

THE FEUD

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Staked Plain, Northern Marches, 1291H/1874M

The caravan stretched far into the distance both before and behind, a single file of camels, horses and mules snaking across the featureless prairie. Ramón Gómez had paid well for this spot in the middle of the caravan, relatively safe from the Natives, Bedouins, and plain old bandits—Christians and Muslims alike—who tended to pick off caravans' trailing elements when they couldn't find lone travelers to rob.

For the hundredth time, Ramón scanned the horizon for any sign of danger. He saw nothing—no smoke, no dust clouds, no riders—but even here on the staked plains, where the flat expanse of short grass seemed to go on forever without a tree or hill to break the monotony, there were always low buttes and hidden river beds that might provide cover for a few dozen raiders. The Natives here were Comanches, the fiercest warriors of the plains, and the Bedouins were cattle-herding Baqqarah, well-mounted and well-armed, making this the most dangerous stretch of trail in the New World.

Of course the caravan had guards, a company of three dozen Moroccan spahis to protect the two hundred merchants and their thousand beasts of burden, and it relied on a motley band of Native and Muslim scouts to pick out the safest routes and advise the caravan master of any danger before it was upon them. Still, the scouts and guards could hardly protect the entire caravan at all times, so Ramón preferred to trust in his own resources.

Besides his Santa Barbara model repeating rifle, which he kept in a scabbard hanging from his saddle, Ramón wore a pair of Turkish revolvers on his belt. If the warriors or bandits were numerous enough, he'd succumb eventually, but he could at least make it cost them.

A hundred yards up ahead, two of the guards were riding side by side, conversing, when one peeled off and rode back, against the caravan's direction of travel.

"Spaniard!" he shouted when he was within earshot of Ramón. "The captain would speak with you."

"Let him come speak then," Ramón answered. "I have no servant to manage my animals, so I cannot leave them right now. If he can wait for nightfall, I will come find him in his tent."

"Do that," said the guard, and rode back to his post.

"Mierda." Ramón could guess what this was about.

‘Ain Jallut, Texas, 1273H/1856M

Rami had never seen anything like the army encamped on the south Texas plains. He had fought in a few expeditions against the Apaches in his native New Mexico, but these had been small-scale affairs, involving only a few hundred Andalusian horsemen, traveling light.

The army assembled for the grand jihad numbered in the tens of thousands, and it was not just Andalusians, but also Moroccans and other Maghrebis from Guatemala and the islands, and Mandinkas and Songhais from the southern continent. There was even a contingent of Muslim Peruvians from the Caliphate of Cuzco, and a few hundred volunteers of all colors, sects and tongues from Europe and Africa.

As always, the main Andalusian host from central Mexico was mostly infantry, as were the foreign mujaheddin who had traveled by ship. Most of the Emir’s cavalry was made up of Bedouins and nominally Muslim Natives, all of whom fought for plunder alone and were unlikely to stick with the campaign all the way to the Mississippi.

Rami’s battalion, the New Mexico Lancers, consisted of three hundred trained and equipped horsemen—on paper. In reality, half of the men were raw recruits and many were without mounts.

“Al-hamdulillah, some scouts captured a whole herd of wild mustangs,” Rami’s captain told him, “and our wise Emir has seen fit to allot a hundred of them to our battalion. I need you to take your platoon to the corral to retrieve them. Go armed.”

“Are we expecting resistance within our own camp?” asked Rami.

“It’s the Ouled Tariq’s corral.”

The Ouled Tariq were a Moroccan tribe that had been feuding with Rami’s own Banu Hamid clan since shortly after the conquest of Andalusia more than a thousand years earlier. To hear some tell it, their Qaysi and Yemeni ancestors had been at each other’s throats since the dark days before Islam.

“Fear not,” said Rami. “I’ll bring your horses.”

“Inshallah.”

It was a short ride to the Moroccan encampment, and Rami found the corral easily enough.

A young spahi answered his salam.

“I’ll have to clear it with the commander,” he said when he’d heard Rami’s purpose.

As Rami waited, he noticed a number of spahis approaching from various directions. As nonchalantly as he could manage, he gave the hand signal for his platoon to take up a defensive posture. His sergeants relayed the signal, and, without a word, the horsemen tightened up their spacing and pointed all their lances outward like a porcupine's quills.

