

A silhouette of a cowboy wearing a hat, riding a horse. The scene is set against a dramatic sunset sky with orange and yellow clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong backlight effect. The overall mood is serene and evocative of the American West.

*The Hunt  
for  
Kid  
Ramble*

Steve Hadley

# The Hunt for Kid Ramble

## Dedication

**The Hunt for Kid Ramble** is dedicated the **Wild Horse Rescue Center** in Florida, USA.

The true romance of the old west is embodied in the horse. In particular, the cowboy's horse and the relationship of a man with a horse he relies upon for everything, including his life. The wild horse also, was an integral part of the magical fabric that became known as the Wild, Wild West.

For every copy of this book sold, \$1.00 will be provided to the **Wild Horse Rescue Center** to support their work. The center is run by people prepared to put their time, money and efforts into saving wild horses from destruction or harm. Their work is not limited to the USA and they have been involved in saving the wild Brumbies at the Snowy River in Australia.

When Mustangs are rescued from abuse or neglect, they are rehabilitated and adopted out to qualifying homes. The center also helps government departments involved in animal management and educates the public. To learn more about the Wild Horse Rescue Center or make a donation, check their web site at [www.mlwhr.com](http://www.mlwhr.com) or contact them at [mustangladydi@aol.com](mailto:mustangladydi@aol.com)

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The persons and events portrayed in this book are entirely fictional. Any similarity to actual person or events is entirely unintentional.

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### The Hunt for Kid Ramble

#### 1 - Kid Ramble

**The four stage coach horses shifted nervously, impatient to be released from their confinement after a long hard run.** Their sides were white with lather after the long haul in from Cheyenne. It was more than fifty miles into Laramie and there had only been one change of horses over the entire route. This coach had been pushed hard, mighty hard. Seven hours was hard on the horses but hard on the people too. Everyone on board and the riders that followed were completely exhausted. When Army money was being transported, you didn't stop any longer than needed and certainly not over night.

Usually, as soon as any passengers got off, the driver would be taking them over to the livery to be fed and rested. Today was different.

The driver, the usual guard and the two Army officers riding shotgun were busy at the bank securing the pay run that had just come in for a part of the fifth cavalry regiment that was passing through this region. Sergeant Brad White led the Army contingent charged with guarding the money. He had conscripted two men passing by to hold the horses while he moved the money into the bank.

White was a veteran of the Sioux Indian campaign of '76. He wasn't there with Custer for that famous battle but he fought just as hard as any of them had. He resented the fact that his troop had been forgotten because they were more than 30 miles away when that historic battle took place. He had put his life on the line for

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this Territory, then and many other times. Most of his comrades gave their's up and he felt he was owed for his part in the taming of this land. The Territory was enjoying an unprecedented period of growth and prosperity because he and a few others like him, had cleared the infamous Black Hills of marauding Indian bands.

He fought at Slim Buttes too. He took an arrow in his left leg and then was forced to hobble through the infamous "Starvation March" in desperate shape. One of only a handful of survivors from that time that went through the whole Sioux campaign, he was battle hardened, belligerent and he was owed. His life had been hard and full of tragedy. Hard living, hard fighting; it all came together to make Brad White a mighty hard case.

Standing in front of the Wyoming Community Bank, he looked every inch a man not to be trifled with. It was called a bank but wasn't much more than an Agency of Wolcott Humphrey's dream of a bank that existed, "just for the people". White's face had the look of leather after many years in the saddle under the fierce mid western sun. His missing teeth, the bent nose and half missing left ear that had been bitten off in a bar room brawl a long time ago, added to his air of command and a look that made the toughest man think twice before taking him on.

What really set him apart was the gun rig at his side. At first glance you may have thought it was the standard issue Colt Single Action Army, the "Frontier" they called it. In fact, it was one but with the barrel shortened, the foresight removed and the firing mechanism trimmed. This was White's weapon of choice, he owned several that he modified himself. He wore a quick draw rig hung low on his hip, more in the style of a gun slinger than a soldier. If he hadn't been in the Army, he probably would have been an outlaw and the reputation he carried said he had killed

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more men in drunken fights and shoot outs than he had in the Indian campaigns that earned him his three stripes. That was all rumour but every one in this town knew those rumours and believed them. As he barked out his orders to the soldiers under his command and the town's folk he co-opted into service, everyone believed it.

That included Kid Ramble, watching from a stool at the hotel, just across the road from the bank. He knew all the stories and decided that no matter what, he wouldn't tangle with White today or any day. He watched dispassionately as Sheriff Madden came out of the bank and walked over to White. He couldn't hear them from his vantage point but he knew what he was telling him. The money for the Army pay roll was now secure in the bank agency safe. White turned and walked through to the bank. He wouldn't trust anyone about that money, he had to check himself and then make sure the safe was locked.

White had been pulling guard duty on the pay roll now, on and off, for over two years. It wasn't his preferred job but when the big shipments came through and this one was big, the Army wanted its best on the job. White was the best. Four times now, big time wannabes had hit the stage when White was escorting it. Each time it ended in bodies full of lead and never a dollar lost. White wanted it to stay that way for he got paid a bonus each time that he was supposed to share with his men but they never knew about it. And the bonus got bigger each time he was successful. Ramble knew his reputation and was not going to mix it up with this man.

He watched for another thirty, excruciatingly long minutes while White fastidiously checked every detail in the bank and could be heard booming out his orders to everyone inside. Two local

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deputies would be on guard until the regiment rolled in tomorrow with Sheriff Madden in control. Two of White's men would be helping out too, all under the Sheriff's direction. At least that was the official version but when White was involved, he was the boss. After White was satisfied that everything was just right, he finally left the bank and made arrangements for the horses.

The stage driver, Brent Squires, looked young to be a driver. He was actually an Army man, under White's control and so were the shotgun guards that rode up front with the driver. White trusted no-one outside the Army and this policy had served him well. Squires played the role well and took the horses to the livery and did all the other duties a driver would do. Meanwhile, now relieved of his responsibilities for the cash Sergeant White had grabbed a fresh horse and headed out of town to rest up at the temporary Army base some four miles to the east.

Jim Barnett waited on the outskirts of town. Jim was one of the Kid's boys and it was his job to give the all clear when White quit town. He watched White ride by and slowly make his way east toward the camp. When he was almost out of sight Jim saddled up and followed at a respectable distance, just keeping the dust trail in sight. He rode for a couple of miles and could see White in the distance, rounding a corner and still travelling well. Jim turned his horse and brought it to a gentle walk. Slowly, ever so slowly, he made his way back to town and urged his horse up a gentle slope and looked back down the road White had taken. He waited a little longer and was finally satisfied that White had gone far enough not to hear anything when the serious business got started.

Jim was young too but didn't look out of place in this town. He wore the standard garb of all ranch hands in the district. In the

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Midwest, ready to wear clothing was hard to find and many ranch hands were forced to wear second hand clothing that had been discarded by the higher classes, predominantly from the eastern cities. Because so many clothes were hand made in the east and handed down, it was not uncommon to see cowboys riding the range or working the ranch wearing a suit coat and vest or fancy dress pants rather than jeans. Sometimes these clothes were not wanted second hand and the poorer classes might sometimes get them for free.

Long after a man left the cavalry or other service, they would wear the remnants of their uniform for as long as possible. Jim Barnett fitted neither of these categories because he had been a moderately successful thief and had some good funds to buy what he wanted. Not wanting to stand out amongst his peers though, he always wore what everyone else had and never flaunted any of his ill gotten gains.

Jim sported a well worn Stetson with a deep V creased into the crown because of the heavy rain he often found himself riding through. Although in generally good condition because it was not too old, a large piece was missing from the brim of the hat at the back. This was torn out when his horse had bitten into it whilst Jim was feeding it some oats when no pail was available. If any man had damaged his hat this would have precipitated a fight but his treasured horse could take liberties no-one else could.

A red bandanna was tied around his neck and was the only piece of colour he carried. An ornate pattern in white adorned it and he wore it over the top of his white, button down shirt to protect his neck from the sun. The shirt had no collar but had twin pockets with button down flaps, long sleeves and cuffs. The shirt was



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made of wool and may be the only warm thing he had on a cold night wandering the rangeland.

Over the top was a cow hide waist coat in tarnished brown with a long fringe at the waist to let water drip off. Several lengths of the fringe were missing that had been torn off over time or cut off for running repairs on his rig. Although he no longer worked as a cattle hand, rustling was more profitable; he still habitually kept a note pad and pencil in his coat pocket to record cattle brands.

He wore a pair of heavy duty jeans that he had recently bought and had padded the saddle area for better wear. Over his jeans were leather chaps that ran the length of his leg to just above his short cut boots. The boots had pointed toes to help when he might need to mount a horse quickly. As an outlaw, these had served him well on a few occasions when he needed to be sure his foot did not miss the stirrup and the raised heel stopped it sliding through once he had driven it home.

Rattling spurs jangled as he walked or rode. Unlike the rest of his clothes, his boots were well maintained and he dutifully cleaned them on a regular basis and applied an oil to keep the leather supple for comfort and water resistant.

His horse was fitted with a leather saddle that carried all his other gear. A Winchester rifle was strapped to the left side of the saddle, with the barrel facing backward and the butt angled up toward the horse's head. It stayed in place in a sloping leather scabbard with a hole at the bottom to let any stray water escape. On the other side at the front, was his rope that he never travelled without and today, his riding gloves were tied to that rope. For long rides he wore them but whenever he neared a town, a ranch or other unknown group of people, he would take them off in

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advance. If it came to gunplay, the gloves were a hindrance and would have to be taken off before he could use his colt.

At the back of the saddle he usually carried his bedroll and when travelling, a saddle bag with his travel cooking gear and extra supplies. This time they were stashed away where he would grab them during his getaway run. No use having anything on board today that was not designed to keep him alive in the moments after the hold up.

The final touch was a gun belt with twin holsters strapped firmly to his thighs. He was right handed and completely useless with his left when it came to shooting. He knew this well but believed the twin colts gave him a deadly look and in any event, a second gun could never be wasted.

In the quiet of the night, he had been slipping away from the rest of the gang to be alone. When he was the only one in the cabin or he was travelling alone, he took every chance he could. When he got these chances he practiced being a bank robber.

He practiced his draw, pulling his gun and pointing it menacingly at trees. He practiced his speech, trying to scare the birds as he rode by. He practiced how he would feel when he killed someone. All the practice would make it right, as long as nobody saw him actually practicing, then he would have died of embarrassment. Luckily, nobody saw him and as the moment was close to arriving, in his mind, he told himself again, "I'm ready. I can do it." He had been a thief for quite a while but had never done anything like this before.

As he rode back to town, the upcoming encounter at the bank had played over and over in his mind. He kept seeing himself dead in

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the street with the Sheriff and the soldiers laughing over his lifeless body. When it had played over several times he turned his horse back out of town and commenced riding down into the valley and away from this trouble that was bigger than anything he had been involved in before. His stomach churned and his head reeled, the fear had him in its hold and was controlling his every motion. He had only ridden a short way before he stopped and looked back over his shoulder toward the town.

He thought through the situation again. In the town there waited lawmen and soldiers that might kill him if things went wrong. In the town there waited Ramble and the gang, if he pulled out now he knew Ramble would track him down and would definitely kill him.

He turned his horse again. Trembling as he rode, all he could think of was the fact the Ramble would kill him for sure, the soldiers only might kill him. He didn't like either set of odds but his fear of Ramble outweighed his fear of the Army and of the law.

A close observer would have seen the nervousness in the stilted way he looked around as he rode down the main street. They would have noticed him too, scanning the rooftops and alleys, exactly the way Kid Ramble had told him not to. Hell, he all but saluted as he rode past the saloon. Jim was more than nervous, he was terrified with what was to come but there was no way in hell that he would let Kid Ramble down now, it had been too hard getting into his gang and he was now unofficially the Kid's second in command. This was going to be his first hold up but he was up to it, he knew he was. He told himself he was, over and over and he believed it, almost.

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### 2 - John Quaid

**As 1880 began, Wyoming held around twenty thousand** citizens or maybe a few more. For such a large piece of untamed land, this wasn't such a lot of people but the Territory had more than doubled its population in the last ten years. The next ten would see even more, much more.

But for John Quaid, eking out a meagre survival on the outskirts of Crook, he knew none of this. What he did know was that near this little town of just over 200 hundred respectable citizens and a few more not so respectable, there was one large parcel of land up for grabs because no-one was there yet. John had led a hard life, growing up with nothing. Until recently, he had even less than that.

But now, slowly approaching 40 years, things had changed for John. He was a big man John, a mighty big man. Not like the big men you hear of, brave hearted men, strong of mind and determined to tame the west. John was big because he had not looked after himself and spent a little too much time hanging around bars and sucking in a lot too much whiskey. But as he surveyed his new place in the Wyoming Mountains, everything was different and he knew it was Molly who was responsible and had changed everything.

Molly hailed from Irish heritage; her family came over to the States in '54 sailing on the Shenandoah. Her father, Bernard Boyle was an Irish farmer looking for a better life. He brought his wife Martha with him and in '58, Mary Kathleen Boyle (Molly) was born and all through her child hood she heard her father tell the story of five days on the Shenandoah out of Liverpool heading for Philadelphia. Five days of misery he said, but counted himself

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lucky because the ship didn't make it through the rest of that year before being abandoned at sea with several people lost. Molly, he called her, when she young. As a child she adored him but as she became older, he abused her in a way that no man should treat a daughter. She came to fear him and hate him.

When Martha died, Molly left her father the very next day and never looked back, not even for the funeral. Bernard had been a wandering man and although a young woman was not safe alone any where in those days, she would never have been safe with him. Without her mother's protection, she knew it would all get worse, so she just left. She had known no other way of life though and she followed his wandering ways, making a living singing and dancing in the saloons along the way. Although not very good, she was pretty and looked mighty fine in a piece of well cut calico and so, she did well enough.

Then she met John and although she had many better looking suitors, some quite well to do, something about him made her fall all the way, for him. As for John, he never believed he would get a woman, any woman, let alone someone like Molly. He understood he was not a good looking man and he certainly did not have the kind of money it took to convince a woman to overlook his appearance. He stood six foot four inches and his stomach was much bigger than his chest. He sported a double chin (some would say triple) and had a bull neck that was so wide, from some angles he looked like he had no neck at all.

His stomach hung well over the top of his trousers and caused them to hang low. As a poor man, most of his clothes were poor quality and second hand. His belt, on the other hand, needed to be new and made of extra thick leather and fitted with a double buckle to handle the strain all that extra body created.

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John walked with a bobbing action because of this weight and having carried it for so long, it had caused a slight limp on his left leg that he had learned to hide quite well but not completely. On a cold morning or if he sat in one place too long, he would have a lot of trouble getting moving at all. Getting out of bed on a cold day he looked like he was completely crippled. Through sheer force of will, he would push himself through the pain he felt every day and put in a days work as big as anybody.

