

CREEPERS

Mysteries



HAUNTED CATTLE DRIVE

Connie Kingrey Anderson

Dedication

For Ebenezer Stump,
who appears and disappears
at just the right times...



CREEPERS® Mysteries

Haunted Cattle Drive

THE BOOK



Haunted Cattle Drive—The Book

Turn the lights down low, and crank the fun up high!

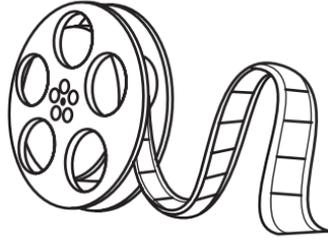
Read it with a flashlight, if you dare!

Chapter 1	Road to Smokey Joe's Ranch	13
Chapter 2	The Disappearing Cowboy	16
Chapter 3	The Beadiest Eyes in the West	18
Chapter 4	Wanted Poster and Stolen Money ..	24
Chapter 5	Cattle Drive	29
Chapter 6	Silver Dollar Dan & the Phantom ..	32
Chapter 7	What's Outside the Tent?	38
Chapter 8	Double Cross	42
Chapter 9	Found and Lost	47
Chapter 10	End of the Trail	50

CREEPERS® Mysteries

Haunted Cattle Drive

MOVIE FOR THE EAR SCRIPT



Create Your Own Movie for the Ear	54
Cast & Crew List	61
Haunted Cattle Drive – Movie for the Ear Script .	63
Sneak Preview of <i>Toadies</i>	99
Before You Go	107
About Ebenezer Stump	109
About the Author	111

CREEPERS® Mysteries



Haunted Cattle Drive

The Book

By Connie Kingrey Anderson

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Movies for the Ear®



Chapter 3

The Beadiest Eyes in the West

It was a long, lonely road out to Smokey Joe's Ranch. The wind whistled through the bluffs, and tumbleweeds skittered across the deserted road.

All three kids dozed in their bus seats, using their jackets as pillows. Only Smokey Joe was awake to see the day drift into a cold, pitch black night. He struggled to see the bumpy dirt road in front of him, but it was almost impossible. The crooked bus headlights snaked their way through the darkness, lighting only odd patches here and there.

Suddenly, out of the darkness there was a sound of metal clinking against metal. It started in the distance and gradually moved closer. Harry heard it first and

opened one eye. Then he opened both eyes and looked around the bus. It was strange to hear something, but not be able to see it.

He listened just a little longer before he poked his elbow into his sister's side. "Gillian, wake up."

She ignored him, turned over, and punched up the jacket under her head.

"Gillian, listen! Listen to that sound!" He shook her shoulder.

"Wha...wha...what are you talking about?" she reluctantly opened her eyes. But it didn't really matter since everything was dark. "Why did you wake me up, Harry? I'm tired."

"Shhh...listen." They were both quiet and the sound of metal clinking against metal filled the bus.

"What is that?" Gillian whispered, suddenly alert.

"I don't know," he said. "Is it Arvin?"

"She squinted at Arvin who was lying across two seats, snoring like a buzz saw. "No, he's asleep."

Harry looked toward the hazy headlights at the front of the bus. "Maybe it's Smokey Joe..."

"No, he's sitting in one place," Gillian said. "And the sound is moving. It's getting closer."

"You're right. It almost sounds like...like someone tossing coins!"

"But where's it coming from?" Gillian turned toward the sound, then turned again, and again. "It keeps changing direction!"

“I don’t know. It’s so dark I can’t see a thing.”

“I don’t understand,” Gillian said in a low voice.

“We’re the only ones on this bus.”

“Except for that cowboy.”

“There’s no cowboy, Harry!”

“Well somebody’s making that noise,” Harry whispered. “And whoever it is...”

“...is getting closer,” Gillian said.

The clanking of coins became louder and faster. Suddenly, it was right behind Gillian’s head! She jumped out of her seat in a panic. She waved her hands as if batting away flies. “It’s around my head! The sound is in my hair! This is creepy, Harry! I’m scared!”

“Aaahh!” Smokey Joe hollered. “Get outta the way!”

The brakes screeched, and Smokey Joe lost control of the bus. It skidded, then landed in a ditch.

“Aaahh!” Gillian screamed. “There’s a face in the windshield!”

Harry jumped up—he couldn’t believe what he was seeing! “Man alive!”

“No, he’s not. Look!” Gillian pointed.

“It’s just a face,” Harry stared in amazement, “and it’s floating!”

It was a Prospector from the old Gold Rush days. He had black hair, a black hat and a big toothless grin. The Prospector laughed an eerie, other-worldly laugh, and chanted, “Dead Man Jack, never look back. Dead Man Jack, never look back.” Then he laughed again.