A man appeared in the doorway of the guard shack, wearing the embroidered green caftan of a lieutenant of spahis. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"I am Rami ibn Jumu'ah ibn 'Abd-al-Qahhar of the Banu Hamid, Deputy Commander of the New Mexico Lancers. I am to take a hundred of these mustangs, by order of the Emir."

"Banu Hamid, you say? An 'Abd-al-Qahhar killed my great uncle at the siege of Tegucigalpa. Why would I give you dirty half-breed Syrians even one of our horses?"

Rami ignored the insult to his lineage. "As I said, Lieutenant..."

"Haydar ibn Farid ibn Murad."

"Lieutenant Ibn Farid. I come by order of the Emir of Mexico."

"Unfortunately for you, I don't serve the Emir of Mexico. My men and I answer only to the Viceroy of Panamá, and he answers only to the Sultan of Marrakech, so unless your orders come from the Caliph himself, they don't mean shit to me."

Some of the men bristled, but Rami raised a hand to calm them. Out of the corners of his eyes, he could see the spahis moving to flank his formation.

"If you want Ouled Tariq horses," Ibn Farid continued, "come try to take them."

Rami looked around him. He could only make out a handful of Ibn Farid's spahis to each side of his formation, but he was sure there were at least a few hundred Moroccans in this encampment. His own men were all battle-hardened veterans and would acquit themselves valiantly if pressed, but they would no doubt succumb if completely surrounded and outnumbered, as appeared to be the case. Not only that, but if the Moroccans killed dozens of Andalusians in pitched battle, the Emir would have to respond in kind. His forces were by far the strongest in the polyglot camp, and would surely teach the Ouled Tariq a lesson, but at what cost? Rami had no love for the Ouled Tariq, but their swords were needed in battle. Any shedding of blood among the Muslims would be a victory for the infidels.

There was only one thing to do.

"Any coward can pick a fight when he's got three hundred men to his opponent's fifty," Rami retorted. "I doubt a filthy Yemeni Moor like you would be man enough to face me alone."

“Dismount, then, and we’ll see who’s man enough,” countered Ibn Farid, drawing his saber. “I came here to kill Spaniards and I’m happy for you to be the first.”

Rami swung down from the saddle and drew his own saber, holding it aloft so his men could see it glisten in the Texas sun. “If I fall,” he shouted, “ride back to camp and tell the captain there were no mustangs to be had. If he falls”—he pointed his saber at Ibn Farid—“we will take a hundred mustangs as ordered, and these good spahis will do nothing to interfere. Agreed?”

Ibn Farid nodded his assent. The two swordsmen faced off at a distance of six feet or so and circled around each other, dodging and feinting as their men cheered them on.

Despite his bluster, Ibn Farid wasn’t much of a swordsman. Once Rami had tested his defenses, it was easy enough to press the attack. Soon, Ibn Farid’s back was against the fence and he was hard pressed to parry Rami’s powerful slashes.

He let his guard down for just a moment and Rami took advantage, lunging forward and delivering what might have been a killing blow. But at the last moment, he pulled back, thinking of the consequences of killing a Moroccan officer in his own camp. Instead of cutting through muscle and ribs, Rami sliced across the skin of Ibn Farid’s chest and forearm, deep enough to draw copious amounts of blood, but probably not to damage anything important.

Ibn Farid dropped his sword and pressed his hands to his wounds.

“Allahu akbar!” shouted the Andalusians almost in unison.

Some of the Moroccans were rushing to aid their wounded commander, while others were rounding up the mustangs under the direction of one of their sergeants. The fight itself had taken some three minutes, and within another five the horses were ready to go.

“Take the damned horses, Hamidi dog,” shouted Ibn Farid from the guardhouse where the surgeon was dressing his wounds, “but if we cross paths again it will be your death!”

Staked Plains, Northern Marches, 1291AH/1874M

Once the caravan was halted for the night and the tents arranged in a rough circle, Ramón hobbled his camels and went to look for the captain’s tent. As expected, it was in the center of the camp, next to the caravan master’s, where the captain could most easily reach his employer or respond

to an attack at any point on the perimeter.

There was no guard, so Ramón scratched on the tent flap the way Natives did when visiting one another's teepees.

"Come in!"

Ramón might not have recognized the voice, had he not had such a strong presentiment of who the captain would be.