None of this bothered Molly, she saw through his looks and saw the man underneath. So they got hitched and then moved on out and started wandering, looking for a place to settle. Never one to make his decisions based on common sense, John ended up in Crook and decided to settle down. Bad decision, nothing here for him but land, solitude and work so hard it would send you to the grave. Maybe soon, maybe late, but that grave was waiting.

But John was here and he had built a little cabin for Molly. It was for little Kathleen too of course, now nearly three years old and as pretty as her mother ever was. A great scene it was that John surveyed when he saw the two great loves of his life come out of the cabin, look about and then, seeing him out with the horse, waved and called him for supper.

“This is the life” John said to himself as he walked to the cabin. He saw the dream of building an empire and never once considered the danger this life presented to his family. John had lived a hard life and been on the losing end of many a deal over the years. He was kind hearted and trusting, a mistake that could lead to tragedy in a tough land.

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While there weren't many people living in the area now, those that did formed a real community. John arrived with a grand plan but no real idea about how to make it a reality. He soon met people ready to help and he learned what could be accomplished if you worked together for a common purpose. This was new to him because he had always been a loner. Now he was a family man, a community man and in his dreams, maybe a community leader when things settled down here.

Mac Butler helped him build his house. He was a fur hunter and was good at it. John worked with him over the summer and in return, Mac turned his considerable skill with his hands, to help John and Molly with the house. In the beginning, his little family lived in the wagon they had travelled in. Now the house was up, things were different. The house was quite good and by local standards, with the help John had been lucky enough to secure, was one of the better places to be seen within two days ride. Molly and Kathleen missed the travelling life though, especially Kathleen.

Now they were settled, Kathleen had chores every day. When they were travelling, her mother and father took care of everything and there was no work for her to do at all. She could play in the wagon all day and check out the land around the camp fire at supper time. She was intrigued with the constantly changing landscape and loved playing guessing games with herself about what she would see around the next corner.

First of all, John built a barn and then they moved into that. After Mac helped with the house, he also helped fix up the barn. John had done the best he could alone, but without help it would have only stood for one or two winters at most.

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Now the two buildings stood firm and the house looked as good as any in the district. Mac built a loft in the barn and he stayed there some times. It all worked out very well for both of them. John continued to help with the trapping when he could and Mac helped around the farm. They became fast friends.

Now they had a barrel fitted to the back of the wagon. The trip to the creek and filling up the barrel now took more than half a day, but the water lasted more than a week and it meant that just occasionally, Molly and Kathleen got to have a real bath. Even if the bath was in an old wooden horse trough, for the girls, it was sheer luxury.

Several people came round on one occasion and everyone helped dig a well. A good thing too for it would have taken John weeks to do it alone. He had no idea either where to dig but Gerard, a lumber jack who was travelling through the district, fancied himself as a water diviner. However he did it, he picked a good spot and the well was dug and providing easy water. It saved hours every day hauling water for the farm from a nearby creek. It was close but three miles to the creek and three miles back, took time and when they first arrived, they had to do the trip with nothing more than buckets.

Other people helped with fences and other work that first year. John returned the favour with labour at their places. It all fitted into his plan and he thought he had truly made it now. This was his version of heaven.

He waved to Molly and Kathleen and headed in for supper. They both waved back and went into the house to serve up John's meal.



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John arrived and went to the wagon to wash up. As he was drying his hands and face, he looked across the wagon and saw Molly standing at the front of the house and she called out that supper was served. He stood for a moment, admiring her beauty and thinking about how lucky he was to have met this wonderful woman and that she had consented to becoming his wife.

Molly was a very young woman, nearly twenty years his junior. She had a finely chiselled nose, a small, slightly receding chin and a very small mouth that boasted full lips that lingered in John's thoughts long after she had left his sight. She had long straight hair with a lovely brown colour that had become delightful to the eye since they started travelling and the sun had created long blonde streaks at the side and back and an almost completely blonde fringe. When she travelled, she wore her hair back in a pony tail tied tightly to the back of her head. Today it was flowing freely and as it fluttered in the soft breeze, she was truly beautiful and John cherished that beauty.

She needed glasses for reading and tended to wear them almost all the time, even though her long distance sight was excellent. Her glasses were framed in a black metal and the pure blackness of the frame starkly contrasted her silky white skin and highlighted her one and only piece of jewellery. She had a pair of gold ear rings that had been her mother's and that she had worn when engaged in her dancing career. They weren't real gold, of course, but that didn't matter. What was important to her was that it was her very last, solid link to her mother.

Mostly, she wore a plain white blouse with long sleeves and a collar more reminiscent of a banker's business shirt with a fold over collar than a garment fit for a lady. Today she wore a white blouse with a fitted bodice, a plunging neck line similar to her old

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dancing dresses and intricately stitched embroidery in bright pink. Other than her church outfit, this was her only very nice blouse and she had it starched and pressed to perfection. The sleeves were folded to her elbows and held up with silver buttons.

Molly's usual work trousers were missing and replaced with a figure hugging calico skirt with lace trim. As she moved, the flowing hem moved around in a manner, most intriguing to the eye. Her plain black work boots were the only thing that betrayed the fact that she was not a high society wife from Philadelphia. She would have worn something to match the rest of the outfit except, this was the only foot wear she owned. Even with the boots, she moved across the wooden porch with style and grace. She always moved gracefully, even when working right alongside her man with the heavy plough.

John saw her there, standing in the fading light of the sun setting against the mountain backdrop. Right now, right this very moment, she could have wowed them on any stage in Europe and here in the mountains, John would have been forgiven if he thought he was looking upon the visage of an angel, such was the radiant beauty Molly now portrayed.

He moved towards her and embraced her lovingly. When little Kathleen raced out and jumped into his arms, John's world was complete.

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### 3 - The Ramble Plan

**Barnett was the signal man. He had followed the plan** Kid Ramble had set out, to the letter. He was totally confident that White had quit town and would not be back today. He would probably be asleep in an hour. At the Army camp he would eat, drink way too much and on the back of the long haul in from Cheyenne, be asleep very quickly.

Ramble's gang were all in place and knew that Barnett's slow ride through town was the signal that everything was ready. They were all young and inexperienced but confident that Ramble knew what he was doing. He had impressed them all, first with his reputation and then with his planning and enforced practice. Only one of them knew his background at all and he would not be letting anyone know that Kid Ramble, previously known to him as Lester Rumble, had changed his name, given himself the title "Kid Ramble" and had created his own reputation.

Any indecision the gang had he had smashed out of them with the butt of his gun. They all believed him when he said he would kill anyone of them that didn't toe the line. Not one of them saw that Ramble was just as scared as every other member of the gang. He was good at hiding that, very good indeed.

They would enter the bank through three doors. Their superior numbers would overwhelm the deputies, the soldiers and anyone else in there.

Not a shot would be fired Ramble said. They would take them by surprise, tie them up and gag everyone. They would leave by the back door and ride gently out of town before anyone knew what

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was happening. He told them also, that he knew exactly where they would hide out until the law gave up.

Ramble did have a plan but he had not told them everything. He was completely confident that when they found out what it was, they would stick with him, to the end. If they didn't stick with him, they would be on the receiving end of a bullet any way. Ramble didn't give a damn whether it was a bullet from the law or from him, if anyone was disloyal, they would get it one way or another. He also knew that if he told them before it all happened he risked losing some of them. He knew most of them were squeamish about the entire plan. If they knew in advance what he planned to do, one or two of them were sure to pull out.

Pat Malone was an Army man and he had worked the security details and guard duty on military transport a couple of times. The soldiers in the bank knew him and didn't question anything when he walked in. Soon they would but by then it wasn't going to matter. For his share of the loot from the job today he was willing to risk losing his twenty three dollars a month and knew his share would be a lot. His twenty three dollars was more than most because of his service. Others got as little as thirteen dollars in their first year and it took a long time to go up. For the first time since Custer met his end, entire companies of the Cavalry were passing through Wyoming. Some were travelling through to Kansas and others through to Montana.

It was one of the biggest Army gatherings in these parts since the big Sioux campaigns in the 70s when Custer had ten full companies at his command. These men would not be staying but as they travelled through, they had an immense impact.

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Pat had been in the early contingent and came to town every chance he had to get out and a few times when he just sneaked away. He had been caught but no real punishment ensued. In days like these it was hard to recruit more soldiers and Pat had shown he was keen for the fighting. That was all that was needed under General Carlson. Everybody knew that the only way out of the cavalry was the end of your tour of duty or dead. If a man needed to blow off a little steam in town, the Army didn't really care as long as he came back.

If the men in the bank had known what else he had been up to, that would have changed things. He had been hanging around with Kid Ramble and bragged to him that he worked the pay escorts. They all joked that it would be great to rob one but when the Kid spoke, he wasn't joking. He wanted excitement, he wanted money and he wanted people to respect him. He didn't care if that respect was fear and he made his plans on that basis. In private moments, in his own head, he secretly wished that this would be the way it happened. He thought about who held the respect of the people in these parts. They were the Pastor, the teacher, a politician and sometimes the Sheriff. People respected them for the job they did.

Outlaws, now people respected them because of what they did. Ramble knew this was because people feared them. He knew this, but didn't care. The only person he had truly respected as a child was his father and that was because he was scared to death of him. In Ramble's mind, that was real respect.

The others weren't keen when he pressed them until the day they heard that part of the fifth cavalry was coming to town and their whole pay, maybe for a whole company, would be here. Pat would know when and where. He didn't but bragged that he

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would. Once the plan had been formed, he set about finding out and somehow he had succeeded.

The Kid watched from his spot at the saloon. Pat wandered across the road in his uniform, maybe for the last time ever. He entered the bank and was immediately confronted by the deputies. The soldiers recognised him and told them to cool their heels. He chatted with them for a moment and told them he wished he had been given the job today, the big one with all that cash inside. He let them know he was just in town and had dropped in to bid them good day. Had they known he was supposed to be on a patrol at this very moment they may have been suspicious. But they didn't know and Pat had a reputation for being a bit wild and always looking for the action. These men had worked with him on previous payroll runs and held no suspicions at all. Pat had earned their respect in action, he was one of them.

Some eight months ago now, he had been riding trail gun on another cash shipment with Sergeant White in command. Mostly, when White ran an operation, he and another soldier would ride ahead of the coach. Two more would ride behind and were referred to as trail guns. On board would be another one or two, often in plan rig and riding with paying passengers. If the shipment was large, the driver and guard were also soldiers but on that run, they were civilians employed by the coach company.

When travelling through close country such as a narrow canyon or heavily wooded areas that afforded a plethora of ambush spots, White would get one or both of the trail guns to hang back. This was designed to provide a surprise to anybody who attempted to hold up the coach as the men who hung back would stay out far enough so as not to be seen. When they arrived on a holdup

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scene, they would provide extra fire power and would often know something was up because they had already heard gun fire.

On that run, White had both riders hang back. When a gang of outlaws held up the coach, they shot the driver, wounded the guard and got the jump on the others. Pat was riding with Andy Raddock, a man not so keen to be a hero. He hung back and left Pat to catch up alone. Pat galloped into the scene headlong, firing wildly as he did. A good shot from horseback, he took out two of the outlaws before they had the chance to get organised. White took the chance to take another out with his knife after dragging him off his horse and then grabbed his gun.

In short order, all five outlaws lay dead and Pat was the hero. Andy disappeared soon after and deserted, never to be seen again.

He left the bank and hesitated in the middle of the street. If he stopped in the middle of the street and dusted off his hat, that was the signal that the guards were settling. He had told the gang that when the payroll arrived, the Army guards and the deputies would be on their guard for a while but after an hour or so, they would relax and it would be easier to catch them out. If he stopped and just turned to walk back, that was the signal for the Kid and the gang to wait. He turned slowly as if to return to the bank before pulling his hat off and dusting it down on his jeans. He then strolled across the width of the street toward the saloon and walked right past the Kid without a glance.

Pat headed straight to his horse that was reined two streets back from the saloon. He saddled up and headed out of town and took up his next spot, to watch for dangers on the escape route.

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In the mean time Jim had wandered around to the rear entrance of the bank and met up with Brad Somerton. Brad was the oldest of the group, at 34 years he was big and strong, good with a gun but not so bright. He was the most willing to follow the Kid.

Brad was tall and solidly built. He had the look of a man that would be good in a saloon brawl but was the kind of man that avoided such events. He was fast with a six gun and always carried a sneak gun under his shirt as well as the Colt on his hip. He often wore a long coat, reminiscent of the classic lawman's outfit. When he did, he was sure to have a second sneak gun in there too, he liked to be better prepared than anyone else.

He wore a wide brimmed Stetson pushed down low at the front. Over his shirt he sported a long cravat that hung almost to his waist. It used to be blue but had not been cleaned for long enough for the colour to no longer be apparent. His recycled trousers had seen better days and only held together because of the leather chaps he sported. His colt sat higher on his left side than most and he sported flat heeled boots without spurs. He spurned the heels preferred by most cowboys because he wanted to be able run freely if he needed. He never wore spurs because he didn't want the noise to announce his arrival when he wanted to arrive unnoticed and he always wanted to be that way.

Brad often boasted of his bravery and claimed to have been the victor in several gun fights. He was a man not to be trusted and a man who would not confront you or give you a chance. If you were on the wrong side of this man, likely as not, you would find yourself shot in the back at night with Brad hiding in the shadows. That would never be the story he told though for he never let the truth stand in the way of good bragging rights. Brad was a man



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that nobody could trust, except Kid Ramble, who could rely on him completely because he saw the Kid as a hero.

Jim checked the door and found it locked, that was expected. He leaned on it gently and checked the strength of the lock. He had checked it the night before but wanted to be sure now. As he lent on it he could feel the old rotting wood giving a little. With the impact of Brad's heavy bulk against it, it would give easily. He sent Brad to the front corner where he stepped round and dusted off his hat the way Pat did.

Rob McEvoy and Randy Nairn were in the alley at the side of the bank. As they worked on the window of the manager's office, they were watched from either end of the alley. Steve Farley stood at the main street end where the Kid could see him. Mat Sterns stood at the back end, both acting as look outs. Rob quietly prised the window ajar and stuck his head in. He knew that old man Bartlett, the bank's none too energetic manager, would not be there until after ten in the morning. He was a lazy man that was never keen to get to work early when he had staff to do all the real work for him. Even on a day like today with the big delivery coming through, he didn't feel any need to be there. In fact, today he felt less need, just in cast there was trouble he didn't want to be about. He was scared to death around the soldiers. Little did he know that today, his cowardice would save his life.

When Rob saw it was clear he slowly and carefully climbed in. Randy followed but was not so careful. He knocked a vase sitting on a shelf beside the window and it shattered on the wooden floor. It made a substantial noise and both men drew their guns and faced the door, fully expecting the law and the soldiers to come barrelling in to check out the racket.