Suddenly, the Cowboy with the Silver Tooth appeared—the one Harry had seen earlier. The Cowboy slowly slithered up from behind the last seat in the bus. He pushed up the brim of his silver hat and squinted at the Prospector.

Then the Cowboy walked down the aisle of the bus, his spurs jingling with every step. He planted his boots squarely in front of the windshield. “Why you no count, good for nothin’, silver mining thief... I’ll teach you to go prospecting in my saddlebags!”

The Prospector laughed, “You think you can take me, you double-crossing snake? Eyeball to eyeball?”

“Eyeball to eyeball,” the Cowboy growled. I’ll stare you down if it’s the last thing I do.” He fixed his eyes on the Prospector and blasted him with an angry stare.

The Prospector let out a cackling laugh. “You forget, I’ve got the beadiest eyes in the West.” The Prospector glared back at the Cowboy with eyes so hot they almost sizzled. The Cowboy became weak and drenched in sweat.

The Cowboy snarled, gasping for air, “I’ll get you, you stinkin’ Prospector, you low down lizard.” The Cowboy struggled to pull a small box of matches from his pocket. He lit one match and held it in front of his shiny silver tooth.

The light ricocheted off the silver tooth and shot toward the windshield. The beam blasted away the Prospector’s floating face. “Aaahh!”

When the Cowboy blew out the match, the Prospector was gone.

Harry turned to Gillian. "Did you see that?"

"Wh...What was it?" she stammered.

"I think it was a...a..."

"...a slight delay," Smokey Joe turned over the bus engine. "Just a slight delay. Are you kids alright? I had a sudden turn there. But we'll be on our way again in no time."

"Smokey Joe, who was that in the window?" Harry asked.

"Who? You mean what. A big old tumbleweed was what it was, Harry. Rolled smack across the windshield."

"No, it was a toothless old Prospector," Harry insisted. "He had black hair and a black hat."

"And his face was floating!" Gillian exclaimed.

Smokey Joe shook his head. "Now, you kids are lettin' your imaginations run away with you, like a couple of broncos that ain't been broke yet."

Harry jabbed a finger at the windshield. "That face said 'Dead Man Jack, never look back.'"

"Dead Man Jack?" Smokey Joe thought for a moment. "You must have been dreaming about those WANTED POSTERS over there on the front seat. There it is, right on the top."

Harry picked up the top poster from the pile and examined it. "Hey Gillian, look at this." He read,

“Wanted: Dead Man Jack. Notorious train robber, bank robber and stage coach robber. Bounty hunters welcome.”

Gillian nodded. “That’s the guy alright.”

Smokey Joe took off his cowboy hat and ran his hand over his ghostly white forehead. “You kids forget that the poster is over 100 years old.”

Harry was beginning to understand. “So the guy we saw is...”

“Dead. Dead as a doornail.”

Gillian looked at the windshield. “So that floating face was...a ghost?”

The bus came to a sudden stop. The old engine spit and hissed, and finally went quiet.

“Last stop—Smokey Joe’s Ranch!” Smokey Joe called out in his best tour guide tenor. Then he nodded toward Arvin who was still fast asleep. “Harry, you ought to wake up Marvin there.”

“Hey Arvin.” Harry shook his shoulder. “Get up.”

“Huh?” Arvin yawned and sat up. “Did I miss anything?”

HARRY: In the last seat. He's got a silver hat, silver hair and silver tooth.

GILLIAN: There's nobody back there, Harry. Turn around.

HARRY: Hey! He's gone!

GILLIAN: There's no place to go on a moving bus.

HARRY: (spooked) But, he was there. How could he have disappeared into thin air?

ARVIN: (know-it-all) Thin air is common in high altitudes, Harry. There's less air getting to your brain.

GILLIAN: You should know airhead.

ACT I, SCENE 3

SFX: SQUEAKY BUS RATTLES, WIND WHISTLES, COYOTE HOWLS

EBENEZER: It's a long, lonely road out to Smokey Joe's Ranch. The wind whistles through the bluffs, and tumbleweeds skitter across the deserted road. The day drifts into a cold, pitch black night. The bus headlights snake their way through the darkness.

SFX: COINS CLINK against each other. The CLINKING starts in the distance, then gets closer and closer.

GILLIAN: (whispering) Harry, what's that?

HARRY: Is it Arvin?

GILLIAN: No, he's asleep.

HARRY: It sounds like someone tossing coins.

GILLIAN: But where's it coming from?

HARRY: I don't know.

GILLIAN: It's getting closer.

HARRY: It's so dark I can't see a thing.

GILLIAN: We're the only ones on the bus.

HARRY: Except for that cowboy.

GILLIAN: There's no cowboy, Harry!

HARRY: Maybe it's Smokey Joe...

GILLIAN: No, he's driving the bus.

HARRY: Yeah, and the sound's getting closer...

