic books, with occasional forays into advertising, film production, and book illustration. He is a native of San Francisco, where he lives in a Victorian house with several artists.