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They stood motionless for fully two minutes before they cautiously looked at each other and started to realise their expected doom was not coming through that door. Randy pulled the window back into place. From inside the manager's office, after their heart beats had slowed enough, they could hear muffled movements inside the main bank. They stood by the door and looked at each other for support and to gather confidence. They pulled their guns and waited.

Matt Sterns walked down the alley and joined Farley. They looked across the street and saw Kid ramble through the window. Just down the street a little they saw Nick. Nick was the final member of the gang and didn't have a last name, none that he ever admitted too anyway. He had family connections amongst the rich and powerful who had disowned him because of his wild ways and he was not willing to admit any connection. He was swaying gently in a chair on the porch of the general goods store, holding a whiskey bottle and seemingly waiting for the store to open. When the robbery started, it was his job, with the Kid, to make sure the horses were ready to go. He had a string of eight horses down behind the saloon. As soon as the action started he would bring them out and guide them down the alley at the side of the bank. The Kid would join him and cover the gang's retreat with him if anything went wrong.

Matt Sterns walked up to the door of the bank and walked in, swinging a bag in his left hand filled with coins that everyone would recognise as a miner's gold dust bag. A miner would exchange his dust for cash and if he'd had a good haul, maybe put some into the bank for safe keeping. Matt certainly looked every bit like the lucky miner today, even down to the tote bag he carried in his right hand. The immediate suspicion on the part of the deputies disappeared when he dropped the tote bag and,

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jingling the other small bag said, “Had a good haul last week fellas, need to put some in for safe keeping”. He placed a large shoulder bag he was carrying on the floor at his feet and as he jingled the coins, the deputies smiled acknowledgement at him and let him step up to the cashier. Meanwhile, Farley leaned against the hitch rail out front, watching the door waiting to hear the noises inside that would indicate the real business had started. Stationed outside, he was a lookout to give warning if anyone approached the bank that wasn’t expected.

Everyone was in place now and Matt was having his money counted. He noticed the guards, standing around talking, taking no notice of him or anything else. They were close to the side door. He called out, “Hey fellas, when ya finish, come over to the saloon, drinks are on me tonight”. This appealed to the deputies and they moved close to him to discuss the offer.

Just then the side door crashed in under the pressure of Somerton’s shoulder and the considerable bulk he carried with him. He swayed into the room and stepped to one side with Randy Nairn coming in hot on his heels, twin colts in his hands aimed directly at the guards. He yelled his instructions to the guards to get their hands up as Matt pulled his own gun clear of leather and aimed it at the soldiers.

Before the guards had time to react McEvoy and Nairn stepped out of the manager’s office and added their own guns to the coverage of the guards. At the same time, Matt reached down to his shoulder bag and came up with a shotgun in his hands, waving it around menacingly and the guards knew they were outnumbered and these guys had the drop on them. Slowly, hands reached for the ceiling and the gang grinned at the easy success of the plan so far.

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Outside, Farley heard the noise, did a quick check in either direction up the street and when satisfied no-one else had heard the noise, went to the door and walked in. He smiled to himself as he surveyed the room and saw everything going well. He saw the teller trying to move away, unobserved by his comrades in the heat of action. He pulled his gun and called over to him, "Hey cashier, better not be movin' any further if'n you want to keep that head on your shoulders." The cashier stopped cold and threw his arms in the air and stood frozen to the spot.

Barnett grinned and motioned to the cashier to move over to the guards. While everyone else covered off those guards he slowly walked through every area of the bank looking for other people. He found young Margie; the bank's cleaner and cook, hiding behind a desk. He motioned her out and she quickly joined the guards and cashier under the watchful eyes of the gang.

McEvoy moved slowly amongst them, removing the guns and knives he found on the soldiers and deputies. He emptied the guns and threw them in the tote bag Matt had brought in. He grabbed the ammunition belts and put them in a far corner along with several knives. He ordered the cashier to step out and then pushed him toward the safe. He commanded him to open the safe but the cashier claimed he did not know the combination. McEvoy continued to menace him while the rest of the crew tied up the guards and the girl. They lined them up along the side wall and made them sit down with their backs to that wall.

When this was done Somerton came over to the cashier. "Which hand do you write with banker?" he asked mockingly. The cashier indicated his right hand. With sudden fury Somerton threw his great bulk against him and slammed him into the wall

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beside the door way to the manager's office. It knocked the wind out of the cashier who was clearly terrified. Somerton grabbed his left arm and smashed it up against the frame of the door way and the sickening sound of cracking bone preceded the cashier's agonised scream as both bones in his forearm shattered from the impact.

Somerton let him fall to the ground and then smashed him across the face with the back of his hand before hauling him up. "Now cashier" he yelled into his face, "Undo that safe before I smash your other arm and put a bullet in that dog ugly head of yours" The terrified look in his eyes betrayed the fear and he just nodded. Moments later he showed the lie he had told when he said he could not open the safe. He clearly could and it took only moments to accomplish. Somerton smashed him back to the ground before he was tied up and lined up with the rest.

McEvoy snarled and told the guards that no-one would be hurt if they just sit tight now while they collected up all the money. Saddle bags were grabbed from just outside the side door and in double quick time, the entire Army pay roll and the other cash held in the bank, was stashed and the gang ready to roll. All they were waiting on now was the boss and he was not far away.

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### 4 - The Real Plan

**Barnett went to the door and made ready for the next signal.** He opened the door slowly and carefully then looked up and down the main street. A cowpoke ambled slowly toward the saloon, a wagon with two people on board was heading toward the store and a fancy looking lady in all white was standing on a board walk looking completely out of place. Everything looked good outside and it was all just fine inside. Barnett stepped out onto the street and waved his hat about pretending to dust it off on his leg. This was the signal to the Kid that everything was OK and that he and Nick should bring the horses around back.

Nick saw the hat and immediately started toward the back of the bank with four horses. He expected to see the Kid come out of the saloon and head around the corner to gather four more. He didn't know that those four horses were already back there just out of sight of the back door. Instead the Kid walked over to him as he crossed the street, "Change of plans Nick," the Kid said, "the other horses are already back there behind the split grey door in the shed behind the bank. They are ready to go, you need to unhitch them and have them ready pronto. We'll be coming out soon, real quick."

Nick went to question this sudden and unannounced change but saw the look in the Kid's eyes and thought better of it, noticing at the same time that the Kid was holding the butt of his gun the way he always did when he was angry or excited. Right now he was both and on a knife edge. Nick knew and shut his mouth while nodding to acknowledge he had heard and would do as he was told. He headed slowly across the track trying not to arouse any interest. He went round back and ground reined the four horses. It took only moments to locate the other horses and unhitch them

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so that soon he had eight horses out there. He mounted his own and watched up and down the lane while watching the other horses carefully. They mustn't be spooked. If one run off now that would leave a man short of a horse and he didn't know what the Kid would do if he got to this part of the caper and something went wrong.

As he sat his horse waiting for the gang to emerge he was startled by the sound of a gunshot coming from inside the bank. Panic began to rise in his throat, someone must have played up and been shot or worse, one of the gang had been killed. He had no idea what the Kid was up to inside.

Inside the bank the rest of the gang had been surprised when the Kid burst in the door and quickly secured the bolt behind him. McEvoy went to question him but was stopped when the Kid looked him squarely in the eyes said simply, "Change of plans". The Kid walked slowly and deliberately over to the wall where two soldiers, two deputies, the cashier and the girl were sat lined up.

The Kid looked at Randy and indicating the tote bag said, "Get me one of them guns and load it up". Randy was curious but did as he was told with saying a word. They all wondered why the Kid wanted another gun, he had two strapped on and there was a rifle on his horse waiting outside. Randy finished his chore and handed him the freshly loaded gun. It was a six shot revolver, similar to his own Colt but something slightly unfamiliar. The Kid looked at it for a moment, wondering what it was. But that didn't matter, it was a gun and it had six bullets.

Ramble looked down at the people tied and gagged, sitting against the wall. He looked around at his gang and said quietly, but with

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authority, “Get ready boys, we leave in one minute.” He turned slowly back to the seated six, pulled the hammer back on the unfamiliar gun and fired at the deputy sat closest to him. The man’s head exploded open and there was a sudden flurry of panicked movement from the rest of the seated crew. The Kid was fast and good with a gun; and at this distance, wouldn’t miss. He fired five more times and six bodies lay in twisted and contorted positions from the impact of the slugs. All six were successful shots and four were dead as the Kid turned for the back door, calling out “Get going boys”.

As his gang tried to recover from the shock of what had just happened, they began to move. They were all completely stunned and not comprehending everything that had just happened or why it had happened. What they had comprehended, almost as one, was that now they would be hunted men not just for the robbery but for several murders. If any of them were caught they were going to the noose for sure. They ran for the door, snatching up the cash and tote bag of guns.

Nairn’s head had gone into over drive but he was not the only one whose mind raced as he saddled up. He had suspected for some time that Ramble was insane and now his leader had proven it himself. There was absolutely no need to kill anyone today and he knew that this had placed every member of the gang in much more danger than before. If they had left everyone tied up and alive, they could have quit the bank and the town quietly without being noticed. They could have been gone an hour or two, maybe more, before the town knew what had happened. After the gun shots were heard, the whole town was alerted and there would not have been too much doubt what was going on. The law and a posse would be on their trail in short order and much more determined to catch them now the men were dead.



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Ramble dropped the now empty gun he had used and turned back to look at the bodies. Four of the men were dead but the girl and the deputy Sheriff were both squirming about, trying to get out of sight. As he walked over the girl began screaming and the deputy tried desperately to stand up. Ramble pulled his own gun and put the barrel two inches from the deputy's head. The man made one last desperate lunge at Ramble, trying to knock the gun from his hand.

With his hands and feet tied, he stood no chance and at it was the last voluntary move he ever made. As he moved, Ramble fired. Standing over him, the shot ripped through his shoulder, into to his chest and travelled down to his stomach. By the time the bullet had stopped, the man was dead.

Ramble turned to the girl and aimed his gun at her. She tried to scream but no noise came out. She looked at him in terror and silently begged him not to hurt her any more. He stood there watching, enjoying the moment, enjoying her pain. McEvoy called for him, he looked round momentarily and then back at the girl. He smiled at her and carefully holstered his weapon. Then he spoke softly to her, "You wouldn't tell anyone what we look like, if I let you live, would you?"

The girl tried to speak and could not. She shook her head emphatically to indicate that she would not. Ramble smiled again, nodded and slowly turned and walked to the door. He reached the door and turned to her, smiled again and said, "You'll be alright, just don't tell the law anything and you'll be fine".

She shook her head again. He turned and took a step toward going out the door. The he turned again, smiled a final time and

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drew his gun again. Two shots rang out and her life ended in an instant. Now there were six dead.

As the gang crashed out through the door almost as one they stumbled over each other momentarily as they jostled to get moving. In only a few moments all eight were mounted and spurring their mounts out of town, heading west away from the Army camp and toward the Medicine Bow Mountains. As they left town they all looked back and saw activity in the town with people beginning to stir and head toward the bank and see what had happened. The Sheriff did not appear to be one of those stirring and as they pounded the road leading out of town, no dust rose indicating anyone pursuing them. They pushed their horses to the limit, riding single file with Ramble bringing up the rear.

As they passed the city limits, Nairn was now making a plan of his own. He would stick with the gang for now, until they had cleared the law and were no longer being hunted. Their chance of success in that ambition hinged entirely on every one of them acting as a team. Once that was accomplished, he would find a chance to kill Ramble, clear out on his own or maybe, just maybe, both. In fact, if he got a chance to kill him sooner, he would because he knew Ramble now represented a greater threat to him than the law or the Army.

Nairn was always up for taking chances, he loved the thrill. But in those moments following the killings in the bank, it became obvious to him that anyone who stayed with Ramble long enough would end up dead one way or another. He had seen the look in Ramble's eyes, the look of exhilaration and joy. A cold heart was shown with only one feeling. Ramble had become completely kill crazy.

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They rounded a corner just out of town and Pat Malone eased his mount out from behind some bushes. His job now had been to monitor this part of the escape and if anyone was seen, fire three shots from his big carbine. Even this far out of town the gang would have heard it and this was their signal they should go another way. The lack of any shots said everything was as planned. They all pulled up in front of Pat and the Kid asked him if there had been anybody travelling down this way. “Not for half an hour” said Pat, “Let’s get going fellas.”

Pat was pleased to be part of this gang and was ready to enjoy his share of the loot. All he had to do now was elude the law with the rest of the men and share up all that money. He went to turn his horse to move out when the Kid came up beside him and said, “You like being part of this gang, don’t you Pat?”

“Sure do” Pat replied, feeling smug to be part of this outfit that just pulled off such a big job. The Kid didn’t say a word; he just pulled his gun and fired, hitting Pat in the chest. The shot was high and didn’t hit any major organs and Pat managed to stay in the saddle. As he took in what had just happened he held his chest to stem the flow of blood and he heard the Kid, talking calmly now, “You were never part of this gang, just a traitor to your own mates”. The Kid spurred his horse and Pat tried to reach for his gun to reply in kind for the shot he had just taken. Too bad for him his muscles were not cooperating and his arm did not work. He tried again but failed as the strength left him.

He fell from the saddle and lay under his horse. Seeing this was further confirmation to Nairn that the Kid was no longer sane, he pulled his colt and aimed it squarely at Ramble’s back. It was a clear shot at almost point blank range, he could not miss and it would end the threat from his leader right now. He hesitated

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though, not knowing how the other men would react. As likely as not, one of them would shoot him before Ramble hit the ground, out of misguided loyalty to their insane leader.

As all this went through his mind an eerie quietness crept across the group as one by one they saw him holding the gun on Ramble. The tension rose as the leader turned in his saddle and eyed the menacing weapon pointed directly at him. His eyes met Nairn's and held them for a long moment. He looked down at the gun for a few moments and then back at Nairn before asking, "What are you planning then?"

Nairn still had the drop on Ramble and if he chose, there would be no contest. The other man sat twisted in the saddle with his gun hand on the wrong side. He saw the shot he wanted to take in his mind but also saw McEvoy covering the butt of his own gun. His reply was calculated to save his own life, "Just backing you up boss. He looked like he was going for his gun." He slowly and deliberately slid his Colt back into the holster.

Ramble slowly turned his horse and moved up beside Nairn. He pulled his gun and aimed directly at Nairn's head and then leaned forward and placed the barrel on his forehead. His opponent sat motionless, terrified but defiant. Ramble glared straight at him for what seemed like the longest time and then ran the gun down his neck and onto his chest. He circled the gun around his chest three times and then slowly pointed it at the man's groin. He pulled back the hammer and then laughed. Nairn saw the same kill crazy look he had seen at the bank.

