

The Ghost Dance in Popular Culture

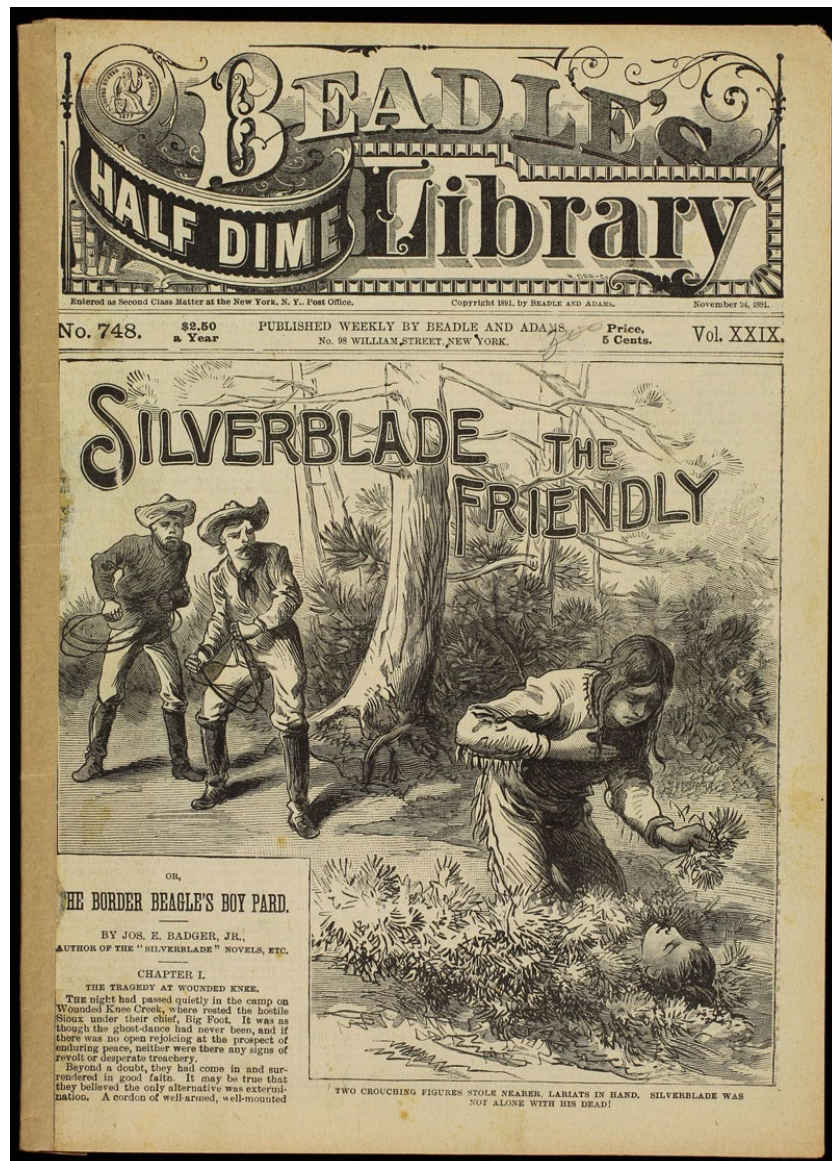
by Jacob Goldstein

Paper submitted to fulfill HIS 252 course

Cultural History of the United States 1876-Present

Taught by Professor Joan Rubin

Spring 2010



Badger, Joseph E. *Silverblade, the Friendly*. New York: Beadle and Adams, 1891.

INTRODUCTION

On June 2, 1891, *Beadle's Half Dime Library*, a weekly publication of the dime novel company Beadle & Adams, published the first in a series of four "Silverblade" novels by Joseph Badger.¹ Badger was a regular writer for the company, and published over 200 dime novels with them over the course of his career. In many ways, his "Silverblade" novels were typical of other dime novels published by the firm including *Deadwood Dick*, *Buffalo Bill*, and *Pawnee Bill*. The Silverblade series included recurring plot devices with plenty of action and suspense and were very popular when first published.² What makes these four novels exceptional is Badger's fictionalization of recent history. In the Silverblade stories, the plot revolves around a half-blood Shoshone named Silverblade and his experience in the Ghost Dance. Throughout the previous year, news coverage of the Ghost Dance and the associated violence in South Dakota was extensive, and Badger, writing only months later, most likely drew upon this coverage in his depictions of historical events and figures. While the stories are fictional, they fairly accurately depict the historical events of the Ghost Dance as they were understood by the American public at the time. Therefore, although these stories are historically erroneous, they do provide an accurate picture of how the Ghost Dance was popularly understood and described by newspapers in 1890.

