MYSTERY AT CATTLE SKULL CROSSING

THE STORY

Major Dan Dupont was with General Sherman in his march to the sea. The Major considered this one of the high points of his life. He had official permission to loot and destroy whatever he wanted and the Major managed to confiscate several valuable articles during the march. He sent these up North to his home with wounded men who were being evacuated. Many men were willing to carry things back to safety for him, if he would make sure that they got on the wagon train going back home. If he did not get word in a month that the items had arrived safely, he simply declared the soldier a deserter and the man was then arrested and jailed, or shot as the Major saw fit.

Dupont had moved to Cattle Skull 4 years after the war, and using his funds from the sale of many of the liberated Southern items, had started up the bank. Dupont was quite proud of his Civil War record and kept his saber hanging on the wall of his office. He was quite careful to keep things honest and slowly grew in power and wealth. He is now one of the leading citizens of the area, and most of the town folks ignore the rumblings from the little farmers and ranchers about unfair rates and terms for loans.

The Major wanted to become a State Senator, so he wants to move in loftier circles. He realizes that he would need real money to play in those circles. He is well to do, but not rich.

Two years ago, he fell in love with Stella Hooper, daughter of Harv Hooper. In a short sighted move, he had foreclosed on the Hooper Ranch, thinking that Stella would marry him to save the ranch. Harv not only would not hear of it, but threatened to kill the Major if he ever tried to marry Stella.

There were some questions about the terms of the loan on the Hooper Ranch, but Harv had tragically been killed in a fall from his horse in a rock slide within a month of losing the ranch. To the surprise of all, Stella moved to town and went to work for the bank.

The Hooper Ranch was the second ranch in as many years to be foreclosed on by Dupont. The other was also a small ranch and very marginal in its operations. Dupont would like to get his hands on the Lazy J but was very careful. Widow Hoskins ran a crew that included six Texans that had accounted for 23 "scalps" in past disagreements. They weren't known for their patience with skull duggery, and the fact that they weren't welcome back in Texas spoke volumes for their character.

Three weeks ago, the Major's stately manor on the hill overlooking town, caught fire and burned to the ground. The Major's hound must have interrupted the thieves as the dog's body was found shot in the front yard.

Wednesday Dupont's body was found at the mouth of an old abandoned and worthless mine. He had been shot in the back.

Which of the mean minded, buzzard breath, slimy snakes in this gathering killed poor old Dan Dupont.

We must resolve that question while the tombstone carver engraves Dan's epitaph: "WREST FROM THIS MORTAL LIFE TO RETURN TO HIS MAKER, THERE TO SERVE MANKIND IN OTHER WAYS."