With a motion so fast that it made the gun barrel appear blurred; Ramble uncocked the hammer and slid the weapon back into its holster. "Good" yelled Ramble, "I need men who will back me up

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no matter what.” He laughed and then rode off at a gallop with the others following and they left the bleeding man to die on the ground.

For more than two hours Malone laid there before the Sheriff found him, not quite dead but done for. The Sheriff had put a posse together and began his pursuit. He questioned Pat but got very little. Pat tried to speak but all he got out was, “They took the money” and “I tried to stop him.” Pat would have told him everything he knew but before he could, he died.

One of the men got down and checked him. He looked up at the Sheriff and shook his head slowly, indicating the man was dead. The Sheriff took off his hat, held it to his heart and said, “Brave man, taking on that gang alone to stop them. Brave but stupid”. The posse nodded as one, agreeing totally with this sentiment.

They paused for a few moments and one of the men said a few words over the body. Then they rode off in pursuit of the outlaw gang.

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### 5 - The Quaid Plan

**John Quaid didn't know much about farming but he was a willing worker and the land was good.** The little spread he had set up had good, permanent water nearby, regular rain and lots of it. The soil was rich and yielded well no matter what you tried to grow.

John had staked out 160 acres, as best he could measure by pacing out the ground on foot. He was amongst the first in this area and planned to claim his free land from the government under the Homestead Act. All he had to do was stay five years and show he had improved the land. At least that was what John assumed after somebody had told him that was how it worked. He didn't bother to check it out, he just believed the man, such was the way of John in such matters. John would never speak out of turn or on any subject he knew nothing about and he honestly believed nobody else would do it to him.

There were still Indians about in this country but not so many after the Black Hills campaign and he figured he had never seen one, they can't be here any more. This was his second assumption that could have gotten him into trouble. The fact was that there were still a lot of Indians in Wyoming and some were running in bands that were still causing a lot of trouble and were extremely dangerous. Since the wars though, they had become more cautious and very adept at staying unnoticed until it was too late.

It was boom times and the Oregon trail was bringing cattle through. The trail passed right through Laramie and after six weeks in the saddle it was surely a welcome sight for settlers and trail herders alike. Then for a long haul there were no major towns to supply the trail herders and settlers moving west. Since

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Fort Casper was burned to the ground, it had never really prospered again. John was planting potato, pumpkins, tomatoes, peas and other vegetables. After long days in the saddle without regular vegetables, relying on the easy beef they herded along, trail herders were often tired and sick. Trail bosses knew they needed vegetables and would pay handsomely for good crops along the way. He planted fruit too, apples, pears and berries. They were hard to grow but fetched a premium, anything sweet did.

After the war, Texas was in a sad and sorry financial state. One huge asset it still held though was many thousand head of longhorn cattle. Texans soon worked out that trailing them up into Oregon and other areas was a highly profitable endeavour. Since the black hills campaigns, the trail through Wyoming became safer and it was already shorter and easier than other options.

This meant a lot of herds came through and brought the money with them that John Quaid was working for. It also brought men that were toughened by civil war action and belligerent because they had lost. Some of the men were also outlaws or the Texas Hellions that had kept the war going months longer than anticipated even against enormously overwhelming odds. These were dangerous men that John did not understand. He believed he was capable of handling them, another assumption that he got completely wrong and that put him and his family at intense risk.

John planned to sell as much as he could to build up his own herd. Maybe he could trade his crops for the odd head of beef as it came through. He had plans, big plans and had a good start.

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They already had a cabin up. It had one large single room on the ground level with a window at both ends and a single door with a narrow porch along the front. The windows were only frames; the glass had broken on the long trip out. The high pitch roof made room for a sleeping area elevated above the main room with a simple ladder leading up.

The house had a kitchen bench now, built around a wood stove that doubled as a heater. John had constructed a cupboard that he had tried to fix to the wall twice now but both times it had come down on him. There was a large bed in their room and a small one for Molly with a mattress stuffed full of goose feathers. Their own mattress less full and somewhat lumpy but with a little hunting luck, more birds would come their way and the bed would slowly become more comfortable as they filled it up.

Molly had used some canvass off the wagon to construct blinds over the windows to keep the cold out and John had put up a false wooden wall around Kathleen's sleeping area to give her a feeling of privacy and possession. For molly, the best part was the view of the majestic mountains and the sweeping vistas outside the front door. Not even the awful looking fence John was building to hold stock spoiled it for her but she would have been happier if John was a better fencer. The front door (the only door) hung loosely on rope hinges. John had ordered some new metal ones but they had not yet arrived.

Molly loved this house, it was hers. She worked hard along side her husband and struggled with the plough for many long hours. It was their prized possession that had filled their wagon on the trip there.



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Deere and Company made good ploughs but they weren't cheap. John and Molly bought their's in Illinois. They bought the plough directly from John Deere's own son Charles and got a great deal. John thought it was his great negotiation skills but really, it was Charles who fancied Molly and wanted to impress. They had dragged this thing over 1000 miles but they thought it was worth it. Three years of travelling but they thought it was absolutely worth it. The family would have made it in only a few weeks if they had only known where they were going. They did not. John just set out and every time they turned a corner and saw a piece of nice looking land, he decided this was the place. Twice now they had stopped in one place for six months or more before working out it was not suitable for them. Finally they arrived in this piece of Crook County. John wasn't planning to stop but the axel on the wagon broke and they had no choice. By the time he got it fixed, Molly had made the decision for him and they put down roots and set up home.

The plan had worked well so far with a couple of trail herd bosses buying food from them. The men working these trails travelled from Texas to the emerging markets and rail heads in Oregon. The trip was over 2, 000 miles and took several weeks. Much of the country was harsh, very harsh indeed. By the time they arrived in Wyoming, they were certainly ready for some good, healthy food.

They now had their first longhorn steer, the start of their herd. Granted, just one and it was injured and would never see prime fitness again but it was a strong, fertile male. John had traded it with one of the trail herd bosses for the vegetables he needed. All they needed now was a couple of cows to get things going. The experience had helped Molly feel safer too; she had been scared about rough types coming on the place. She had grown up in

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Chicago in a rough way. In her teens she had come across men who only wanted one thing and more than once, she had no choice but to give it to them if she didn't want to get hurt and her father never kept her safe. Then she found her own father had wanted exactly the same thing and she had no choice but to give it to him too.

Only when her mother died was she able to escape but still her life in Chicago was rough, dangerous and desperate. But then she met John, a man who did not expect anything of her and came to adore her. He treated her with dignity, with respect and made her want to give herself to him. And when she became pregnant, she was thrilled that it was to him and she loved him even more. She had been hesitant about his grand plan to travel all this way to build a future but she had to admit, it was working out. Everything would work out great, she just knew it now. Seeing it all coming together she just loved him more than ever. Tonight, these feelings also made her want to give herself over to him.

Tonight she did and she was completely happy. She knew she would never be with anyone else, not ever and John's plan would work out for her little family. These were the last thoughts in her head as she dropped off to sleep that night and she was completely happy for the first time in her life.

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### 6 – The White Plan

**Sergeant White was angry, insanely angry. He didn't care** about the money going missing, the Army had plenty. He didn't care about the Sheriff's deputies, he didn't know them. He didn't care about the cashier or the girl that died, bank workers never really did anything worth while, no real work, never fought for their lives or their country.

He did care about three good men, three troopers who met their deaths serving their country doing what was right. White had seen too many soldiers die, in the Indian Wars, in the Mexican campaigns, from one end of the country to the other. He wanted to go after those that had done this, he really wanted to go. When the General sent a message for him to come and meet, he knew what was wanted and he leaped at the chance. He was angry that what they wanted was to get the money back; they didn't really care about the men. But the General had made him an offer of 10% of what he recovered and said he could pick any men he wanted, as many as he wanted for as long as he needed. An example needed to be set that you did not get away with robbing the Army.

He didn't care about the money the Army lost but he cared about getting more of it for himself. He would tell those he took with him that they would earn 2% and keep the rest for himself. But he really did care about the men who had died and this would give him the chance to go after the men who had killed **his** team. He would get them for young Pat Malone too. He had spoken to one of the Sheriff's men who had returned to town with a lame horse and he had told him about Malone's last words. White took them to mean he had tried to stop the thieves on their run out of town and had lost his life in the effort. A soldier protecting the interests

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of his troop, there was no greater cause and no greater reason to seek revenge. But if he had known what part Malone had played in the robbery, he would have shot the man himself. As it stood, he did not know this and saw Malone as a hero. His death would be avenged and everyone would know what a hero he was and the Sergeant would make sure his name went on the military honor roll.

He set about setting up a military posse. The civilian posse with Sheriff Madden at their head had failed miserably in less than two days. Given up is what they did, no stomach for taking on a bunch that had already killed six men they knew about and one defenceless woman while she was tied and bound. Any men who would do that would do anything to protect their loot. Even though they knew from the tracks leaving town there were only six or seven members of that gang and there were 25 of them in the posse, they still did not have the guts required for this caper.

White did. He didn't know yet that the posse had given up already and if he had been told, probably wouldn't have believed it until he saw proof for himself. He had killed many more men than Ramble had and now he made plans to add six or seven more to that tally and he counted himself justified for each one. The General had said to bring them in but he knew he would not. Each would die, every one of them and this country would be better for it. He was a hero and he just wished more people understood that.

Sergeant White would never give up his pursuit. He never had before and he certainly would not start now.

He set about putting his team together and getting them moving. The gang would have a four or five day head start and would take

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some catching. But he would catch them no matter how long it took. He would need tough men, obedient men who would push on and be willing to risk themselves for the task at hand. He knew the core of men he wanted and he set about getting them. He would need a few more and would call for volunteers, Army men would always volunteer if there was money to be had. For Army men, a share of 2% would be a huge sum.

Gerry Rogers was his first pick because he had served along side Gerry for many years. Gerry was a career soldier that knew all about risk, all about obeying orders and all about honoring a fellow soldier. He was a corporal and would never rise higher in the ranks, he wanted to be an enlisted man forever and stay with the real men.

Rogers was 40 or thereabouts. He was almost completely bald except for a lavishly bushy moustache. He wore glasses and was almost completely blind without them. Scarring adorned his neck and arms from long sun exposure and the skin on his face was like leather to touch, wrinkled and spotted. He was a tenacious fighter who would not give in and was known to get up to win a fist fight after his opponent was convinced he was out for the count. He drank too much, a lot too much and when he did he became very obnoxious. It was this trait that was responsible for his fighting skills developing because whenever he got drunk, a fight was sure to follow.

Barney Smith was next. He was an outlaw, a thief and a murderer. He had been in jail for murder and sentenced to hang. He was given a reprieve to join the Army in '75 and had served with Custer for a short time until he was transferred across to White's troop. Two years ago he was wounded in an Indian skirmish and volunteered to stay behind at a river crossing where

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he could hold the Indians off for a while so the rest of the squad could make their escape. He had his left leg smashed with a large calibre bullet and could not get on his horse again. They left him facing 30 braves at that crossing; left for dead.

Six days later the squad returned with reinforcements and found four dead Indians and Barney still hanging on. He was in a pretty bad way and took a long time to recover. He still walked with a limp but could ride and fight the equal of any man alive.

Next he grabbed Mike Turner and Spit Walker, twins. Well so everyone reckoned, they looked identical, hung together like a dogs two back legs and had all the same habits and even spoke the same way. In the same clothes you would never tell them apart but they always insisted they had never met before joining the Army. Didn't matter to White, they were crazy bastards that sometimes rode shotgun with him when he did the cash escorts and knew how to handle outlaws and gunslingers, that was what he needed now most of all.

Last of the hand picked bunch would be Ma'heonôhvo'komaestse. He was a Cheyenne Indian who had joined the white man's Army against his own people, the Apache and the Sioux during the Black Hills campaign. His tribe had changed his name to Ma'heonôhvo'komaestse, a name in Cheyenne that no white man could pronounce. The English version was White Bull, a noble name in Cheyenne heritage. But not for this White Bull, it was a taunt because he had joined the white man. He knew his tribe had disowned him and his new name was spoken in disgust by his people. But he held on to it because the whites he rode with all thought it meant brave or hero or something like that. White knew he was a great tracker and had knowledge of these hills that nobody else had. He would be invaluable tracking this gang. The

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rest of his riders would be volunteers. A damn nuisance but he needed numbers.

White called a meeting in the mess tent and asked for volunteers. He needed ten men, not including himself; so that meant five more were needed. He spoke about the money reward for getting the pay roll back. George Patten came forward straight away at the first hint of money. White thought he was useless but he still counted as another gun and that might prove the deciding factor if things didn't go to plan.

White talked at length about the money but no-one else stepped up. Then he talked about avenging the dead soldiers. Bert Masterson called out, "Does that mean we get to kill these bastards? We aren't going to bring them in alive, are we?"

"The General said we have to but if we can't, he pays the reward on the money, not on the body". Bert stepped up straight away, looked over his shoulder and said, "Count me in, I'm in to run those bastards down."

White talked for a good while longer but there were no other takers. Didn't matter, the Captain would organise a few more volunteers and that was all he needed.

He told his crew to be ready to move out at first light and get some rest. There would be hard riding for a couple of weeks at least, probably a whole lot more. He went to the stables and organised the best horses he could find and then went to see Captain Spears. He explained the situation and Spears assured him he would have at least five more volunteers waiting for him at the stables in the morning. "That will give you at least a dozen, that ought to do it. But if I can get a couple more, I will." White

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knew what this meant and knew his extra “volunteers” might be a bit reluctant but soldiers, well most soldiers, would follow orders and do at least a respectable job.

With twelve men that included five good men, even if the rest were useless, that gave him the edge he wanted. Even bad soldiers would work together when it came to a crunch. He knew the bandits would kill each other if the pressure came down on them, if they thought it gave them a personal advantage.

Even the worst soldier wouldn't kill you, they understood the need to remain loyal to each other. They might be a coward, they might not give you the unconditional back up you would want and they might run when danger hit. But one thing for sure, they wouldn't actually kill you.

If you were in an outlaw gang, a fellow outlaw would kill you, without hesitation.

White was experienced guarding the payroll but even more experienced as a hunter. Whether it was hunting game, Indians, outlaws or deserters, it was all the same to him. To him, all outlaws and deserters deserved to die and until recently, he thought the same way about Indians too. Since meeting White Bull, they had become good friends and he relied upon the man's tracking skills and knowledge of these hills. He also valued his friendship and advice, coming to think of him as a man, the first time he had thought of an Indian in that way.

For this outlaw band, he would give no quarter. He would track them down, surprise them in some convenient spot and kill all of them but one. He would, if he could, take one prisoner to interrogate because he wanted to know who these men were and



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whether there were others involved in the robbery. He knew that to pull a robbery off this well, you needed information from someone inside the Army and he wanted whoever that was to share their fate.