The action of the four Silverblade dime novels centered on the interrelated adventures of two characters: Buck Horton and Silverblade the Shoshone. Like many dime novel protagonists, Buck Horton is the perfect hero. He is a strong and virtuous detective who travels the west arresting lawbreakers and tax evaders, while saving innocent farmers and ranchers from marauding Indians and villainous gangs of robbers. Physically, Horton is nearly ideal: around thirty years old and "well-proportioned for both strength and activity, lacking a couple of inches of reaching the six-foot standard."³ In each dime novel, he comes inches from death, but is miraculously saved and recovers with superhuman speed. In "Silverblade the Shoshone," after Buck Horton and Max the Cowboy are saved from being eaten by a lion, Horton recovered much faster because of his "marvelous powers of mind

¹ Badger, Joseph Edward, Jr. "Silverblade, the Shoshone: or, The Border Beagle's Secret Mission: A Romance of the Great Craze." *Beadle's Half-Dime Library* 28 (723). New York: Beadle and Adams, 1891.

Badger, Joseph Edward, Jr. "Silverblade, the Half-Blood: or, The Border Beagle at Bay." *Beadle's Half-Dime Library* 29 (729). New York: Beadle and Adams, 1891.

Badger, Joseph Edward, Jr. "Silverblade, the Hostile: or, The Border Beagle's Ghost-Trail." *Beadle's Half-Dime Library* 29 (739). New York: Beadle and Adams, 1891.

Badger, Joseph Edward, Jr. "Silverblade, the Friendly: or, The Border Beagle's Boy Pard." *Beadle's Half-Dime Library* 29 (748). New York: Beadle and Adams, 1891.

² Evans, James L. "Joseph E. Badger's Portrayal of the Ghost Dance in Beadle Dime Novels." *Dime Novel Roundup* 62 (2): 36-44 (1993): 36, 44.

³ Badger, "Silverblade the Shoshone," 4.

and body.”⁴ Another miraculous moment occurs in “Silverblade the Hostile,” when Silverblade shoots Horton in the head. Although Horton faints, he miraculously manages to survive this all-but-deadly shot.

Silverblade, on the other hand, is the protagonist always in need of saving, and whose actions drive the plot of this series. As was common in many dime novels, the drama of these four stories revolves around Silverblade’s internal struggle between his “white blood” and his “red blood.” Silverblade, also known as David Woodbridge, is first introduced at the beginning of the novels as the half-blood Shoshone who abandoned his home and family to join the Ghost Dance craze. In 1890, this son of a white father and a Shoshone mother is caught between his two competing racial identities. Although he had been taught to be a rational white man at the famous Carlisle Indian School, the Ghost Dance and his “red blood” constantly overcomes his “white blood” and take control of him. Throughout the novels, it is Buck Horton’s mission to find Silverblade and convince him to give up his Indian ways and return to his family.⁵

The novels chronicle Silverblade’s internal journey, and the attempts of many characters to influence him one way or the other. In “Silverblade the Shoshone,” Silverblade learns of the Ghost Dance from Red Leaf, the so-called Mouthpiece of the Messiah. Although he struggles with whether or not to follow the dance, in the end he decides to leave his family for good and follow Red Leaf. In “Silverblade the Half-Blood,” Silverblade, now a firm devotee of the New Messiah, again questions his faith when Buck Horton appears to convince him to return to his family. Again, Silverblade’s “red blood” wins out and he decides to go to Sitting Bull, the Ghost Dance Messiah, and join in the Sioux uprising. “Silverblade the Hostile” chronicles the death of Sitting Bull and its aftermath, ending with Silverblade’s eventual realization that Red Leaf is actually a villainous white man.⁶ With the realization that this Mouthpiece is trying to stir up a rebellion, Silverblade vows to give up the Ghost Dance, but still refuses to go home because it is now his duty to

⁴ Ibid. 15

⁵ Ibid. 3

For more on the depiction of Mixed-Blood Indians in American literature, see:

Brown, Harry. *Injun Joe’s Ghost Dance: The Indian Mixed-Blood in American Writing*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2004.

