

---

---

# 1

---

---

All the horses cocked their ears toward the loudspeakers the instant the announcer switched on the PA system. The low hum rose to a squeak, then a crackle, followed by the thud of the announcer tapping his microphone and blowing on it.

“Riders...” the voice began, only to be drowned out by rising feedback. The announcer began again in an electronically loud voice with soft tones. “Riders, please form up. Buddy, at my signal, if you will.”

Buddy Rogers snatched the broad brimmed Stetson from his head and waved it high in a big circle, startling the horse nearest him. “Let’s line ’em up!” he shouted, turning from side to side, waving the hat.

“Hey, watchit, will ya!” the rider nearest Buddy snapped. “Yuh gonna get me dumped wavin’ that damned hat.”

Buddy ignored him. Waving his hat and ordering the two dozen riders into position was his prerogative as parade marshal. Besides, it was part of the performance. It was theatrical. Buddy felt like Ward Bond at the opening of *Wagon Train*. He wanted to yell “Forward Ho!” but the announcer, Deyl MacGreedy, said it was to be at his signal. And when MacGreedy was in charge, MacGreedy was in charge absolutely.

As the area’s leading businessman, MacGreedy had a reputation for knowing exactly what he wanted and always getting it. No matter what. Six months earlier, what he had wanted was radio station WKAT, the local AM powerhouse where Buddy Rogers was morning DJ and chief celebrity. Using Buddy as his public spokesman to promote his ideas was guaranteed to give MacGreedy a lock on local public opinion. Favorable public opinion was vital for swaying local politicians, and MacGreedy knew that having the politicians in his camp was essential to get his Crestline Estates into development. Otherwise, he could get bogged down for years in red tape and environmental hassles. Time, MacGreedy knew, is money. And the time for Crestline was now, now while the Catskill Mountains were enjoying an unprecedented popularity with the downstate, property hungry yuppies.

From his command center in the announcer’s booth at the top of the grandstand, MacGreedy surveyed the scene. The twenty-five riders that were to head the parade were now lined up behind the stands. In formation behind them was the drill team from one of Albany’s poshest military style boys’ schools wearing the new uniforms MacGreedy

so generously provided. Following them were the three open-topped limousines with local, county, and state politicians, by now well lubricated with New York State champagne. The tail end of the parade featured the local high school band riding an authentic, turn-of-the-century bandwagon pulled by a team of Belgian draft horses decked out in fancy rigging.

MacGreedy's plan was to have the parade circle behind the arena, come through the elaborate gateway at the far end, take a turn around the three-quarter mile race course that defined the arena, then exit the way it had come, passing through the gateway a second time. The twin thirty foot towers of the gateway were where MacGreedy had two remote TV cameras situated. A third camera was in the control booth, along with a news reporter who was late getting there, to interview MacGreedy as things proceeded, giving the hoopla the air of a legitimate news event.

MacGreedy looked up at the large-faced wall clock. The sweep seconds hand swung past the 12, and a green light lit up on the control panel in front of him. A technician said, "Three minutes to air, Mr. MacGreedy."

MacGreedy pushed a button on the console and spoke into the intercom. "Dominic, where the hell is the reporter?"

Dominic Josephson, MacGreedy's personal assistant, was a rumpled, balding man in his late forties with a rock-hard gut and a sense of loyalty only found in cops and gangsters. He was both, or more precisely, had been first the former, then both, then only the latter, eventually getting a position in MacGreedy's organization. After only two years, he had back-stabbed his way to second-in-command. Now he came into the announcer's booth, half pushing, half carrying a rail-thin, blue suited reporter.

"Right here, Mr. MacGreedy, sir," Dominic said. He sat the man down in a chair next to his boss and jammed a headset onto the man's head. "He's sorry about the delay," he said looking at the reporter as if daring him to contradict.

"Bob Lewis, Mr. MacGreedy," the reporter said, pinning a tie-mike to his lapel and putting out his right hand at the same time. "WALBTV, sports director."

"Yeah," MacGreedy mumbled, not shaking his hand. "You got the setup? You know what's expected?"

“One minute,” the technician’s voice came over the headsets both men wore.

“Yes, Mr. MacGreedy,” Lewis said, fixing his face into a smile for the TV camera.

MacGreedy switched on the PA microphone and said, “Okay, Buddy, move out.”

The technician said, “...three...two...”

Buddy Rogers gave in to his urge and yelled, “Forward Ho-o-o-o!” The parade moved out with Buddy’s hat waving in circles. The band struck up *Stars & Stripes Forever* with a shrill fanfare that immediately perked up the drowsy Belgians.

The technician pointed his finger at Lewis.

“And thank you, John. Bob Lewis here at the opening day celebrations for our region’s newest and biggest upscale total living environment. And here with me is the man whose vision is responsible for all this, Mr. Deyl MacGreedy.”