He was expert at changing his plans on the run but he would stick to that basic plan. He would rely heavily on White Bull for tracking duties during the chase and particularly when they got close to the gang. Without him, the chances of finding the gang were only half as good. White Bull could track a man for miles in situations that most others would give up on in a moment.

Once their location was known, White Bull would also trail them solo for a while until a good spot was found for an ambush. The man could be within a few feet of you and you would never know he was there. He somehow managed to blend into the background, no matter what the environment. It was a skill the Sergeant wished he had but, try as he must, could never reach the skill level of his Indian friend.

When the place was decided, they would surround the gang and using their superior fire power, show them the same mercy they showed an innocent girl in the bank.

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### 7 - On the Run

**Ramble's gang were elated. They had expected several days** of hard riding, maybe two or three weeks eluding the law. One day into the escape plan they saw dust from a group of riders following them out of Laramie. They had a good start on them and everyone was keen to keep on moving until they got into the heavily wooded hills. Ramble had no experience of law keeping but understood some of the process involved in a posse tracking an outlaw or an outlaw gang.

A tracker seldom saw an entire foot print or hoof print unless the ground was rather soft. Ramble made sure he kept to rocky ground when possible, knowing that with several riders the tracker's chance of finding their trail was greatly increased. After they were well clear of town he split his men up to follow different tracks to the same end point where they would join up again, just to confuse the following men.

On rocky terrain, flat spots on hard surfaces were the most telling for an experienced tracker. Ramble used bushes in places to disguise this sign by raking the area they had just crossed, trying to make it look like the trail of small game rather than a horse. Only an animal the size of a horse would leave these flat spots. Even for the best of trackers, the process was slow and tedious and certainly left the edge of speed on the side of the fleeing outlaw. Ramble would use this gained time to set a decisive ambush for the posse.

The rocky ground here would make it hard to be followed. McEvoy disagreed, he knew eight men on horse back would be followed by any decent tracker and said they should just continue on and leave the pursuers behind.

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They were just entering a box canyon that would be a great place for an ambush and Ramble believed they could end this thing right here. He had planned this well in advance and knew exactly where he was going. McEvoy spoke up because he knew the posse would know how many people had been killed and they would be coming hard with revenge on their minds. If only he really understood, what he thought he knew to be so obvious was actually dead wrong. What the posse had on their minds was getting back to town and settling down with a whiskey.

McEvoy voiced his thoughts that they should just keep pushing on over the hard ground and not stop. Ramble didn't like being questioned and he pistol whipped McEvoy clean out of the saddle. McEvoy hit the ground and came up on one knee, gun in hand. "Too slow", he thought to himself as he found himself looking up into Ramble's cold eyes and twin colts. He dropped his gun and froze. He didn't move until Ramble laughed and put his guns away.

A few moments of silence followed and then, "McEvoy," said Ramble and pointed at him from his mounted viewpoint, "Question me again and neither of us will laugh it off." With that he pulled another pistol out of his saddle bag, pointed it at McEvoy's head and fired. The sound of the hammer hitting an empty chamber echoed around the quiet group, re-enforcing Ramble's leadership. Ramble slowly slipped the cylinder and pulled out a bullet, admired it and then slid it back in. He spun the cylinder hard and set it back into the revolver. He paused to highlight the drama of the moment and placed the gun back in his saddle bag.

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The silence that followed would have scared the toughest man alive. Everyone in the gang knew what that gun was, what it represented. Ramble had told them but they didn't believe it. **Now they did.**

Ramble had told them all, if they crossed or upset him in a big way, he would blow their head off without hesitation. After the scene in the bank agency, they all believed that. Until now, they didn't believe what he said next. If anyone annoyed him just a little or failed to do as he was told, he would use this gun on that person. It contained one bullet and the cylinder was spun at random so the result was like Russian Roulette. If the hammer fell on the chamber with the bullet, you were fired, out of the gang, dead. If the hammer fell on an empty chamber, you were forgiven and the matter would never be raised again.

Not one person in the gang believed that when Ramble told them. Now they did and each and every one of them was now silently vowing never, and they meant **Never**, would they question Ramble again.

Ramble instantly concluded that McEvoy had now joined the Nairn camp and was dangerous to him. Both of these men would need to be watched and reigned in. He could not have been more wrong. Whilst Nairn had concluded that Ramble was insane, McEvoy only recognised in that moment, that Ramble was truly a man in his own likeness in fact, more than that, he was the man McEvoy yearned to be. In that moment when everyone else saw hatred and malevolence in McEvoy, his heart and mind were converted to complete devotion. He would die for Ramble if the need arose and he would find the means to prove it and become his right hand man.

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The gang rode up into the foot hills and took ambush positions in the little canyon. The entrance run was less than 20 yards wide and although it did not remain so narrow for long, it would concentrate the following riders and afford the gang a great opportunity to cut the posse down. As well, on one side a ridge ran to over 100 yards high and gave a great view of the approaching riders coming across the flat land of the approach. Ramble ordered one of the gang to clamber to the top, knowing this would give them at least an hour warning of the approach, even through the thick woodland on the lower slope.

Ramble sent Randy Nairn up there and watched until he had taken up his position, ready to signal the gang when the posse approached. Ramble feared that Nairn would shoot him in the back if he got the chance and was not willing to have him close by during a gun fight and leave him the chance to do so. Nairn had the same thought and as he climbed he fumed angrily against that chance being lost. It took him more than hour to get there. Although not all that high, it was a hard climb, narrow and dangerous in places. Several times he slipped back and at one point, rolled some 10 yards back down the slope before slamming into a boulder. The impact took the wind out of him completely and left his left arm numb. He was glad that he was out of sight of the others and knew that if Ramble thought he was slacking off, there would be no hesitation to shoot him.

He thought about the posse and could see them in his mind, riding hard to reach them and he imagined a hard fight ahead, one he was not too keen to be in. He imagined these would be hard men looking to gun him down and led by two or three experienced law men. He thought about running right now but the thought of Ramble chasing him down scared him more than the posse.

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Nairn stood tall on a small rocky outcrop and waved his rifle in the air. This was the agreed signal that the posse had been sighted. Looking down the wall of that small canyon he could see several other gang members including Ramble, who signalled back that he had seen the signal.

Now Nairn crouched low and watched the posse approach. His nervousness increased as they rode nearer and the sound of his pulse was pounding in his ear like a whole chorus of native drums. He was usually a calm man but the waiting was getting to him, especially with so many men heading his way. He tried to count them but kept coming up with different numbers. Any way he looked at it, there were three or four men in the posse for every one man in the gang. He sweated also on the thought that if the gang was to win this battle and he lived through it, Ramble might just be waiting for then for the chance to kill him.

Steve Farley and Nick took up positions on a ledge under Nairn's position. Although not nearly as high, they still had good elevation and would have a clear view of the first man into the passage for quite a while before he was close enough to fire upon. Ramble had made it clear that nobody was to start shooting before he did. If his was not the first shot, whoever shot first would go down later. They all believed him and no-one would dare be the first to open up. The two men talked nervously about this but it was only to distract them from the battle that was coming. They both understood only too well that some of the gang were going to die here today and that possibly, they all would. They were grateful for the elevation, it gave them a better chance.

As they waited, they talked about the coming battle. Discussion centered on how many posse men they would each account for, their chances of success, which gang members might die and what

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Ramble would do next. Although both men desperately wanted to, neither dared broach the subject of the horror they had witnessed at the bank. It was fresh in their minds and the sure knowledge that if Ramble could do that to a girl, he would not hesitate to do it to them. If they had known this was the way it was going to be, they would have taken no part in the robbery.

Mat Sterns, Brad Somerton and Jim Barnett lined the low ridge on the other side. Spaced out about 10 or 15 yards apart, they could see each other but were not close enough to speak. Each held the same fears but each thought he was the only one that was scared. Every member of the gang was practiced at looking tough and in control no matter how much fear was running through him. Even though each of them did this, they did not recognize it in the others. They knew too that their positions were the most vulnerable, shielded by trees but never covered from all directions at once. All three breathed hard and sweated but only Somerton actually wet himself.

Ramble had found a spot overlooking the narrow run straight down the middle. He too knew his position was vulnerable but his bravado would not allow him to take a less dangerous spot. Where he lay was well sheltered while the oncoming riders were well off but once they were close, he would be in clear view and clear danger.

Rob McEvoy was sitting on a boulder just above ground level. He leaned back against a tree and made himself comfortable and rolled a smoke. He was the only one there without fear. He was supremely confident in his own ability but he had also scoped out a retreat that would protect both him and Ramble. The Kid did not know it yet but McEvoy was now his most loyal man. He had

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taken up his spot specifically to give him a better spot to protect Ramble and would be happy to give his life to protect him.

Nairn watched as the posse pulled up and milled around, gathering together in an area just short of where they would begin the climb to the gang's position. In this location he had the clearest view yet and counted over 25 riders and he swallowed hard, it would be a damn hard job to overcome that many men and even if they did, several in the gang would be dead for sure and it could be him. He was so grateful to be the one up high because that made his chances better than anyone else. Even so, seeing that many riders made him think again about just walking out right now and leaving the rest of them to it.

As he watched he was surprised to see the posse milling about for a long, long time. It made sense that approaching the hills, they would stop to discuss the situation and make a plan. But they had been doing this for ages and he knew that men who understood they were going into battle would not want to wait forever. It was the waiting that was hardest and it was what was making him sweat now.

After a little more than half an hour of this, he was stunned to see the posse move off again but not toward him. They wheeled left for a short time and wheeled left again heading back where they came from. He couldn't believe it, they had lost the trail and turned back.

He thought about this a while then decided it could not be so. On the sand covered trail down where they had been milling, the trail of eight men could not have been more obvious. If he knew what really happened he would not have believed that either. After a while he decided that they would come at them in the morning,



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making them wait even longer. He knew he needed to tell Ramble but had no signal for this and was not going to walk down when the posse could start up the hill at any time.

He could not have known that the men weren't hard cases looking for a good fight. When the posse saw the canyon ahead and the closed in entrance they knew it was a good spot for an ambush and thought better of it. Most surprising was that it was Sheriff Madden that suggested it, getting killed for Army money was the last thing he wanted to do. This wasn't the story that would get told later when they got back to town. Then they would tell of a desperate two day pursuit with sporadic battles, how lucky they were not to have lost anybody to outlaw bullets and only losing the gang in the rocky country heading up to the high land.

The much anticipated gun fight with the posse did not eventuate. The unreleased tension pulled on every member of the gang but there was a sense of relief too that they had all made it through this day and their chance of getting away was looking better all the time. Shortly after sunset, Nairn did climb down, sure that the posse would not attack in the dark because that would put them at tremendous disadvantage.

He met with the others who were already sat together and preparing a badly needed meal. When he told of his observation, Ramble decided that he was not going to wait for a late morning battle. If he left now and rode all night, they would be travelling through hard, rocky country and maybe, just maybe, the posse would lose the trail. If they had given up as Nairn suggested, so much the better.

The gang pulled out soon after their meal and hit the trail hard all night and most of the following day. They continued for two

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more days before pulling up at an abandoned shack. Ramble was a mad one but he had planned this thing well. He had been up here weeks ago and stashed food, guns and spare supplies of everything. He sent the gang out to various hiding spots to get things. When they got back and saw everything in one place, they were all impressed and his leadership was enforced another notch. A couple of them who had been thinking of finding a way to get rid of him and end his tyranny, but never including McEvoy, stopped all such thoughts right there and then. Some weren't happy but others would follow him through the gates of hell and take on the Devil himself. Nairn knew now any chance of becoming the leader or getting rid of Ramble had passed. If he tried now, the guns of at least four men would tear him apart and that didn't include what Ramble carried. He had picked the change in McEvoy and it was just as well for him; McEvoy was ready and willing to step up in that regard.

This gang was one now, one leader, one voice, one direction. Tonight they celebrated, tonight, they drank from the supplies Kid had stashed until they weren't capable of holding a bottle. After tonight he planned to hold tight for a few days before heading out to live it up in one of the nearby towns where they would have a royal time with their new found wealth.

The power of a shared success had combined them now. The fear of death had finally left them, for the moment at least.

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### 8 - The Chase Begins

**As the sun slowly rose over the temporary barracks, Sergeant White strode purposefully toward the corral.** Leaning on the rail, Rogers, Smith, Turner and Walker were chatting away, discussing what they would do with their reward money. A job like this was pretty good, you were away for a few weeks which meant you hadn't been paid. When you got back your pay was waiting and the reward. That would be big money for these troopers.

White Bull was astride his horse, ready to go. He didn't mix much with the white soldiers even though he worked with them. He did like Sergeant White, admired him for being a straight shooter, never mixing his words or dancing around what he wanted to say.

White was annoyed as he walked over and noticed there were no more volunteers and Masterson had not turned up. This would mean there were only six or he would have to wait around while more could be found. He was cursing this turn of events when he heard the booming voice of Sergeant Bud Collins. He was an older man who had served his country by means of the cavalry for over 20 years. He didn't walk so well now having been busted up a few years ago. But he was a tough sonuva and did the training hereabouts. He was yelling abuse at a group of soldiers reluctantly making their way to the Corral. They were dragging their military issue kit bags and each had a brand new carbine slung over their shoulder.

Trailing along behind was Bert Masterson. White silently berated himself for thinking Masterson would not turn up. He was ready to go and helping make sure these "volunteers" were delivered as the General had promised. Collins marched over and saluted

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White with mock formality, “Eight extra keen super soldiers at your command Sergeant.” He grinned and turned to leave. As he walked away he called back, “General says they are all yours for as long as you want them, just don’t come back with half of them dead or he’ll be mighty sore at you after what happened down at Watson’s Creek last year.”

The volunteers didn’t seem to be nearly as keen as Collins had said. But now they were here and with Masterson standing over them, they would toe the line for sure. White didn’t know even one of them but then again, a few weeks riding the trails gave you plenty of time to get to know the men who were riding with you. He asked the name of each of them as Masterson headed them over to saddle up and get ready to move out.

These guys were Darren Gallagher, Dusty Cameron, Dirk Ballinger, Paul Nickman, Ron Bradfield, Rob Clarke, Daniel Rondel and David Cameron. Not one of them was much over 20 years old but each had been trained and had been in the Army for at least a couple of years. They could shoot tolerably well, ride as well as any group of men you might come across, knew how to take orders and could mix it up if trouble started. Reluctant they may be but they would follow White’s order without question. That was all he needed. He had six good men, seven including himself. All he needed from this new bunch was obedience and another gun to bring to bear if things got dicey later on. With a bit of luck, one or two of these volunteers would turn out to have some spirit and make a valuable contribution. When he saw everyone had a horse ready he yelled out so they could all hear, “Mount up, time to move out.”