⁶ Although outside the scope of this essay, another interesting study of these dime novels might relate to the role of these villainous white people. I see two different directions that a study such as this could go. The first is how these villains relate to actual villains during this period who attempted to stir up rebellions in order to free up Indian land for wealthy capitalists to buy up and sell for a profit. Another direction of study might be how these fictional villains fit into the greater genre of whites “playing” Indian.

For further information on whites “playing” Indian, see:

Deloria, Philip. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

teach the rest of the Indians the truth. In “Silverblade the Friendly,” Silverblade is captured by a gang of villains shortly after the Massacre at Wounded Knee. He is saved by Horton and spends much of the novel going through a type of withdrawal as he rejects all Indian practices and ultimately decides to return and live as a white man.

In addition to the overarching plot, each dime novel also has its own internal story. Each of these stories, however, follows a similar and fairly common dime novel plotline. In each, a gang of villains is introduced who plan to raid a ranch and blame it on hostile Indians. This gang captures one of the heroes, who is then saved by the others at the last minute. Horton and Silverblade then go to the ranch to warn the family and save the day. On each ranch, the family consists of a father-daughter pair (and sometimes others, but they are inconsequential). In each novel, one of the heroes falls in love with the daughter and by the end of the novel plans to marry her. The third novel, “Silverblade the Hostile,” takes place only among the Indians, so the plot varies slightly, with an Indian father-daughter in need of saving from the Indians instead of white ranchers.⁷

DEPICTIONS OF THE GHOST DANCE

What greatly distinguishes the Silverblade series from other similar dime novels is their depiction of historical events. Unlike most dime novels, the action and progression of these stories is dependent on the historical events they feature. It is because of his faith in the Ghost Dance that Silverblade begins to follow Indian ways, and it is because of Sitting Bull the Messiah that Silverblade travels to South Dakota and takes part in the famous events that occurred there at the end of 1890. James L. Evans, in an analysis of the Silverblade series published in 1993, claimed that “the basis of these stories closely corresponds to the historical facts,” a statement unsubstantiated by modern knowledge of the Ghost Dance.⁸ As is now relatively well-known, many of the depictions of historical events in these dime novels were inaccurate. In 1890, however, little accurate information about the Ghost Dance was known to most Americans. While wholly inaccurate by modern standards, the Silverblade novels are actually quite accurate reflections of the general understanding of the Ghost Dance, and related events, *in 1890*.

Much of the historical information in the Silverblade Dime Novels was most likely drawn from the extensive newspaper coverage of the Ghost Dance in 1890 and 1891. The Ghost Dance first began appearing in newspapers sporadically during April of 1890, growing somewhat more common through the summer and into October. Beginning in the middle of November, most major papers throughout the country, including cities as far ranging as Omaha, Chicago, New York, and Atlanta, had daily coverage of the Ghost Dance and the developing conflict in South Dakota. In total, there were seventeen reporters in South

⁷ Cox, Randolph J. *The Dime Novel Companion: A Source Book*. Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 2000: 9.

⁸ Evans, “Joseph E. Badger,” 44.