GILLIAN: ...and closer. This is really creepy, Harry. I'm scared...

SFX: COIN TOSSING increases in speed and volume.

SMOKEY JOE: (hollering) AAAHH! Get outta the way!

SFX: BUS BRAKES SCREECH. BUS CLUNKS to a stop.

EBENEZER: Smokey Joe loses control of the bus. It skids, and then lands in a ditch.

GILLIAN: Aaahh! There's a face in the windshield!

HARRY: Man alive!

GILLIAN: (frightened) No, he's not. Look!

HARRY: It's just a face—and it's floating!

PROSPECTOR: (laughs) Dead Man Jack, never look back. Dead Man Jack, never look back. (laughs)

EBENEZER: It's a Prospector from the old Gold Rush days. He has black hair, a black hat and a big toothless grin.

Suddenly, the Cowboy with the Silver Tooth appears. He slowly slithers up from behind the last seat in the bus. He pushes up the brim of his silver hat and squints his eyes at the Prospector.

EBENEZER: The Cowboy slowly walks down the aisle of the bus, his spurs jingling with every step. He plants his boots squarely in front of the windshield.

SFX: Slow, heavy BOOT FOOTSTEPS with SPURS JINGLING.

COWBOY: Why you no count, good for nothin' silver mining thief...I'll teach you to go prospecting in my saddlebags!

PROSPECTOR: (laughter) You think you can take me, you double-crossing snake? Eyeball to eyeball?

COWBOY: Eyeball to eyeball. (growls) I'll stare you down if it's the last thing I do.

SFX: STARING SOUND EFFECT

PROSPECTOR: (laughter) You forget, I've got the beadiest eyes in the West.

SFX: COUNTER STARE

EBENEEZER: The Prospector glares back at the Cowboy with eyes so hot they almost sizzle. The Cowboy becomes weak and drenched in sweat.

COWBOY: (snarling, gasping for air) I'll get you, you stinkin' Prospector, you low down lizard...

EBENEEZER: The Cowboy struggles to pull a small box of matches from his pocket. He strikes one match and holds it in front of his shiny silver tooth.

SFX: MATCH STRIKING, then RICOCHET SOUNDS.

EBENEEZER: The light ricochets off the silver tooth and shoots toward the windshield. The beam *blasts* away at the Prospector's floating face.

SFX: BLAST!

PROSPECTOR: Aaahh!!

EBENEEZER: When the Cowboy blows out the match...

SFX: DISAPPEARING STING

EBENEEZER: ...the Prospector is gone.

HARRY: Did you see that?

GILLIAN: (scared) What was it?

HARRY: (scared) I think it was a...a...

SFX: BUS ENGINE TURNS OVER

SMOKEY JOE: ...A slight delay. Just a slight delay. Are you kids alright? I had a sudden turn there. But we'll be on our way again in no time.

HARRY: Smokey Joe, who was that in the window?

SMOKEY JOE: *Who?* You mean *what*. A big old tumbleweed was what it was, Harry. Rolled smack across the windshield.

HARRY: No, it was a toothless old Prospector. He had black hair and a black hat.

GILLIAN: And his face was floating!

SMOKEY JOE: Now, you kids are lettin' your imaginations run away with you like a couple of broncos that ain't been broke yet.

HARRY: He said "Dead Man Jack, never look back."

SMOKEY JOE: Dead Man Jack? Oh, you must have been dreaming about those WANTED POSTERS over there on the front seat. There it is, right on the top.

SFX: PAPER RUSTLING

HARRY: Hey, Gillian, look at this poster. (reading) Wanted: Dead Man Jack. Notorious train robber, bank robber and stage coach robber. Bounty Hunters Welcome.

GILLIAN: That's the guy alright.

SMOKEY JOE: You kids forget that the poster is over 100 years old.

HARRY: So the guy we saw is....

SMOKEY JOE: Dead. Dead as a doornail.

GILLIAN: So that floating face was...a ghost?

SFX: BUS comes to a stop. ENGINE is switched off.

SMOKEY JOE: Last stop—Smokey Joe’s Ranch. Harry, you ought to wake up Marvin there.

HARRY: Hey, Arvin.

ARVIN: (yawning) Did I miss anything?

ACT II, SCENE 1

SFX: ROOSTER CROWS. BACON SIZZLES.

EBENEZER: The next morning, Harry, Gillian and Arvin wake up to the delicious smell of flapjacks and bacon.

SMOKEY JOE: (shouting) Rise and shine! Chow’s on! Come and get it!

SFX: DOOR OPENING

HARRY: Morning, Smokey Joe.

GILLIAN: Morning.

SMOKEY JOE: Morning everybody. How did you greenhorns sleep last night in that old bunkhouse? I hope the coyotes didn’t keep you awake.

GILLIAN: Oh, no. I couldn’t close my eyes because...