Fifteen men moved out, heading to town. White Bull had left some time ahead of them to go looking to pick up any trail he

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could and he made the group sixteen. Everyone knew which way the gang had gone on their way out of town but after killing Pat Malone, it was anybody's guess where they went next. The most likely place was the mountain range overlooking the town. It was hard rocky country in places up there, just what was needed if you didn't want to be followed.

White was putting his money on that being what the gang was thinking too. He was also putting his money on the civilian posse not being able to do the job. Sheriff Madden had a fearsome reputation and was known to be tenacious when hunting down those that got on the wrong side of the law in Laramie. After killing two deputies the fellas were as far on the wrong side of the law and Madden, as it was possible to get. But White had no such confidence in those that followed the Sheriff.

Madden had lost two good men in the robbery and needed to leave the rest of his deputies in town to keep law and order. That meant he was out with a full crew of volunteers that would want to be getting back to town to their wives, their comfortable lives and most of all, the saloon. It was hard to push reluctant men on your own. White had reluctant men but he had a solid core of six men he had no doubts over. For their own reasons, each of his selected crew would follow him where ever he led, no matter what. Masterson had shown he could be relied upon to push any reluctant volunteers along too, if the need arose.

White urged his mount forward and the rest of the crew fell in behind, riding two by two. His selected crew fell in right behind him with the volunteers following on. Masterson brought up the rear, riding with a shotgun braced across his legs. This was a message to those in front that any attempt to leave the new squad would be dealt with swiftly and permanently. A short gap opened

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up between the volunteers and those ahead, a short gap that did not widen as they rode but spoke volumes about the separation between the two groups within White's squad. He knew this would be how it would be for a few days and actually hoped they would not catch up with the gang too quickly. A confrontation now could be disastrous but in a few days these men would bond and become a unified fighting force. If he was saddled with a lemon or a coward, he would know it within the week and if everything went according to plan, a week would be about when they caught up with the gang.

They rode into town and dismounted outside one of the bigger stores. White went in and organised some extra supplies. His men already carried the basics but he bought a few extras that would help bring this lot together. It included extra salt, tobacco and whiskey. They would all help but especially the whiskey. He would sponsor a huge binge at their first secure stop, tonight or soon after. His men bought some of their own but not too much, mostly trying to keep it hidden but they all knew what the others were up to.

After collecting two pack horses and taking a brief stop over they headed out of town. White intended to take a look around where Pat Malone had been found. He didn't think he would find anything useful but he did think the pause would help to focus the minds of some of his crew. When he pulled up he dismounted and stood next to the patch of ground that was still stained from Malone's blood. He said a few solemn words, almost biblical but intended only to reach his men in some way. While he stood there, White Bull rode up and called him aside. He had been riding ahead looking for sign while the others were otherwise engaged.

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The two men talked animatedly for some time. White Bull had found what he was sure was the signs of the gang heading out followed by the posse heading for the hills. It fitted with what White had thought would be the case and he swung up into the saddle. He passed on what White Bull had said, mounted his horse and started to move out. The men slipped into the same positions they had been travelling in but with the White Bull up front with White. He would continue checking the trail and signs every moment from now until the gang had been brought to heel. He was a great tracker and never took his observations for granted; always checking and rechecking whenever possible. He learned the skills as a boy tracking game for the hunt; this was different. Antelope and small game did not shoot back, Ramble would.

He had honed his skills tracking men during the Black Hills campaign when he was still riding with his Cheyenne country men, tracking and fighting the very soldiers he now rode with. In common with most of the Cheyenne people, White Bull always held a sense of fair play that he had inherited from his father. Some three years ago now, whilst riding alone he had come across a cavalry despatch rider who had come off his horse after it had been spooked by a rattle snake. The man had fallen down a shallow ravine, lost his weapons and smashed up his legs on the way down. He was a goner for sure without help.

White Bull gathered the rope from the trooper's horse and threw it down to him. With the rope secured around his waist, the trooper was helped to the top and helped onto his horse. To reward him, the soldier pulled his rifle from his scabbard and took the man prisoner. This was when Sergeant White had met him. He too had a sense of fairness and it did not sit well with him that this man had become imprisoned for his good deed. He convinced his

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commanding officer to let White Bull out into his custody on the condition White Bull agreed to track for the Army.

White Bull did agree and for a while, held to his agreement because of his sense of honour. Now, he stuck to the agreement because he held such respect for the Sergeant.

A few hours later they saw a dust cloud in the distance and White Bull picked that it was heading in their direction. It took another hour before they sighted the riders and a while longer before it was apparent it was Sheriff Madden and his men. White wondered whether or not Madden had already tracked them down but soon found out that was not the case.

Madden relayed his story about chasing the gang through the hills for two days, exchanging shots now and then, before losing them over the rocky ground. He readily agreed when White sympathised about how hard it would have been to push his civilian crew when the going got a bit tough especially if the odd shot came close. Madden said he would be coming back with a good deputy and track them down on his own. His tough talk impressed White, for now.

White decided to stop and spend the night with Madden but the Sheriff had other ideas. He didn't want these groups mixing and someone letting the truth slip out. The Army must not know that they had camped out for four days, just to make it look good. He did have a reputation for being tough and he wanted to protect it. Maybe he was a tough lawman once, but those days had gone and he had lost his nerve a long time ago after being shot twice in separate circumstances, both of which were as a result of foolish mistakes. White was impressed again when Madden told him they would not stay; because he wanted to push on back to town,



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get some law business done and get back on the trail. He told White he hoped to catch up and work together. That was as far from the truth as it could possibly be but no-one knew that. So he headed off with his conspirators to protect the lie and left the soldiers to themselves.

As they parted ways, Sergeant White promised to leave clear and easy sign for the Sheriff to follow so he could catch up quickly.

Even though there was quite a bit of light left in the day when Madden moved out, White decided to put up camp early. He led the crew toward a stand of Rocky Mountain Juniper trees that overlooked a small stream, following the Sheriff's directions to get there. The refreshing flow would rejuvenate them and they got there in short order and set up camp.

The site was safe and secure, it would serve him well tonight. He knew too from the Sheriff's information that the gang they were chasing was a long way off and posed no danger tonight. He spoke to Masterson and Rogers. He told them of his plan with the Whiskey but told them he wanted them both to stay sober tonight to watch for any attempt to desert or trouble amongst the crew. They readily agreed knowing full well the sooner this lot had a few drinks in them and settled any troubles between the volunteers and the rest, the better.

White called them over and told them all his plan for the night. He hauled down the large pannier he had draped over the rump of his pack horse and spilled the bottles on the ground. One full bottle of Whiskey each lay on the ground. As soon as supper was finished, they should take the chance for a good night for there might not be another for quite a while. He issued orders for the gathering of wood, preparation of food and lookout positions. He

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sent two of the volunteers, Ballinger and Bradfield, out to do a long perimeter check. They were told to take it slow and make sure the area was well clear of trouble; drinking would not start until they got back.

It didn't take them long to get back and any other time White would have bawled them out for tardiness when it came to the safety of the crew. Tonight he was confident after speaking with Sheriff Madden that no danger was close so he let it ride. The men started on the whiskey with great gusto and started on the meal with a lot less enthusiasm. Bush cooking was never the finest and this was far from it. But after a couple of shots of Whiskey no-one cared. The night was full of frivolity and skylarking among the men. Some light hearted ribbing went on and a few arguments but nothing serious. White made it look like he was joining in but he had only enough Whiskey to make it look like he was as under the weather as the rest of them.

By midnight they had all crashed and only he, Masterson and Rogers were still sober. White grabbed the last two bottles and called them in. "Thanks fellas, great job. May as well have some yourselves now, these fellas will cause us no trouble tonight but I dare say there will be a few grumbles in the morning". The three laughed and started their own session with the drinks.

As the sun rose Rogers was kicking the crew into life. There was grumbling from all quarters but they all got ready in short order and were mounted to move out. White Bull had left an hour earlier to check the trail again and ride ahead. As long as the trail kept going where he and White expected it to he would keep riding. If it deviated or there was anything unexpected to report, he would turn back to report in. This morning, there was just that and he had turned back a short way and found a shady spot to sit

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and wait for the boss. When they approached he went over and called White aside to make his report.

Astride the horses under the only tree for miles, White asked “Why have you pulled me away from the men?”

White Bull explained what he had found. He got the boss to follow him a short way to where he pointed out sign showing seven or eight riders heading for the hills. He pointed back where he had just ridden and pointed out sign showing a larger group following the trail. The trail ended here where they were stopped, he pointed to sign of a group of riders milling around, not moving but circling in an irregular way. This told the story of what really happened here when they had stopped and looked about. In the sandy ground here the trail of the gang heading for the hills was plain to see, you didn't need to be an Indian tracker to pick that up.

Then he pointed his horse east and rode slowly, showing White the sign of a group of riders heading that way. He got down off his horse and indicated a specific set of hoof marks amongst the others. White got down and kneeled to look. White Bull told him this was Sheriff Madden's horse, he was leading his men back to town and not chasing the gang up into the hills at all. He had followed the tracks a couple of miles and they veered back to the creek where they had camped last night and the posse had probably camped for a few nights.

White didn't have to think about this too long, the Sheriff didn't go up into the hills at all, he had lied and bragged of deeds that had never happened. This accounted for the strangeness of a posse having several gun battles with an outlaw gang and not one posse man or outlaw was killed or injured. He had thought it

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strange at the time but said nothing because he had respected the Sheriff's reputation. Anger rose within him and he swore he would not let this go. This betrayal could have put him and his men in danger, for he had believed the Sheriff and been riding in a relaxed and unwatchful way, knowing there was no danger for several days.

He swung around and headed back to where the others were waiting for him. He called them around him and explained the news. The gang may not be riding hard through these hills at all, they could well be holed up in a secure place waiting for anyone that followed, able to take them at will in a canyon or at a river, any where with good cover. This time, when White led out the procession of soldiers, it looked a lot different.

White headed up the main crew and White Bull galloped ahead to pick up the trail again. Walker and Turner rode point for him, keeping an eye on the either side so White Bull could concentrate on his trail following duties without concern of ambush. Clarke and Cameron hung back a way, watching the trail from behind for anyone following them. They ambled their horses for quite a while until the main bunch were almost out of sight and then matched the pace so as not to get more than a few minutes hard gallop from being back with the group.

As the troop progressed through the day, these distances closed up when the country become close on either side with trees or hills giving cover. On open ground the distance increased again to give a wider field of view. This was all designed to minimise the chance of any unexpected attack coming from any quarter. If something did happen, better to lose one or two who were caught off guard than lose everyone from an unseen enemy.

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As they approached the canyon where Ramble had gone through when his gang headed into that high country, White pulled his crew to one side and preparations were made for a meal. It was close to midday and the men were somewhat worse for wear from the combination of too much drink, nothing to eat and the oppressive heat of the open country. Soon they would be in the shade of the hills and wood country that would provide shade; but that would provide cover for a sniper as well.

White didn't need to say anything but he said it any way. This was where the danger of being caught out by their enemy came into to stark reality. Until now it had been possible but in these hills, that was where a thousand places to set up an ambush were presented every step you took. He explained the deception of the Sheriff to his men and cautioned them to be on their toes from here on.

As they rode through the canyon where the ambush had been set for the posse, each man saw the possibilities and thought, even if only for a moment, maybe the posse had the right idea. No-one spoke that thought and it was short lived. They were soldiers and being spooked was not something to admit.

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### 9 – Converging Destiny

**John Quaid knew nothing about farming when he left to find** a piece of rural prosperity. He had a goal but had no idea how to make it happen. He had not the slightest understanding of how much hard work he would have to put in to make a farm work, the many dangers he would subject himself and his family to or any clue about how to raise crops or stock in a harsh land with poor soil.

What he did have was motivation. That motivation was called Molly and then three years ago it got a second name, Kathleen. John's wife and daughter were his driving force and he would do anything for them. He would give his life for either of them. If he had known the danger he was placing them in, if he had truly understood that danger, he would never have come here. John had bought a book on farming, just one. He had read it six times though and that was quite a feat when you consider how much effort he expended to keep it a secret from Molly. He wanted her to be impressed with his farming knowledge when he brought up things he had learned from the book. He needn't have bothered because Molly knew of the book's existence and where it was kept but would never embarrass him by saying anything.

Something else he didn't know was that all through the Wyoming territory, there were random areas of incredibly rich soil that contained all the minerals and nutrients crops and stock needed to grow. If you stumbled onto such land, you could get several years of great crops, almost no matter what you planted. These soils, fed by ancient nutrient sources, were a prize to be cherished. Stock grazing on such land would prosper and grow strong. The land would only last 10 years under intensive farming like that, at most, without a man knowing good farming practice and putting

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that in place. With a bit of hard work and concentration, he would be able to learn most of what he needed to know as he went along.

John had stumbled on such a place and his farm was looking great. Crops were flourishing and fetching a high price. John had given no thought to who may buy his produce but was confident they would. His stumbling onto good fortune had continued after finding such great soil and he found himself right in the middle of new cattle trails, forming part of an emerging network covering the Midwest.

Trail herders had been coming across the farm regularly over the last two years. The food they bought from him was good and they paid top dollar. The “Goodluck” trail generally ended at the railhead in Cheyenne. The “Western” trail however, passed right by Crook County and word passed around about where to get good food.

Many of the men travelling with the herds were rough and wild, not caring one bit about John or his daughter. They did care about his wife. After weeks on the trail, most any woman looked good to them and a woman of Molly’s fine features was every trail herder’s dream.

Several men had made a play for her and a couple had wanted to force the issue. John had stared them down. It had built his confidence each time and he imagined that Molly would have increased respect for him. He needn’t have worried for Molly loved him and would be there for him no matter what. But growing respect was not what Molly felt, it was growing fear. She saw something John had not; it was the trail bosses, they had been the real threat behind John that settled the matter. Not many

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men would go against the boss before they got to Oregon and their pay.

Most of the trail bosses were ex-military leaders from the war and they knew how to handle rough men. Trail side executions were reputed to be a common place method of instilling discipline but this was rarely reported to official lawmen. How true this was did not matter, it was well known and well accepted, making the threat an exceptionally effective tool.

The trail bosses were tough men who knew the way things were. They were paid handsomely for successfully leading a group of men and holding them together long enough to get the cattle to the rail head or other destination. They worked hard to keep every man in check and keep the team operating as a team until pay day at the end of the trail. Then they would let the men go to hell if needed, it was no longer their responsibility.

It meant they needed no trouble during a trail ride. There were plenty back in the big eastern cities with much to say about the trail herders even though they relied upon them for their beef. The trail bosses did not want bad stories getting around more than they already did, that interfered with their pay.

So twice now, dangerous men had backed down because of their trail boss and both times, John had been left to think it was his doing. Without that backing, there was every chance that John would be dead by now.