Dakota, writing for sixteen local and national papers, as well as the Associated Press. Newspapers which had not sent reporters copied and reprinted the reports from other news sources. Early on at least, many of these reporters were taken by so-called “friendly” Indians to view and report on the actual practice of the Ghost Dance. These descriptions, although often peppered with the reporters’ own assumptions about the violent nature of the dance, were relatively accurate descriptions of the practice of the Ghost Dance.⁹

As in the newspapers, Joseph Badger also provides fairly accurate descriptions of how the dance was practiced, although not about its meaning. The series opens with Buck Horton and Max the Cowboy spying on the Shoshone dancers, looking for Silverblade. They saw “around the pole, hand joined to hand, nearly a score almost naked figures were slowly circling [sic], keeping time by stamping their feet, their heads thrown back until their eyes started toward the zenith, seemingly fascinated by the sun, which, fortunately for them was partially dimmed by the haze of Indian Summer.”¹⁰ From this early description, Badger accurately sets the scene of what would take place at a Plains Ghost Dance camp. In later dime novels, Badger establishes further facts about the dance, including the fact that the dancers always circled leftward. There are, however, some parts of the Ghost Dance that are depicted incorrectly. A few times in his stories, Badger has the Ghost Dancers sing the dance song. This song involves a series of verses all beginning with the phrase “Father, Father”¹¹ followed by a prayer such as “make us strong to drive away the white man!”¹² This song appears to be the author’s fictional creation. Although some of the Ghost songs might have been known by this time, most were not published until later in the decade when the Ghost Dance began to receive more serious scholarly analysis. Without any actual Ghost Dance songs to draw upon, it is unsurprising that Badger would write his own for the sake of his fictional story.

Another fact that Badger depicts accurately is that for most Indians the Ghost Dance was a peaceful movement. In “Silverblade the Half-Blood,” the story opens on the Shoshone Ghost Dancers listening to the preaching of Red Leaf, the supposed “Mouthpiece of the Messiah.” In his speech, Red Leaf explained the Ghost Dance message that in the very near future, the world would be recreated, the white settlers would be destroyed, and all the dead Indians would be returned to live happily on earth. As the villain of the story, however, Red Leaf (really Zeno Godfrey, a white man, in disguise) then tries to convince the Indians that although the Messiah does not need their help to destroy the whites, they should, nevertheless, travel to South Dakota and join the uprising led by Sitting Bull. Historically, however, the Shoshone Ghost Dancers never rose up against the white settlers. In the novels, therefore, most of the Shoshone refused to follow the supposed Mouthpiece into

⁹ Andersson, Rani-Henrik. *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008: 192-209.

¹⁰ Badger, “Silverblade the Shoshone,” 2.

¹¹ Badger, “Silverblade the Half-Blood,” 15.

¹² Ibid.

war, and instead chose to stay in their homes and await the coming of the Messiah. Breaking away from his people, Silverblade decided to journey to South Dakota.

SITTING BULL AND THE FEARED "SIOUX UPRISING"

If Silverblade had stayed with the Shoshone, Badger would never have been able to recreate for his readers the killing of Sitting Bull (which begins "Silverblade the Hostile") or the Massacre at Wounded Knee (which begins "Silverblade the Friendly").¹³ The emphasis in these stories on these violent events was also a reflection of the press coverage related to the Ghost Dance, because even more than the dance itself, the press coverage focused on the threat of violence among the Sioux. This press coverage, however, was based in large part on rumors of impending violence, not on actual threats. Without any substantiated fact, papers throughout the country continued to print contradictory reports and rumors, sometimes on the same day.¹⁴ On November 22, for example, *The Chicago Tribune* printed four short articles on the same page about the Ghost Dance. The first stated that there was no immediate danger of an uprising, although it was not entirely impossible in the distant future. The second, however, reports that the settlers in Emmons and Campbell Counties had fled their homes and that war was imminent. The third discussed the supposed cannibalistic practices of the Ghost Dancers, unsubstantiated by any other reports, and the fourth reports that Nebraskans were prepared to travel to Dakota to fight the Sioux if they were needed.¹⁵

In the first few days of December, newspapers began to report attacks on settlers and their property, but these reports are almost entirely unsubstantiated by any military reports from the same days. These Indians, it was reported, were raiding on their way to join the rest of