“Thank you, Bob,” MacGreedy’s deadpan softened, almost.

The sounds of the parade, being picked up now by the strategically placed microphones, provided a stirring background sound track.

“We’re here in the announcer’s stand, watching the great Buddy Rogers lead a terrific show, Mr. MacGreedy...”

“Call me Mac, Bob,” MacGreedy said.

“Well, Mac, this really is some show.”

“Yes, Bob,” MacGreedy said, jotting a note out of camera-sight to the reporter MacGreedy considered totally empty headed. The note said, ‘talk about the facilities.’ The handwriting was hard and bold.

The parade swung through the gateway where brilliant banners snapped in the fresh summer breeze. The band played *God Bless America* as the red and gold bandwagon passed under the arched entrance sign with “Crestline” emblazoned in real gold leaf. MacGreedy glanced at the TV monitors, pleased that the remote TV cameras in the towers were recording that particular instant. It would replay on all the local evening news broadcasts. He made a mental note to use that footage in his videocassette promotionals and TV spots. He also made a mental note to have the gold leaf removed and replaced with gold colored paint.

“...as this truly magnificent parade covers the three-quarters of a mile of the track,” Lewis was saying. “And as I hear, Mac, you’re negotiating with NYRA, the New York Racing Association.”

“That’s right, Bob,” MacGreedy nearly smiled. “This is a top quality six furlong oval. As soon as we get legislative clearance, we’ll be able to host both Thoroughbred and Standardbred racing.”

“And, of course, Mac, that would include pari-mutuel wagering with an OTB televised hook-up,” Lewis said, reading the information surreptitiously from the second note MacGreedy passed to him.

“Of course.”

“But, as I understand it, Mac, that’s only part of the full recreational benefits Crestline will offer to its residents.” Lewis didn’t need to refer to any notes for that, having been briefed on the multi-million dollar facility earlier in the day.

“That’s right, Bob,” MacGreedy nodded. “We’ll have traditional country fair type events right here in the arena.”

“And a beautiful arena it is, Mac.”

“And farther up, at the highest elevations, we’ll have an Olympic class ski slope with all the latest in high speed quad-chair and gondola lifts.”

“We can just catch a glimpse of the mountain from our vantage point here at the top of the grandstand.”

The parade was passing just in front of the grandstand. On the booth monitor, the image from one of the tower cameras showed the drill team smartly performing its maneuvers before thousands of spectators, many of them bussed in to seed the crowd with enthusiasm. MacGreedy didn’t like to leave anything to chance.

“...ground breaking for our mammoth base lodge,” MacGreedy was saying, “and the first phase of the housing tract this summer.”

Another ten minutes of promotional babble saw the bandwagon passing again under the gleaming “Crestline” archway. The fading strains of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, artificially amplified by electronic gadgetry that piped it back to the announcer’s booth, provided the background as MacGreedy was saying, “...that’s right, Bob. We’re proud to be spearheading this magnificent effort. Nearly five thousand acres with six thousand luxury condominiums and town houses, every conceivable recreational facility imaginable from this A Class racetrack to a fifteen thousand seat indoor sports complex. And I want to say, Bob, that it makes me proud to know that in this great country of ours...” The booth monitor showed a tower camera picture panning to the top of the grandstand, up the gilded flagpole to a long shot of the American flag rippling in the wind. MacGreedy paced his words to

coincide with the gradual zoom close-up as the flag filled the TV screen. "...a country built by pioneers carving a civilization out of the wilderness, that we can carry on in that tradition..."

Suddenly, a thunderous roar filled the air. The sound technician screamed, ripping the headset from his ears. Lewis jumped up, yelling "Oh my God!" into his tie-mike. MacGreedy punched the off-button on the sound panel in front of him, killing the monstrosly amplified roar filling the control booth magnified by the arena's sound system. He gaped in horror as the first, then second explosion rocked the unmanned entry gate towers.

The scene below was total pandemonium. Spectators panicked and climbed over each other, trampling those too slow or stunned to run. The towers splintered, then lifted, with the trailing end of the parade just beyond the gateway. The whole entrance structure swayed and collapsed, showering debris on the retreating bandwagon. The teamster, himself scared witless, lost control of the team and it charged forward, scattering the screaming drill team. Horses reared, bucked, and bolted, losing riders and galloping off in all directions. The three limos speed off, the frightened passengers huddled out of sight on the floors.

The booth cameraman swung his unit 180° and panned wide, capturing the confusion on videotape just as a third and fourth explosion blasted the spindly remains of the gateway, engulfing the structure in a burst of orange and red flame. With professional tenacity, the cameraman spotted and focused on the enormous "Crestline" emblem as it flew upward, tumbling and spinning to its apogee, then dropping, dropping into the waiting flames just as the electricity died and the sprinklers came on in the announcer's booth.