When he'd joined the caravan at Cairo, it had been guarded by regular Mexican Emirate cavalry, but they had switched out in Wichita. As soon as he heard the new guards' Moroccan accents, Ramón had feared the worst. These were the same Ouled Tariq spahis from the Great Texas Jihad—the enlisted men would be their sons, rather, but some of the sergeants and officers would be veterans of that campaign, which had pushed the eastern frontier of Islam all the way to the Mississippi and given the Viceroyalty of Panama a sphere of influence at its mouth.

So he had tried to lay low, which had been the plan anyway considering the cargo entrusted to him, and to keep out of sight of the captain. He'd succeeded for more than two weeks, but now his luck had run out.

He steeled his resolve and pushed through the flap.

The interior of the tent was dim, since there was no fire inside as there would have been in a Native teepee. The only light came from a small oil lamp sitting on a collapsible table next to the captain's bedroll.

Still, there was no mistaking it. The man sitting across from Ramón, pistol in hand, was Haydar ibn Farid, of the Ouled Tariq.

"Come closer," said Ibn Farid, waving with the pistol.

Ramón still had his own weapons, as he had not been searched, but hadn't drawn them before entering. Anyone entering a tent with guns in hand was liable to be shot before he could even introduce himself.

"I thought I recognized you," said Ibn Farid when Ramón had moved into the light. "What's your name?"

"I am Ramón Gómez Alcázar, of Saint Augustine. I don't believe we have met, though I've been with the caravan since Cairo."

"Yet you look quite familiar. Tell me, what business does a Spaniard have in my caravan?"

"I've been trading for furs among the northern savages since spring, and I've heard the gold miners on the west coast are paying top dinar."

"So if I search your camels, I'll find nothing but furs?"

Ramón shrugged. In fact, his camels were laden with far more profitable merchandise, with only a few layers of fur on top to disguise it, but there was no point in telling Ibn Farid that. If he searched them, he'd find out soon enough anyway.

“Honestly,” Ibn Farid continued, “I don’t much care what you’re transporting. If you’re smuggling, I should turn you over to the authorities once we reach Taos, but I don’t expect you to make it that far.”

Ramón must have blanched, because Ibn Farid let out an evil laugh.

“You knew when you came in here you’d been discovered,” he said. “Did you really think a Frankish mustache and a fake name would be enough to fool me? Come, Ramón Gómez for Rami ibn Jum’uah? It’s like you wanted to be caught.”

“The Spaniards don’t care about Rami ibn Jum’uah,” said Ramón, or Rami, rather. “And this is my first time back in Dar al-Islam in eleven years.”

Taos, Vilayet of New Mexico, 1282H/1865M

The provincial capital of Taos was in a festive mood, its adobe buildings decked with red and gold banners, its cobblestone streets full of revelers in their Friday best. This year, sheep-shearing season coincided with the holidays, so all the shepherds had come north from their winter pastures with their flocks, hoping to sell not only the wool but the fattest sheep for qurbani. A few cattlemen from further west had converged on Taos as well, with small herds of beef for the local market.

Eid al-Adha wasn’t for another week, but the holiday season in Taos kicked off with the Festival of Mansa Muhammad ibn Qu, the Mandinka sultan who’d discovered the New World some five hundred years prior. Rami couldn’t remember celebrating the festival in his youth, but it had been popularized in Mexico over the past few years as an alternative to Ibn Battuta Day, which was celebrated in the Moroccan possessions across the Caribbean Sea to mark the date the famous Moroccan explorer had turned his sails west. Taos loved to party, though, so it had gone all out for the new holiday.

Rami wasn’t much of a reveler, himself. He had been in the hills with the flocks for so long that seeing hundreds of people, rather than sheep, around him made him nervous. Avoiding the thronged plazas, he made his way to an unassuming coffeehouse on the corner of Az-Zahrawi and Ibn ‘Arabi Streets.

He pushed through the batwing doors into the dimly lit interior. The aroma of tobacco and hashish filled the air, but Rami was not interested in either of those pleasures. He ordered a cup of tea and found himself a table in the back, away from the smokers and backgammon players.

He stretched out his legs under the low table, enjoying the softness of

the cushion, the relative coolness of the air, and the subtle interplay of mint and sugar in the tea, and allowed his mind to wander. He'd come straight from the corral, where he'd left one of the hired hands to watch over the horses and those sheep brought into town for slaughter. After tea, he'd go to the baths—he'd washed in every stream he'd come across down south, but hadn't had a proper hot-water bath in months—and then to the mosque for the afternoon prayer. Only then would he go about the serious work of finding buyers for all his livestock.