¹³ The Massacre at Wounded Knee is an extremely significant event that has been dealt with widely, and in great detail. An analysis of the Massacre as presented in the Silverblade novels would require far more space than allowed by this paper. In "Silverblade the Friendly," the depiction of the Massacre at Wounded Knee is so grossly inaccurate that an entire essay could be devoted simply to this topic. Additionally, an understanding of the true nature of the massacre only developed slowly during 1891, and so in order to discuss accurately the relationship between newspaper coverage and the Silverblade novels, one would need to determine when the final Silverblade novel was written. Although it was published in October 1891, it ends with a note saying that it was written in March 1891. Press consensus regarding the massacre changed rapidly as new opinions were expressed by those who had been present at the massacre or at the nearby Indian reservation, so establishing a timeline, if even possible, would be very important to understand exactly what Badger actually might have known of the Massacre (or Battle as it was known at one point).

¹⁴ Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*, 192-209.

¹⁵ "Depends on Sitting Bull." *Chicago Daily Tribune* November 22, 1890: 2.

"Fears of a Massacre Today." *Chicago Daily Tribune* November 22, 1890: 2.

"A Cannibalistic Feast." *Chicago Daily Tribune* November 22, 1890: 2.

"Nebraskans Ready to Fight." *Chicago Daily Tribune* November 22, 1890: 2.

the Ghost Dancers in the Badlands (a mountainous region of Pine Ridge Reservation, which was easy to defend). From the Badlands, *The Chicago Daily Tribune* warned in a front page article, the hostiles would be able to continue dancing and raiding the nearby white settlers.¹⁶ Newspapers continued to print similar stories much of the rest of the month, alternatively reporting stories of Indian attacks, military leaders concerned about the impending war, and other military leaders who assured the public that there was nothing to fear. Badger adopts these Indian attacks on white settlers in his dime novels, featuring the threat of attack quite prominently. In each of the novels, except for “Silverblade the Hostile,” the ultimate goal of the villains is to raid a rancher’s home and blame it on “wild Indians.” These villains, on the payroll of wealthy capitalists, hope to use the Ghost Dance to scare away settlers and open more land for sale to their bosses.¹⁷

This violence, however, was not part of the original Ghost Dance message taught by Wovoka, the Ghost Dance Messiah. Although unknown in 1890, the Ghost Dance had originally begun when Wovoka, a Northern Paiute spiritual leader from western Nevada, “died” during an eclipse of the sun on January 1, 1889, and was taken by God to heaven. God instructed him to return to earth and teach a new dance, which would help hasten the return of God and the dead to earth. On this return, the living and the dead would be reunited in a newly created paradise on earth, without sickness, hunger, or death. Before the end of winter 1888-89, tribes throughout the west began to hear rumors of this new prophet and sent delegates to learn his new message. The Sioux sent a delegation of five or six men in the fall of 1889, and when they returned in the spring, they immediately began teaching the new religion.¹⁸

The Silverblade novels present the most basic elements of the Ghost Dance message accurately. All four novels discuss and expand this message. The Ghost Dancers in the novels believed that God would return to destroy the white settlers and restore the earth to the way it once was when Indians on the Plains lived in traveling villages and hunted buffalo to provide for most of their needs. In this new world, all Indians would live happily, without sickness, hunger, or death. In the Silverblade novels, however, the Ghost Dance was begun by Sitting Bull, “and Sitting Bull is the chief who is to represent the Messiah until the day of his coming.”¹⁹ Until the coming of the Messiah, it was to be Sitting Bull’s charge to lead his followers in war against the whites. In order to spread his message, he sent emissaries out from South Dakota to convert other tribes including, among other tribes, the Paiute. Zeno Godfrey (Red Leaf), pretending to be one of these emissaries, claimed to be a Brule Sioux sent by Sitting Bull himself to teach the Shoshone.

¹⁶ “Swelling the Hostiles’ Numbers.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* December 1, 1890: 1.

¹⁷ Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*, 192-209.

¹⁸ Mooney, James. *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

¹⁹ Badger, “Silverblade the Half-Blood,” 5.

