



Elfego Baca, Destined to Survive

Robert J. Alvarado

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In the early 1880s the peaceful villages along the San Francisco River, in western Socorro County of the New Mexico Territory, were invaded by Texas cowboys and their large herds of cattle. Conflict between the Spanish settlers and the rowdy Texas cowboys was escalating into intimidation and violence. Often after consuming forty-rod whiskey from Milligan's liquor store, the cowboys delighted in terrorizing the settlements along the river called the Frisco Plazas. In early October of 1884 the violence escalated into a gruesome incident, which left the local settlers in shock and fear of the Texas cowboys. The villagers were in dire need of a miracle. Young Elfego Baca answered the call. Elfego's efforts to bring law to the San Francisco valley resulted in a gunfight lasting over 36 hours. The well-armed cowboys shot approximately 4,000 bullets and dynamited the wood and mud shack, a *jacal*, in which Elfego took refuge and defended himself. In the longest gunfight of the old west, Elfego prevailed over the cowboys, unharmed. The intimidation and violence against the Spanish settlers stopped. Where does this kind of bravery originate and why did Elfego take it upon himself to protect and defend the settlers of the San Francisco valley? Was it Elfego Baca's distinct genealogy, his DNA, the life blood of centuries that flowed through him? Was Elfego destined to go to Frisco Plaza and confront the Texans, and was he destined to survive?

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