The empty glass brought him back to the present. When he looked around for the tea-boy, Rami noticed a man sitting alone, just like him, in the opposite corner, sipping on what appeared to be nominally illegal mescal. The man wore the embroidered green caftan of a spahi officer, and he was scrutinizing Rami at least as hard as Rami was scrutinizing him.

Rami had to think for a minute before it came back to him. It was the Ouled Tariq bastard he'd wounded at 'Ain Jallut. Ibn Farid.

They both leapt from their seats at the same moment, each reaching for his gun, but the sound of metal against metal stopped them cold.

It was the coffeehouse's proprietor, a heavyset Native fellow, banging an old-fashioned short-barreled blunderbuss against an equally old-fashioned cutlass. "None of that in here!" he shouted. "You got a quarrel, take it outside."

Rami pushed his revolver back into its holster, and Ibn Farid did the same. Eyeing each other warily, they each set a pile of coins on their respective tables and inched toward the door. This brought them close enough together to speak in low tones.

"Should we settle this in the morning?" asked Rami. "Outside of town where we won't be interrupted?"

"Let's settle it now," replied Ibn Farid with a derisive look. "I wouldn't trust a cowardly Hamidi not to flee during the night."

"I might have let you off with a paper-cut as I did that day in Texas," said Rami as they pushed through the door into the daylight, "had you not called me a coward. Is a Muslim's honor not sacred to you?"

"It would be if you had any."

A pair of Black patrolmen—from the governor's private police force—walked by, eyeing Rami and Ibn Farid with suspicion. It was probably just the cloud of hashish smoke that had followed them through the door.

When the patrolmen had passed, Ibn Farid jerked his head toward a mostly deserted alley branching off az-Zahrawi Street. "You have a sword, Syrian?"

Rami shook his head. He had not worn a long blade since he left the army, as there was little use for one in the hills with the sheep.

“No matter,” said Ibn Farid. “Gunfights are all the rage these days anyway. We’ll just have to do it quick and run away before the police come.”

“You won’t have to worry about the police,” said Rami. “Worry about Munkar and Nakir.”

They turned into the alley and spread out some thirty feet apart. Though the alley was deserted, they could see revelers passing by on the streets at either end, and hear the beating of drums and tambourines.

Ibn Farid was wearing a cavalryman’s belt over his caftan, with both saber and pistol suspended at his left hip, where he could reach either with his right hand. It was a two-shot pistol, Rami noted. He wore two guns, himself, both five-shot Turkish revolvers, one on either side, with the grip pointed back for a quicker draw. Between the quicker draw and the extra bullets, he figured he had an unfair advantage, but that couldn’t be helped. He’d held back last time, but this time he’d go for the kill.

“Have you said your shahadah?” Ibn Farid asked.

Rami grabbed for his gun, the right one only, since he’d need the left hand to cock it, but Ibn Farid was faster. He held his pistol at arm’s length before Rami’s had even cleared the holster.

Ibn Farid’s shot went wide, and Rami got his gun up and worked the action, firing three rounds in quick succession, when he was interrupted by Ibn Farid’s second shot, which caught him in the chest and knocked him on his back.

Laying there in the dirt, staring up at the clear New Mexico sky, Rami could do nothing but say the shahadah, as Ibn Farid had taunted just moments earlier. There was an outcry in the nearby street, and the sound of boots racing toward him.

Rough hands grabbed him, turning him sideways and prodding at his chest wound—on the right side, thank Allah, and lower than the lung—and the corresponding point on his back. The patrolmen’s dark faces loomed over him, haranguing him with questions and abuse.

“Allah curse your mothers!” one of the men shouted in his face.

“I knew you were up to no good.”

“Someone go for a surgeon,” said the other. “And the rest of you help me find the other one, Arab bastard in a green caftan.”

Staked Plains, Northern Marches, 1291AH/1874M

"I'd heard you were still alive," said Ibn Farid. "I had to flee the city, but my commander refused to turn me over to your governor's men. No jurisdiction, he said, and I had been acting in self-defense anyway. I was kept in a cell for my own protection, since some of your kin were calling for my blood. Some of the enlisted men brought news about you."

"Then you know I was tried for inciting public disorder and only escaped the chopping block because a few enterprising Banu Hamid broke through the wall of my cell the night before my execution. They hid me in a wagon and dumped me over the border in Spanish territory. Luckily, my family has spoken Spanish as well as Arabic since Andalusia, so I just changed my clothes and my name, and soon had work as a laborer on the Camino Real they were building."