Where Badger most diverges from historical fact is his claim that Sitting Bull was planning an uprising. Badger makes a Ghost Dance uprising central to his novels, even beginning “Silverblade the Half-Blood” with a description of the Ghost Dancers each bearing “Winchester repeating rifles...and belts full of fixed ammunition.”²⁰ Real Sioux Ghost Dancers, however, eschewed all things made by whites, including guns, and most likely were not planning to attack white settlers. Furthermore, there are also questions as to whether Sitting Bull was ever a part of the Ghost Dance. In his article, James Evans discusses how there are many conflicting accounts of Sitting Bull’s attitude towards the Ghost Dance. While some still believe Sitting Bull was a proponent of the dance, modern historians tend to be more skeptical of this idea.²¹ Although Sitting Bull saw nothing inherently wrong with the dance, he did not participate himself, and almost certainly was not planning an uprising, as was generally feared. In fact, some accounts of Sitting Bull’s attitude maintain that he thought it was useless to resist the whites and their army.²²

What Evans fails to note, however, was that for his time, Badger’s belief that the Ghost Dance was begun by Sitting Bull was not unusual. In 1891, the debate over Sitting Bull’s true attitudes and motives had not yet begun. Instead, during 1890, newspapers often blamed the rising violence on well-known, and often blameless, Sioux chiefs, including, most importantly, Sitting Bull. As early as October, there were articles discussing how Sitting Bull was “in a very ugly mood and was stirring up the young bucks.”²³ At the end of November, articles in the *Omaha Daily Bee*, *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, and *The New York Times* informed their readers that the emissaries of Sitting Bull were encouraging Ghost Dancers to slaughter the white men. Sitting Bull, these papers reported, was using the Ghost Dance “craze” to stir up a rebellion against the United States. According to *The Chicago Tribune*, the Standing Rock Sioux, where Sitting Bull lived, were almost entirely under the leadership of Sitting Bull and would not fight without his orders.²⁴

ORIGINS OF THE GHOST DANCE

More than just a leader of the Ghost Dance, some newspapers, including *The Chicago Tribune*, took an even more extreme position and claimed that “Sitting Bull had invented the whole Messiah Craze.”²⁵ Like much other reporting of the Ghost Dance, this was not based on fact, but was merely an assumption made by reporters based on their own uninformed assumptions. Originally, both reporters and the army assumed that the dance had begun in the place where they had first heard about the Ghost Dance: South Dakota.

²⁰ Badge, “Silverblade the Half-Blood,” 2.

²¹ Evans, “Joseph E. Badger,” 37.

²² Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*, 66.

²³ *Ibid.*, 198

²⁴ “Depends on Sitting Bull” *Chicago Daily Tribune* November 22, 1890: 2.

²⁵ Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*, 213.

The first rumors of the Ghost Dance, beginning in early 1890, had come from Indian agents and settlers near the Sioux. These informants were concerned that the Sioux had started dancing again in preparation for another war. For the rest of the year, a majority of information concerning the Ghost Dance came from the Dakotas, and newspapers ultimately sent their reporters to South Dakota to report on the conflict.²⁶ With a majority of their information on the Ghost Dance coming from South Dakota, some papers assumed that the dance must have come from there.

It was not until late November that new rumors began to surface about the “true” origins of the Ghost Dance. On November 20, in a report about the origins of the Ghost Dance, the author wrote that the Messiah was believed by the dancers to live somewhere in Nevada, and to be either a white man or a Paiute Indian.²⁷ On November 24, *The New York Times* reported that an army officer in Los Angeles claimed to have found the Messiah himself living in Nevada. This man, named Johnson Sides, taught a message very different from the Ghost Dance as it was practiced in Nevada. He was a “Peacemaker among all Indians and the whites of Nevada,” and taught a Ghost Dance very similar to Christianity.²⁸ This information, while closer to the truth, was also not entirely accurate. A few weeks later, it was finally discovered that the Ghost Dance messiah was a Northern Paiute man in Nevada named Wovoka. Even with this new information, however, it appears from the Silverblade novels that the belief that Sitting Bull was the Ghost Dance Messiah did not entirely disappear in 1891.²⁹