Molly tried to speak to him about her fears, to explain what had happened. John was too puffed up with is own success though to listen and hushed Molly to silence to quell her fears.



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John had no idea that his success had been completely accidental, the result of happenstance beyond his control and beyond his reasoning. He still did not comprehend the dangers in this land that would soon bring evil to his home.

John and his family had no idea what was happening nearly 300 miles to the south. No reason to suspect that the future held a visit to his world from three men that were part of a gang of bank thieves that were currently intent simply on escape. The converging destinies of John Quaid and Kid Ramble were heading toward an encounter in Crook County in the coming months. As Ramble edged further northward the approaching meeting of these two men would change both their lives forever.

A town could not have suspected they would get a visit from these men much sooner. The town didn't have a proper name yet. It wasn't even a town really, more a collection of sites across an area covering several miles of territory on the side of Baldy Mountain some 90 miles off the western border with Nebraska. Later, it would become known as Lost Springs, a small boom town that would grow on the back of the railroad that would soon be coming through. It would prosper for a while before withering away, such was the way of things in the Midwest.

Right now there was a camp with a group working for the railroad, mapping the area and prospecting sites and routes for the future. There was a hotel of sorts, just a few boards haphazardly thrown up on a badly built log frame. A mile down the track, a shop and supply station had sprung up and a few hundred yards further on was a stable that also served as house and home for a blacksmith. This man also doubled as a water hauler, bringing the precious liquid in from the nearby creeks and the spring.

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There were farms nearby, mostly run by Mormon families. Since early '46 there had been a flow of church families heading west from Mississippi. By the end of '47 over 2, 000 Mormons had crossed through Wyoming territories into Utah. They established the settlement called Fort Supply in '57. President Lincoln called upon the Mormons in '62 to protect telegraph lines and mail routes during the Civil War. Some of those men remained behind and a few had families join them.

Members of the church completed missionary work in the area for many years and worked closely with the Shashone people, baptising over 300 members of that tribe in the weeks before Kid Ramble decided to pass through these parts.

Ramble and his gang rode into the area in the early afternoon and found a sleepy little settlement, ill prepared on this day to handle men such as these. Eight kinds of hell rode through that day and caused mayhem every place they went.

Barnett led the carnage, shooting up everything in sight and hauling rein at the black smith building. The smithy, Bert Semmer, was a huge man, tough and disagreeable. He could handle any two or three men in a fair fight but today, he wouldn't get one. Barnett saw that Semmer had several good horses there and demanded fresh ones for himself and the gang. When Semmer mentioned payment for his trouble, his only payment was pair of 45 slugs buried deep in his belly and he was left to bleed out.

Barnett and three of the gang riding with him took horses for themselves and the best looking bay gelding as well as a gift for Ramble.

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As this was happening, Ramble had found a small rise and rode up to the top. Although it was only a few yards higher than most of what surrounded him, it gave him a view for miles around and he surveyed the actions of his men like a general surveying his Army. If he had a campaign tent and cold champagne, the illusion of being a Napoleonic General would have been complete.

He watched Steve Farley racing around checking out buildings with two of the others following along. He had only one thing on his mind and was determined to find a willing woman to fulfil his desires. While Farley liked willing, he wouldn't hesitate to make a woman willing by any means needed if he thought that was required. This was something he had thought about before but had been too scared to really go through with. Now he was riding with Ramble, with the robbery fresh in his mind, his bravado was higher than ever. He thought this gang was invincible and that he deserved a reward for being part of it. He revelled in the knowledge the posse had fled and now thought the gang could have that affect on any group that messed with them.

As news spread across the country side that trouble had arrived, the settlers that were in the area either made a run for it or took to hiding. Ramble didn't know it but he and the gang were pretty lucky that day. A contingent of the Mormon settlers was out on a hunting party with several of their Shoshone friends when Ramble arrived. If they had been around they would not have had such an easy time of it. Although many of the Mormon men living in the area were mostly in their 40s and 50s now, in '62 they were members of the Mormon contingent sent to Wyoming during the Civil War. These were hard men, good with a gun, willing and able to protect their own. These were God fearing men that followed their faith but don't make the mistake that this meant they were helpless.

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The Shoshone with them may have been in a reservation now but they were still hard warriors and unlike many other native Indians forced onto reservations, these people had not been affected by the awful effects of alcohol and inactivity to the same extent of some other Indian groups. Living and working with missionary folk had seen to that and these men could be truly fearsome if the need arose.

As it happened, Ramble arrived only hours after they had left. After a whirlwind tirade of violence that lasted all afternoon and well into the evening, the gang retired to the wreck of a building that passed for a saloon and took to draining as much whiskey into themselves as they could in one night. They eventually collapsed, totally drunk, each one of them. Although defenceless by then, there was no fight left in this place after the beating it had taken.

A couple of hours after the sun rose the gang were filling saddle bags with whiskey and other supplies stolen from every building they found. The owner knew better than to argue, he had seen one of the young men that had been working the fields stand up to them. Unarmed and completely defenceless, they shot him up like a rag doll just for being there. As they pulled out, three men were dead and several more badly hurt. Two women had been abused in a way that would scar them for the rest of their lives and the children at two of the farms had been so traumatised they would not come out of hiding until hunger forced them to.

As they rode down the mountain side, making their own trail, they saw a dust trail in the distance and headed north to avoid whoever it was. Even these morally bankrupt hellions, with their growing thirst for violence and depravity, had taken their fill of trouble for now and they were still affected by ill effects of the alcohol and

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feeling sorry for themselves. They didn't know how fortuitous that decision was. That dust trail was the Mormon men returning accompanied by a dozen or more of the Shoshone warriors.

They had been lucky too that the railway surveyors had simply run when the gang arrived. There were seven heavily armed men in that group with the capacity to fight back but a yellow streak in each and every one was suddenly apparent and they left the women and children to look after themselves.

One more time Ramble should have deemed himself lucky, very lucky. Only a few short years ago these Shoshone warriors would have tracked him down relentlessly. With their knowledge of the mountains and the ways of the wilderness, Ramble and his gang would have stood no chance if they came after him. Now they had been forced onto a reservation and their leaders baptised into the church. Ramble would never know how lucky he had been.

They avoided a serious conflict but that wouldn't last. The life style they were living would always lead to conflict, **always**.

## 10 – Becoming the Hunted

**As the late afternoon sun began its slow drop toward the** horizon, in the distance a thin wisp of smoke slowly rose to the heavens. The constant flow of the smoke betrayed the fact that it came from a chimney and not an open campfire. This could mean a homesteader; but in these parts that was unlikely. It could be a beaver trapper or other kind of hunter but it wasn't quite the right season for that. It could also mean a bunch of hellions had found themselves a cabin that wasn't occupied or at least, was easy to make that way. White knew that the Ramble gang would not hesitate to kill anyone that stood in their way.

As he got nearer he started making plans. He sent White Bull and Barney Smith on ahead to scout out the situation. Smith wasn't an Indian tracker by any means but he had been an outlaw and knew this type of men well; they were, after all, his type. Together they worked their way around the side of the valley, avoiding the obvious entry and scouting wide in amongst the thick woodland growth. As the sun was settling they reached a place where they had a good view of the valley below and Smith pulled out the field glasses White had given him just before he left.

He watched for a while and saw several men, young men, wandering around a cabin that was a fairly large and solidly built affair. It was probably a standard single room style settler's cabin but these men were not settlers. From this distance it was hard to tell even with the field glasses but they looked every bit the outlaw gang. He made out five different men quite distinctly. They wore two to three weeks growth on their faces, every one of them. This was a clue, it probably meant they had started a journey together fresh and clean. White's troop had started that

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way and now each of them had a similar facial growth as did Smith himself.

As the light faded he sent White Bull down to get a closer look. Not long after dark he returned and confirmed what they had both thought on their first glance down toward the shack. This was almost certainly the gang they were looking for. White Bull had never seen any of the men but he saw one standing on the porch of the building, giving orders and directing affairs. He was tall and lean, wore a colt on either hip and fingered the one on his right every time he gave an order. This had to be the killer who had led the bank robbery. Although nobody in the bank that day had lived to tell the tale, they had been seen shortly after leaving town and Ramble was leading the pack. Two townsmen returning from a trip had heard the shooting as they approached the outskirts. They took cover as they heard riders approach and got a good look and gave a good description of the bunch, especially the one leading them out.

The two men made their way cautiously back to camp and reported in to White and the rest of the crew. After listening to their story White let the troop know that tonight was the right night to get some good rest for tomorrow was when the real work would begin. He stayed up late though making White Bull and Smith go through every detail of what they had seen. They drew a map in the dirt and marked in all the dips and hills, anything that made good cover. White thought it almost seemed too good to be true; what Smith was describing gave them great advantage over anyone sitting in the cabin so long as they could slip into place without being seen.

He would let the troop rest in late tomorrow and make a mid morning start. This would see them in place around lunch time

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and they would make an assault on the gang from concealed positions as safe as any could be once the shooting got started. Only one thing worried him and he quizzed White Bull several times. Only five men he said were at that cabin but the descriptions said there eight or nine and White Bull had said the tracks indicated seven or eight horsemen. Were the others inside or somewhere else? That could throw a spanner in the works but they were probably inside, his men had not stayed around too long and could not have looked inside the shack without being seen.

As the sun rose that fateful morning, half the men were up and moving, too nervous and excited to stay asleep. A couple had barely slept at all for no matter how experienced you were, how well trained or how tough, knowing you were going into a situation that could see you dead before it was over caused nerves in any man except the occasional man that was insane and felt nothing. As hard as some of his men were, White didn't have such a man in his team. Although mad men were sometimes the best fighters around when things got really tough; they could not be trusted because they felt no loyalty either. They would as soon shoot each other as the enemy and rejoice to the same thrill.

A couple slept longer and he let them. The more rested each man was today, the better. He knew he had the advantage right now, of surprise, of numbers and of position. But darkness was the great leveller in these situations so he would be doing everything he could to have it wrapped up before then. There were two usual outcomes in this type of situation. One was that the whole show was over in a couple of minutes and the outlaws were either dead or captured. If you got it right, they were completely surprised, out of position and had absolutely no chance to fight back.



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The other result was not so good. It was when the outlaws knew you were coming, got a break early on or worst of all, set a trap for you. In this scenario, a gun fight and stand off could last for hours and sometimes days, often without being able to take the outlaws out.

As the last of the sleepers woke up he sent White Bull back to scout for sniper positions and meet him while the troop was still well out of site. This time he sent the man alone, nobody had his skills and ability to stay hidden.

Breakfast was eaten with great gusto today because the men knew there may not be any chance for lunch or maybe even supper today. Smith briefed the rest of the crew on what he had seen and they crowded around the hastily drawn dirt map from the night before. Smith filled the men in with a few more details and White issued his orders.

Each man was given a position they would take up and instructions to stay in pairs as much as possible. He wanted to know if a man went down and the only way to do that was if you had a partner with you when it happened. He stressed the need for quiet and for care when reaching position. It did not matter how long it took, just that you weren't seen as you took up your place. If everyone achieved that this thing could be over quick and sharp. If there were only five men left in the gang, he would simply wait until they were all outside together. The signal would be the sound of his own rifle opening up with the first shot.

Sixteen men opening up on five, especially if the five were all in the open, it would be a bloodbath, short and simple. Even if one got to the shack, alone he would be not be problem of any great note. Even if there were actually seven in all, after an initial

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assault a couple left stuck inside would not last long. All five though, or seven, inside the shack, they could last for hours or even days if they knew what they were doing. He would make sure that did not happen because he knew that one man in there knew what he was doing, the leader knew and would do anything, absolutely anything.

Soon they were mounted up and this time moved in single file with a long gap between each man, almost letting the one in front get out of sight. This would give them a better chance if something went wrong and it was them that were surprised and not the gang. Spread out that far the gang would only get one or two of them, no more. As they neared a steep cliff just before the valley that held their quarry, White Bull appeared from behind a tree and startled White. He didn't show it and calmly asked White Bull if everything looked right.

He quickly reported that there were still only five men at the cabin and no movement seen anywhere in the area. He had picked several good vantage points for the troopers and a spot where White could view everything that went down when the action started. He also indicated that just round the corner was a spot with a tall over hanging cliff on two sides and a heavily wooded creek on another that would be ideal to talk to the men before getting in place.

White led the way and one by one the men came in and took a seat on a log, a rock or what ever else was handy. He reiterated the strategy of staying in pairs and told them the signal would be two rapid shots from his rifle, followed by a gap and two more. With a bit of luck this would be accompanied by two of that gang going down and out of action. No-one was to shoot before that unless the gang saw them and opened up first. If this happened, each

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man had orders to start shooting and not stop until they all went down. The last thing he said was that each pair would take direction from White Bull about where to set up, he didn't want anybody out of place, he wanted to know exactly where they were.

They mounted up and moved out two at a time and took up their positions. At that exact moment though, as sometimes happened, Jim Barnett and Randy Nairn topped a rise about one mile south and saw the column of soldiers moving out. They ducked for cover and tied their horses well out of sight. They watched for a while and from their current vantage point, had a perfect view of what was going down. Although they could not see into the valley where Ramble and the others were shackled up, what they saw next made it absolutely clear, these men were surrounding the cabin and would attack; these men were a hunting party and the gang were the hunted.

Nairn was all for riding hell for leather back to the cabin and alerting Ramble. Barnett held him explaining the chance of them getting there was slim if they just barged through these guys now. He knew that valley pretty well now, he had been wandering in and out of it for more than a week and thought there was a good chance he could get a vantage point overlooking most of the soldiers and pick a few of them off one at a time when the shooting started. If he was lucky they wouldn't even realise he was there in the heat of battle and with so many bullets flying, nobody would notice a few more.

He told Nairn he would get his chance to do the hero run soon. When he had a good idea about the soldier's positions he would take up his spot with his rifle and all the ammo they had between them and Nairn would do the run into the shack. On his own and

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with the soldiers split up and still moving into place, he would have a better chance of getting through. Most of the way would provide him some cover from trees and boulders, right up until the last little way into the clearing where the shack stood. He was to hold his horse back a little to keep it fresh with some energy for that last little run then push him hard up to the shack. He would report to Ramble and tell him to stay put in the shack, the soldiers would have to get closer to take them out unless they were outside. When they moved to try, he would pick them off from higher up and he had plenty of ammo to keep going for hours. “Tell Ramble,” he said, “Every time the troops open up, return fire for a while but save your bullets. Each time they open up they will lose one or two men from me shootin. If the soldiers start to move in fast or I lose my advantage, I’ll fire three quick slugs into the front porch from your carbine, that will be the signal”. Nairn mounted up and got ready.