Ibn Farid laughed. "I knew you cursed Banu Hamid were Spaniards at heart. Just look at you!"

Rami couldn't very well look at himself, but he had studied Ibn Farid enough to know they were similar in complexion and features, both an inextricable mix of Arab, Frank and Native, though he supposed Ibn Farid's ancestors were Yemeni, Vandal and Muisca rather than Syrian, Visigoth and Mexica, but the end result was not so different.

"Well, you got me now," said Rami, getting back to business. "No police and no soldiers, except yours I suppose. You want to kill me?"

Ibn Farid stroked his beard. "I could have my men execute you. Or tie you to a stake and leave you for the coyotes. But I suppose we should finish what we started in Taos. Do you have a sword this time?"

"Nobody fights with swords anymore."

"I guess not. Pistols, then, just like Taos. I'd say that puts you at a disadvantage, but it's not my fault you don't have a blade. After fajr prayer."

"You're not afraid I'll run away at night, Qaysi coward that I am?"

"Not this time. You're alone and my men are watching the perimeter. Besides, where would you go?"

Rami ought to have passed the night tossing and turning, but he found himself inexplicably calm. Maybe it was the prospect of finally putting this feud to rest, after so many years of looking over his shoulder. But no, he would still have to worry about Ibn Farid's sons or brothers— or some more distant Ouled Tariq relations—trying to even the score. Maybe it was the confidence that came with daily pistol drills after letting himself be bested by Ibn Farid

with an inferior weapon. Whatever the reason, he slept better than he had in years.

He washed and prayed fajr alone beside his camels. So many years of herding in the mountains and trading alone among the Natives had so accustomed him to solitude that he much preferred to pray by himself, only joining a congregation when he happened to be in town on Friday afternoon.

After a lengthy du'a', he went to meet his rival on the open prairie half a mile from camp.

The sun's disk was still below the horizon, but its rays were already filtering up through the wispy clouds, painting the sky every shade of red and orange, as if a wildfire were raging to the east. A hot, dry wind was blowing up from the south, bringing with it clumps of tumbleweed that bounced across the otherwise empty plain of short grass.

Ibn Farid was there as promised, pacing back and forth with his hand on the grip of his pistol. Rami noted that he had switched out his old double-barreled flintlock for a five-shot revolver like his own. Seeing Rami, he stopped in his tracks.

"I was beginning to think you'd run off after all," he said.

"Astaghfirullah, but I'm going to enjoy this," said Rami.

The two men stared at each other for what seemed a lifetime. A tumbleweed blew across the prairie between them.

A shot rang out, and both men flinched. Neither had so much as reached for his gun.

Both turned toward the source of the sound, in the direction of the camp.

More shots popped and cracked in the same direction, and the would-be duelists took off running toward the sound of the guns.

"Bandits!" shouted Rami, running full tilt to catch up to the captain

"We better hope it's bandits," called Ibn Farid. "If it's Comanches, we're dead."

They were still a hundred yards from camp when the first horsemen whipped by, firing at them from the saddle. They were not Comanches, thankfully, but their leather clothing and wide-brimmed hats identified them as Malucos, which might be just as bad.

Ever since the Lusitanian state on the east coast had been destroyed by a Franco-Tunisian expedition—and its metropole conquered not long after by the opportunistic Castilians—the hardy Portuguese had been moving westward, intermarrying with Natives and escaped slaves, and amassing vast herds of horses, sheep and cattle. Sometimes they allied themselves with local governors to keep the Natives and Bedouins at bay, but at other times they

happily joined the same Natives and Bedouins in raiding the farms and villages of their neighbors. Rami had never heard of them raiding this far west.

He had hoped to join the Malucos himself when he was first exiled, but had been repulsed by their strange religion. He could deal with the Spaniards' Catholicism and even the Natives' idolatry, but the Malucos adored the cross and crescent equally, along with a pantheon of Native and African spirits. It was rumored they sacrificed their captives in bloody rites worthy of the Mexica, and, though Rami doubted this, he was in no hurry to find out.

Find out, he would, if he didn't make it back to camp before the Malucos closed in.

Two riders galloped up to within a few dozen yards of Rami and Ibn Farid, firing their carbines from the saddle. Rami returned fire with his revolver, just a few unaimed shots as he kept running, and Ibn Farid did the same. Neither of them hit anything.