Even with the true Ghost Dance Messiah found, however, rumors about Sitting Bull being deeply involved with the teaching of the new religion did not end. Even the first scholarly analysis of the Ghost Dance emphasized that it was led, if not originated, by Sitting Bull. In 1891, James P. Boyd published the first analysis of the Ghost Dance using historical sources: *Recent Indian Wars Under the Lead of Sitting Bull and Other Chiefs; With A Full Account of the Messiah Craze and Ghost Dances*. Boyd acknowledges the fact that the Ghost Dance was not originally a doctrine of violence. He argues, however, that it grew violent as the “medicine men and politicians” of the Sioux, including Sitting Bull, drew upon

²⁶ This information is determined mostly from a search of Proquest Historical Newspapers, which reveals that although there are some articles discussing the Ghost Dance among peoples near the Sioux, a majority of information comes out of the Dakotas.

²⁷ “The Indian Messiah Delusion.” *The New York Times* November 20, 1890: 4.

²⁸ “The Indian Messiah Found.” *The New York Times* November 25, 1890: 5.

²⁹ Who Badger believed began the Ghost Dance is somewhat more difficult to determine. From the Silverblade novels, it is fairly obvious that Sitting Bull is meant to be the representative of the Messiah and the dance originated with him. It is possible that Badger knew about Wovoka and only decided to make Sitting Bull the leader of the new religion because it made a better story. At the same time, however, it is also apparent from historical sources that Badger did not create the idea that Sitting Bull was the originator of the dance.

the suffering of their people to turn the Dance into a sinister plot against the United States.³⁰

THE DEATH OF SITTING BULL

As fear of an uprising grew, police were sent to arrest Sitting Bull, an event that features prominently at the beginning of “Silverblade the Hostile.” Although immensely important to the overall story of Silverblade, Sitting Bull himself only makes a short cameo appearance at the end of “Silverblade the Half-Blood.” The next dime novel, “Silverblade the Hostile,” begins with his arrest and death. Although there has been much debate over the last 120 years, the bare facts of the arrest and subsequent killing of Sitting Bull are as follows: on December 15, Agent James McLaughlin of Standing Rock sent the police to arrest Sitting Bull before he could leave to join the Ghost Dancers. During the arrest, Sitting Bull was shot and killed, which greatly increased tensions between the Sioux and the army. Immediately following his death, many of Sitting Bull’s followers fled the reservation to join Big Foot, the last remaining Ghost Dance leader in the region.³¹

Like most news related to Sitting Bull, his death was considered immensely important and made the front page of newspapers around the country on December 16 and 17. Like most news out of the Dakotas in late 1890, however, this coverage was filled with lies and unsubstantiated rumors. According to *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, it was likely that the police never intended to take Sitting Bull alive. When the police arrived at the camp, it was reported, “The camp was already astir. At least 100 of the savages were stripped and in battle array ... The police were immediately surrounded by a jabbering, threatening band of red, and the outlook for a massacre was excellent.”³² The chief of the police managed to convince them to let him talk to Sitting Bull. Once he took the medicine-man into custody, he ordered the police to begin firing on the Indians in a desperate attempt to get out of the camp alive. The Indians were momentarily stunned, and so did not react immediately, “else every one of the officers would have been killed.”³³ Sitting Bull, seeing the resistance, attempted to escape, but was shot dead by one of the police officers. Ultimately, the paper reported, about 120 Indians fled to the Badlands, where they joined 300 to 500 who were already gathered there. The obituary that followed this report again repeated that Sitting Bull had used the Ghost Dance to his advantage to create an uprising.

³⁰ Boyd, James P. *Recent Indian Wars, Under the Lead of Sitting Bull and Other Chiefs; with a full Account of the Messiah Craze, and Ghost Dances*. Philadelphia: Publishers Union, 1891: 176.

³¹ Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*, 73-99.

³² “How Bull was Killed.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* December 17, 1890: 1.

This exact article also appears in the *New York Times* on December 17 under the title “The Death of Sitting Bull.” I cannot say for certain, however, where it was first published, because the newspapers do not acknowledge their use of each other’s articles.

³³ Ibid.

