

Steven E. Domingues II

Steven@stevendomingues.com

The Kill Part 2

By

Steven E. Domingues II

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I ran towards the morning sun. The shouts behind me grew dim as I crashed through the underbrush. I held my rifle steady at my side with my right hand, it's strap rubbing a thick patch of skin on my neck. My gloved left hand pushed branches out of the way.

The kill had been quick; my job complete. I had watched the man fall through my scope, a rose blooming on his chest. I allowed myself a few seconds to dismiss his life from the world. Then there were shouts, an alarm raised, and I had to leave.

I felt my foot catch on something, and I twisted my body, knowing that I was going to fall. I had to protect the rifle. My body could heal, the rifle could not. The world spun, sunlight and shadow blurred. Then my head exploded in pain.

I awoke to the sounds of men. I stayed still, and listened. They were walking through the forest, talking to each other, tracking me. I had to get up, I had to move. I flexed my arms and legs as quiet as I could. Leaves crunched beneath me, a sound I

couldn't afford. My body, aside from a few aches, seemed fine. I stood, watching the world around me. It was dusk. Luck had stayed on my side, the trackers weren't as quick or efficient as they should have been. Your boss dying before you had that effect. I crouched with my back to a tree, my body half covered by a bush. I looked over my rifle. The barrel was straight, the stock unscathed. I worked the bolt and breathed a sigh of relief.

I took off my pack and unrolled the cloth I used to protect my livelihood. It stunk of oil, but was dry to the touch. I wrapped the rifle and secured it with leather straps to my pack.

A few feet away there was a broken wood snare. The object that had caught my foot had been well hidden. Remembering the pain in my head, I poked and prodded my head and scalp. My fingers came away damp from a gash on the side of my head. I looked down and, for the first time, noticed the dark red stain across my jacket and shirt. I rummaged in my pack, but found no bandages. I took off my jacket and tore my left sleeve from my shirt and wrapped it around

my head in a tight knot. It would have to do until I could find some herbs, or disinfectant. The cost of living kept rising.

"Look! There he is!"

The shout pulled me out of my planning, but not as fast as it should have. Concussion? I wondered, as I sprang from my spot and started running. I swung my pack on and dodged around trees and bushes. They were close behind me and I could hear their continued shouts, their voices letting me know how close they were without me needing to turn around.

I wasn't gaining any ground and my head started to pound. Water. I needed water. Lying around the forest all day hadn't done me any favors.

I needed a place to make a stand. I had a makeshift knife in my pack, but close-range combat had never been my strong suit. I needed an advantage. The forest started to thin and slope downwards. If the forest ended, I'd be out of luck. The desert beyond held no shelter, no advantage.

There was a felled tree about thirty yards away. It looked to be propped up on a boulder. A

plan formed in my head. I could climb up the trunk, get the drop on my pursuers. I could hide under the brush, surprise them that way. There may even be a nook or cranny that I could wedge myself in and hide.

The voices still called out to each other, but the sun had given up for the day and had sunk below the horizon. The twilight might be enough to keep their prying eyes at bay, I thought. My breath was coming in ragged gasps now. I needed this to stop, but the adrenaline pushed me onward.

When I reached the felled tree I saw that it wasn't propped up on a boulder, but a building. A log house. The back end of it was smashed, but the front door beckoned me. There could be supplies, weapons, water. I had to take the chance that there would be something inside to help.

Not slowing down, I ran up the two stairs on the meager porch and slammed my full weight against the door. The hinges creaked. I backed up and kicked at the weak spot to the side of the door knob. Something in the frame gave way and the door swung

open.

I entered and closed the door. My eyes hadn't yet adjusted to the darkness when I grabbed the closest piece of furniture and pushed it in front of the door. A coffee table? I grabbed in the darkness again and found a chair. Something crashed to the ground. I winced as the noise echoed in the night. I raised the chair over my head and smashed it on the ground. With a loud crack the chair came apart. I felt one of the legs and smiled as my fingers brushed the screws sticking out of one end. That would have to do. I took off my pack and stowed it against a nearby wall. I found my knife and pulled it out. Armed with my screw studded club and my sharpened steel, I was as ready as I could be.