The Malucos wheeled around for another approach, but then Rami and Ibn Farid were within sight of the caravan.

The caravaneers had already broken camp to start the day's march, so the camels were mostly strung out in a file, rather than circled together in a defensive posture. Ibn Farid's guards and scouts were doing their best to form a perimeter, but Rami could tell they wouldn't be able to hold on for long.

He and Ibn Farid dashed past the closest guards who—luckily for Rami—recognized their captain and held their fire, and tumbled to the ground behind a kneeling camel.

"Your guards are too few," he told Ibn Farid when he'd regained his breath. "If we want to survive, the merchants and laborers must fight too."

Ibn Farid snorted. "You, at least, were a soldier once upon a time. But most of these civilians are no more than shopkeepers. They have no arms but second-hand flintlocks and heirloom swords that have never tasted blood."

"I have enough weapons for everyone," said Rami.

Ibn Farid's eyes opened wide. "I knew you were up to something, Syrian."

In fact, Rami's camels were laden with three hundred repeating rifles of Egyptian manufacture, destined for the rebels in the Western Vilayet. There, gold miners from every corner of Dar al-Islam—Andalusians, Moroccans, Mandinka and Songhai, Peruvians, Tatars from New Siberia—and even a few thousand Christians and Chinese, were rumored to be fighting for a republic free of the domination of sultans and emirs, and free of the enmities of tribe and clan. Rami didn't care much for ideology—he had smuggled weapons for tyrants and freedom fighters alike, but he had to admit the project was appealing. He'd thought more than once about staying on the west coast

once the cargo was delivered, and doing his part to make this dream a reality.
But first he had to get there.

“There are enough guns in my saddlebags for every guard and civilian here. They are repeaters, and I have two hundred rounds for each weapon, so even untrained shopkeepers can keep up a decent volume of fire.”

“Allahu akbar,” exclaimed Ibn Farid. “Can you get them distributed? I’ll rally my men. Inshallah we can hold the bastards off long enough.”

The battle lasted most of the day. Fourteen guards and merchants were killed in the initial onslaught, and another ten over the course of the fight. Dozens of animals were slaughtered as well. The Malucos retrieved their dead, so Rami couldn’t be certain how many had fallen, but he suspected their losses were about the same. He had killed two or three himself.

They had made three massive assaults, three hundred leather-armored horsemen bearing down on the stalled caravan, while smaller parties harassed the flanks and rear, but the defense never broke. Once the Egyptian rifles had been shared out, Ibn Farid was able to mass fire against the cavalry charges while his trained guards fought off the diversionary attacks without too much effort.

By sunset, the scouts reported that the Malucos had repaired to a streambed some ten miles distant to regroup.

“To lick their wounds, you mean,” said Ibn Farid, flush with the heat of victory.

“We’re not in the clear yet,” said Rami. “It’ll be a week yet before we reach New Mexico proper.”

“Malucos are little better than bandits. They’ll look for easier prey, at least until they can get reinforcements, and we’ll be long gone by then.”

“Inshallah.”

They sat in silence for a minute.

“There is a little light left yet,” said Rami. “Should we finish our business now, or wait until after fajr and hope we are not interrupted again.”

“You fought well today, for a half-breed Syrian Andalusian bastard. I thought we might postpone our quarrel until we reach Taos, at least. Maybe until we reach the Western Vilayet.”

“If the authorities in New Mexico learn my identity, or discover my cargo, we’ll never get the chance. I still have an appointment with the executioner.”

“They needn’t know anything. I wouldn’t want to deprive you of the

opportunity to defend the Banu Hamid honor.”

It was getting dark, but Rami was sure he’d seen Ibn Farid wink.

“Fair enough,” he said at last. “We’ll set our feud aside for now, until we reach the goldfields.

Tell me, you dirty Yemeni savage, have you heard about the Republic of the West?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jibril Stevenson graduated from the University of Puerto Rico more years ago than he cares to remember and, after a couple decades in government service, is currently pursuing graduate studies in linguistics. He lives on the East Coast with his wife and children, a lizard, an aging guinea pig and a brand new kitten. His short fiction has appeared in Toyon Literary Magazine, New Maps, Cosmic Horror Monthly, Frontier Tales (as Gabriel Stevenson), and elsewhere. Look for him at jibrilstevenson.wordpress.com or [@jibrilstevenson](https://twitter.com/jibrilstevenson) on Twitter