Although it is unlikely that all the police would have been killed by the Indians, it is true that the Indians fired on the police and that Sitting Bull attempted to escape when the fighting started. In the Silverblade series, however, this “battle” is even more sensationalized than in the newspapers. According to Badger, the soldiers were outnumbered five to one, and would never have gotten out alive if they had not been saved by the army. As in the newspaper accounts, the chief of the police ordered his men to fire on the Indians, but in “Silverblade,” the purpose was to cover the policeman who was attempting to get past the Indians and run to find the nearby army. In Badger’s account, the “battle” only ends after the army arrives to save the day and scatter the Indians, including Silverblade, who flee towards the Badlands.³⁴

THE GHOST OF SITTING BULL IN "SILVERBLADE THE HOSTILE"

Shortly after the death of Sitting Bull in “Silverblade the Hostile,” General Miles, the commander of the army sent to the Dakotas, met with Buck Horton to discuss the increasingly tense situation. They were interrupted by a rancher named Tom Hetlund, who described having seen the ghost of Sitting Bull on the hills near his ranch. Although General Miles dismisses him as a drunken fool, Buck Horton is more curious. Horton remembered how Zeno Godfrey (Red Leaf), in “Silverblade the Half-Blood,” used Magic Lanterns to create a vision of the Ghost Dance Messiah and trick the Shoshone into going to war. Horton was afraid that this new ghost was nothing more than another trick by Zeno Godfrey. Only at Horton’s urging does General Miles listen to Hetlund and take seriously the warning of the ghost.

In his research, James Evans found no evidence of the Ghost of Sitting Bull, and assumed that Tom Hetlund was a fictional creation used to introduce the ghost of Sitting Bull. Although an obscure figure mentioned only once in national newspapers, Hetlund was, nevertheless, a real rancher who lived about fifty miles north of the Badlands. In the days following Sitting Bull’s death, he reported that the “peaceful, Christianized, and semi-civilized tribe of Two Kettle Sioux are now seized with sudden frenzy.”³⁵ He reported that they had seen the ghost of Sitting Bull, which motioned for them to follow him. The ghost jumped from hilltop to hilltop, finally disappearing in the direction of the Badlands. Hetlund

³⁴ Badger, “Silverblade the Hostile,” 2.

³⁵ “Sitting Bull’s Ghost.” *The Washington Post* December 21, 1890: 1.

reported that the Sioux, following this apparition, began to believe that Sitting Bull was himself the “long danced for Messiah.”³⁶

Just as the real Hetlund described, the ghost in the Silverblade novels also jumped from hill to hill, motioning for the Indians to follow him to the Badlands. In the dime novel, however, history changes slightly. It turns out that the apparitions are not really ghosts at all, but members of Zeno Godfrey’s gang of villains. Positioning themselves on different hills, they use a trick of light to make it appear that the ghost is moving towards the Badlands. Before reaching the end of the charade, however, a shot is heard and the ghost falls flat on his face. One of the Indian scouts with Horton had shot the impostor. When the Sioux reached the ghost and realized that he was a white man, they grew quickly confused. It was this event that led Silverblade to begin questioning the Messiah, ultimately ending with him rejecting the Ghost Dance religion. Whereas the historical ghost had led the Sioux to the Badlands, this fictional ghost ultimately “saved” the Indians and taught them that the Ghost Dance Messiah was a fake.

CONCLUSION

In his four Silverblade dime novels, author Joseph E. Badger uses the Ghost Dance among the Sioux as the background for his story of a half-blood Shoshone struggling with his two racial identities. In these novels, Badger draws upon a large number of historical events and persons, ranging from extremely famous events such as the death of Sitting Bull to all-but-forgotten figures such as Tom Hetlund. Judged by modern knowledge of the Ghost Dance, Badger’s depiction of many of these events might be seen as simply wrong; however, when looked at from the perspective of 1890, Badger’s account reflected contemporary understandings of the Ghost Dance. For his readers, Badger’s novels would have reflected what they knew about the Ghost Dance from newspaper accounts. While the Silverblade novels are not at all an accurate depiction of the real Ghost Dance, they do provide an interesting case study of how the Ghost Dance was understood at the time that the dime novels were written.

³⁶ “Sitting Bull’s Ghost” *Washington Post*.