The window near the door brightened with a flickering light. The glass itself was too dirty to see through. The voices pointed out signs that someone had been here recently. I crouched near the door, on the side that would swing open, allowing myself a few more seconds of cover.

The door was pushed on. The coffee table

scraped across the floor. The firelight from their torches came through the crack in the door and I took a second to look around the room I was in. There was a mish-mash of items: blankets, pots and pans, a grill with firewood stacked nearby. It looked as though someone had been living here. The button eyes of a teddy bear shined back at me from it's place on an old stuffed chair.

The door was kicked open, the coffee table flung aside. The first man entered with a slow step, his eyes darting around the room. I swung my club as hard as I could against the side of his head. The screws sunk into his temple and he gurgled, his eyes wide. As his body fell, I tried to rip the club back, but it stuck fast and was torn from my hand.

With a shout, another man jumped through the doorway, his body turned to face me. He had a crude bow with an arrow pulled back and ready to fire. I shouted at him, hoping my voice and volume would set his aim askew. He fired his arrow and my leg seared with pain. There was no time now. The man reached for another arrow from the quiver that was strapped

to his side. I fell to the ground, my leg not cooperating with me. I reached around and grabbed at the blanket that was lying on the ground. I threw it at my attackers face, hoping to at least distract him, at most tangle his weapon.

Fire blazed up in the motion. I hadn't noticed that the first man's torch had landed on the blanket. The sudden movement of the blanket caused the flame to flair up. I heard the bow's string snap in the heat, and the bent wood flung itself apart. The man threw the fiery mess down and tore my club from his friend's head. Gristle and hair clung to the screws as the man swung the club in a few test swings. He smiled at me and advanced.

From my place on the floor I had no options. I couldn't stand to fight, there was nothing closeby to shield myself from the attack. I took a deep breath and took the only option I could. I flung my arm at the man, and his head snapped back, my sharpened steel protruding from his eye. He crumpled to the floor as his hand rose up, as if to pluck the steel from his face.



The crackle of the fire caught my attention. The wall the blanket had been thrown against was starting to burn. I reached down at the arrow, hoping it had passed through my thigh, so i could break it and remove it. It seemed my luck had run dry; the arrowhead was lodged in the muscle of my thigh. Touching it caused waves of pain to pulse through my body. I couldn't help myself, I yelled. When the echoes died in my ears I heard footsteps.

The third pursuer pushed the door all the way open, before he stepped inside. He was a small man, slouching in the doorway. In the firelight he surveyed the bodies and shook his head.

"Can't say I'm surprised. If they were good men-," the man tossed his torch into the building, near me, but not close enough for me to reach. The chair that the stuffed bear was perched on started to smoke. The man then reached down to the holster that was strapped to his hip. He pulled out a revolver, "-they'd've been given one of these."

"Now, you made a mess of things back at camp. Everyone is in a tizzy with the rich man dead. Who

gets what, where do we go, all that crap." The man swung open the chamber and dumped the shells into his hand. He put all, save one, into his breast pocket.

"All I know for sure is," the man loaded the single shell back into the revolver and clicked the cylinder into place, "if I bring you back, I get to be the hero." The man pointed the revolver at me, using his thumb to cock the hammer back.

"Wait-" was all I managed to say when a sound crashed in the room and the man's head caved in. He fell backwards out of the door with a thump. My ears rang as I looked around the room.

Standing in a corner was a boy and a girl. She was older and he hung behind her leg, his eyes wide with fear and his hands over his ears. The girl had tears in her eyes, but her mouth was set in a determined grimace. She looked from the mess at her front door to me. She raised her rifle and aimed.

That's when I passed out.