Nairn was edgy and only held back a while longer because Barnett made him. He wanted to act before the soldiers started shooting at the others. He didn’t care one bit about Ramble but he had become quite close with some of the other men. He felt they wouldn’t let him down and he didn’t want to do it to them. As he saw where the soldiers ended up or picked where he thought the others would go, he made sure he knew those positions. Barnett told him to wait fifteen minutes before making the run. He was to let him get up to the spot he had chosen and maybe he could help him out on the run in once the soldiers started firing.

He waited but not long enough. Nairn took off and he urged his horse to full speed, not holding back at all. “Damn fool”, thought Barnett and he doubled his effort to get into place before any shooting started. The noise Nairn was making was huge.

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Everyone on the western side of the valley heard the noise Nairn was making as he galloped through the scrub. He may as well have let out an Indian war whoop, he was doing everything else. The troopers searched out the noise and gained a glimpse here and there as he headed in toward the shack. Those that heard him and saw the movement made to get into position and bring him down if he was one of the gang members.

He raced into a short clearing and suddenly it was all too obvious he was one of the gang. He wasn't wearing a blue uniform so he wasn't one of White's crew. David Cameron and Spit Walker were closest but had a difficult view to shoot from. They moved to the top of a large boulder and together, took aim and fired. The bullets whined over Nairn's head and crashed into the trees behind him. Their position was no good now but might get better as he moved further down the valley.

Further across the valley Dusty Cameron and Ron Bradfield also heard the commotion and had been moving to the top of a boulder themselves. They spread out and stood firm, took up firing positions and let loose. Their first volley was no more effective than their comrades and the bullets thudded into the ground. This spurred Nairn on and he pushed his horse even harder. It was then that he finally did something he had been told. Barnett had told him that when the shooting started, he should look up towards his own position and if he glimpsed any of the soldiers, take a few shots at them with his hand gun just to put them off their aim. Don't worry about aiming he was told, he had no chance of success really, it was just for the show. He did that and let three shots go in their direction.

On his other side Smith and Dirk Ballinger had a good view of it all from their position. They sat astride their horses and pushed

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them up a gentle slope. They then pulled their own rifles and joined in the attempts to bring him down. They were further away but had a good sight of him as he came out of a heavily wooded section. They saw him firing wildly at the other troopers and then they fired. They saw the rider jerk in the saddle as a bullet hit home. They saw him slide sideways and then recover before they fired again just as he regained his seat. This time they saw him lurch sideways and fall heavily as he hit the ground on the other side of his horse.

What they didn't see was what was happening at the same time to their comrades across the valley. Cameron saw the first shot hit home as Nairn had jerked in the saddle and fought to stay on. He moved to line up another shot himself as the rider pulled himself upright. This was the last thing Cameron ever saw as a slug from Barnett's carbine hit him and took half his head off and threw his limp body to the ground below the rock.

As Nairn bit dirt after a second bullet struck him, Barnett lined up Bradfield and blew a hole in his chest that was just as devastating to him as the head shot had been a moment ago. Barnett was thrilled and chanced a quick look to Nairn and saw the horse, riderless and standing in the gap where Nairn had fallen. No time to worry about him now. Barnett slid back to be completely out of sight. He didn't think he had been seen and the troopers would not know what had happened to them for some time to come. White had been watching and saw Bradfield fall. He couldn't believe it but it looked like that rider had taken him out as he fired blindly during that wild ride.

In the mean time, Ramble and his men heard the firing and had headed inside the shack, taking up positions near the door and windows so they could return fire. From their position they could

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not see anything but fired to where they thought the shots had come from. Right now they had no idea what was happening but it could not be good.

Nairn lay still a moment before he realised he was alive. He had a slug in his right leg and it hurt like hell but he could still move the leg. He didn't know it but the other bullet had hit a bag he had been carrying across his shoulder and the impact had thrown him off the horse. He checked his leg carefully and saw the blood running freely. If he stayed here he was a dead man and he knew his strength would go quickly with the blood flowing like it was. He pulled a bandana from his pocket and tied it around his leg to stem the flow. He sat up a little to do this and for the moment, nobody seemed to be watching him; they probably thought he was dead after they saw he had come out of the saddle and concentrating now on the shack.

Nairn mustered every ounce of strength he had and although his leg was screaming at him in the foulest language he had ever heard, he knew that if he stopped where he was he would die for certain. He ran for his horse and leaped over its rump and into the saddle. He spurred the animal into action and was at full speed again before anyone noticed him moving and before he realised that he was in agony from the run. This time it was White himself that took aim and let fly; but he was too far away and had no hope of pulling down a man travelling at full gallop.

Bullets screamed in at Nairn from every direction and he felt the sting of a slug scrapping across his shoulder but not going in. Shot after shot rang out but he was nearly at the cabin. He just hoped they recognised him and didn't shoot him themselves. He pulled the horse sharply round a small stand of trees and spurred the animal on for the last few yards before the shack. A last

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volley of shots rang out and he felt another slug hit him under the arm and once more he tasted dirt. The wind was blown right out of him and he groaned in pain. He couldn't move and he waited for the next bullet that was sure to come now.

A new wave of shots rang out from close by. He didn't know it but his salvation was at hand. Ramble dashed out of the shack, firing wildly in every direction with his twin colts. Sterns and McEvoy were either side of him, firing and covering him. Ramble grabbed Nairn and dragged him back to the shack with every man in his gang laying down the heaviest fire they could manage to cover their retreating comrades. In other circumstances this would have been suicide except that the soldiers had been taken completely by surprise and weren't ready to react. Nairn's hero run was completely confounding to them and reckless.

Ramble got to the door and dragged him in, both safe inside the thick wooden walls. McEvoy turned and dived in and Sterns back peddled rapidly as well. Just as he got to the door he hesitated a moment and fired the last of his bullets from a six gun in either hand. He jerked back against the door frame and stood rigid for a moment with the frame holding him there. As he stood motionless and already dead, three more bullets tore into him and he slumped to the ground. Farley shoved him out and closed the door as another volley of shots arrived a second late to take him out too.

The moment the door closed the sound of gunfire stopped. There were no targets now for the soldiers or the gang.

White got White Bull to go and tell his men to lay down some occasional fire to keep that gang from thinking about doing a



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runner until he got organised. They did that and it was during one of those barrages that Barnett acted again.

Mike Turner and Dirk Ballinger were lying on rocks toward the valley with a great view of the side window and the rear. They were there primarily to stop any planned escape out the back way. They hadn't fired a shot yet and did not know they were being lined up as targets themselves. Barnett had perfect cover right now and was not going to give it up easily. When the men started firing from the other side of the shack, Ballinger could not resist and starting firing himself. He got up on one knee and started firing from that position. Without warning one of Barnett's carbine slugs buried itself in his side and burst out the other side of his chest, taking the life out of him as it went.

Turner saw him fall and scurried for cover. The cover he scurried for though was in the wrong direction and he left himself still wide open to Barnett. The next slug hit him in the boot and spurred him to further action. As he moved two more shots rang out and he worked out where they were coming from. He scurried around the other side of the rock and a rifle that had lined him up from the window of the cabin fired and the bullet scored his arm just before ricocheting off the rock. He stumbled back and fell, losing his rifle as he went down. He tried to take better cover but the bullets were still flying. Another big calibre bullet struck harmlessly nearby but very close. He moved to grab his gun and the next bullet hit a rock just short of him but ricocheted into his left knee. The slug had become shrapnel after hitting the rock and now he did not have a knee but he was still alive and reached for the rifle again.

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This time the bullet hit his rifle and tore the firing mechanism apart. He had no choice now and dragged himself to cover at the side of the rock hoping he could find a way out of this.

Barnett took cover himself and grinned, three dead and another out of action. Ramble was going to be pleased with this and he had more to give yet.

White didn't know everything that had gone down but he knew he had lost at least one man. He knew that his crew had become the hunted ones now and didn't like it.

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### 11 – Sunset Flight

**After a little while went by with no shooting, Barnett climbed** carefully back into position. He didn't know their names but he was looking for Smith and David Cameron that were directly below him. He had seen them riding toward the cliff below him but had lost sight of them during the last round of shooting. He had expected them to come in just below him but they weren't there now. He was sure nobody had picked him yet but he could be wrong. He edged forward a little further and began to consider getting out of here in case they were swinging round behind him.

He then spied some movement through the bushes down below him. He edged forward further and saw them moving around directly below him. They had actually moved further back from the shack but it had given them better elevation and now they were directly opposite the side window. They took up positions lying on a rocky ledge, side by side, and placed their rifles in conveniently positioned grooves in the rocks. They had decided that this would be a good spot and they would keep these guys thinking when the bullets started raining in through the window. Smith started a count down from three with his fingers. Three, Two, One and they started firing. A steady rhythm started and they squeezed off a shot every few seconds, keeping the gang away from that window.

Barnett edged forward and took careful aim with his own rifle. The men he sought were less than 20 yards below and in clear view. He was in an awkward position and the rifle was a little shaky. He knew he needed to act soon in case these guys lucked out and shot one of his pards. He decided that he would just cut loose with a hail of lead and make sure that some of the bullets hit their mark. He edged forward a little more and fired, 21 times. He

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was using an 1873 Winchester lever action repeater with the long barrel. It held 21 and he used them all. Then he tossed the weapon behind him and pulled his Colt before he paused to look properly. When he did, he was elated, the score was six now, five dead and one more down but they still didn't even know he was there.

White Bull had crept back to where Sergeant White was. He had seen the rifle firing when Barnett cut loose and this just confirmed what he already suspected; somebody was firing at the troopers from up there. He pointed the position out to White who knew one of his men was dead but had no idea there were five more of them already out of action. White Bull knew there was more than one for certain and would not be surprised at the end of the day when the true extent of what went down became apparent.

White told White Bull to collect Rondel and Clarke, head over that way and pick up Smith and Ballinger as he went through and take that sniper out. White Bull nodded but was not entirely confident that all those men were still alive. He grabbed Rondel and Clarke as instructed and headed up the gully. They followed the half hidden trails and Rondel circled the sniper to the left, Clarke to the right. Too bad for them both they weren't as proficient at stalking as White Bull because Barnett had spotted them coming and was watching intently. He had not spotted the Indian, who was now just below him and had confirmed his own prediction when he found Smith and Ballinger. Their injuries told him exactly what happened and where the shot had come from. He started to move slowly up a narrow track at the side of the overhang where Barnett had been. Barnett moved back when he saw the others coming and had taken up a spot 50 yards further back that gave him a wider view and some protection from the rear.

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He left his trail clear for any one to see. Rondel saw it and smiled. He sneaked along the side of the path planning to arrive unnoticed. He hadn't noticed the obviousness of the trail or the situation he was walking into until the first bullet tore into his chest and threw him to the ground. Luckily it had hit him wide and not touched anything crucial but as he squirmed in agony he did not know this. He screamed in pain and Clarke reacted. He had seen the flame from the rifle and jumped from cover and fired several times, fully expecting to hear the agony from his victim as he lay dieing. He heard no such thing; he did hear the bullet aimed at his heart and for a moment, only a moment, felt foolish at rushing in like that.

Rondel has stopped squirming and sat up. He took a bead on Barnett as he was emerging from the trees, ecstatic with his rising death toll convinced now that he was invincible today. Rondel fired and Barnett felt the wind from the passing bullet that passed less than an inch from his head. Barnett reacted with lightning speed and fired two shots into Rondel's chest. The man sat there for a moment, stunned but seemingly unharmed. Barnett fired again and this time a bullet to the head settled any doubt as Rondel bit the dust.

Barnett was not the only one that could move like lightning. From behind, another moved like lightning, silent lightning. White Bull was behind him and lunged forward. In swift and precise action, he planted his knife squarely between Barnett's shoulder blades and then before the man had time to scream, withdrew and brought it across his throat to end his devastating sting as a sniper. He would never shoot from hiding again.

As the afternoon passed by things quietened down. White Bull made his way back to Sergeant White and reported in. He had

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done the rounds and found the bodies of the dead men. He listed them off for White. They were Smith, David Cameron, Ballinger, Bradfield, Dusty Cameron, Rondel and Clarke. That man up on the slope had exacted quite a toll and without the Indian tracker, he may have kept going.

White Bull had found Mike Turner as well and patched him up. He reported to White that the man might live but was in a bad way. He would never walk again though, his knee was completely ruined and he would probably lose that leg, sooner or later. He had left him set up in the shade, hopefully well out of the firing now but just in case, set up with a rifle and a Colt. They would collect him later.

Sixteen was now nine and the gang had the numbers on their side. White sent White Bull out to bring in both Rogers and Gallagher as well as Masterson and Nickman. Tell Walker to stay round back and cover any run for the horses and don't tell him what happened to Mike Turner; we don't want him going off and getting himself killed as well.

There were at least six people in that Shack now and they were well protected in there. With the Sun slowly dropping lower, the sunset was approaching and this gang needed to be drawn out soon or they would hold all the advantage once darkness arrived. White sent White Bull off one more time, back to their horses and he came back with a bow and arrow. He put together the makings for flaming arrows; White had determined to burn that shack and make them come out.

Inside Ramble was making plans of his own. Farley had been watching the hill from the side window when he could. He had seen the men moving up there heading towards Barnett's position.

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There had been shooting up there and now it had gone quiet, no shooting and no movement. Farley thought they must have got Barnett and he had relayed that to Ramble and the gang.

Nairn told them Barnett was trying to clear a safe path west for them to reach the hills. They had no idea how successful he had been but Ramble decided to give it a go any way. They would head out and grab the horses before making a run for the hills. If Barnett had done a good job they would have a chance. Nairn could not run though, his leg was out of action for the moment.

McEvoy had patched him up and even got the bullet out of his leg and another from his ribs. He wasn't a doctor though and the work was rough, mighty rough. Nairn was in a bad way from the two shots and he had suffered two pretty heavy falls as well. There was no way he was going to get to his horse without copping another slug and truth be known, he probably couldn't get to the horses alive. They would have to leave him behind and that would mean capture or death. Then Ramble had an idea. There was a large box at one end of the room, with a lift off lid designed to hold fire wood. It was nearly empty and big enough for a man; given the hot weather it was unlikely anyone would be opening the box today.

They set up some padding and laid Nairn in it. The box was not well made and had plenty of gaps, none big enough to see through well enough to know what was in there but plenty big enough for air to get through. Ramble explained his only chance was to lie still until the soldiers left and he would come back for him in a day or two. Nairn never believed for a minute he would come back but he knew he had no choice. He lay in the box and made himself as comfortable as he could and made sure he had two

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loaded guns on his chest. If they found him he would go out fighting.

Ramble got his men together and explained the plan. Everyone was to head for the horses, grab one and head straight past the over hang where Barnett had been holed up. If he was alive he would put down covering fire, if he wasn't at least he had made it so there were less men to shoot at them in that direction. Ramble gave them their instructions.

They were to race out the door two at a time, one going left and one going right; heading around back to the horses. Keep a break between each pair leaving the door, don't give them a group to shoot at. Don't ride together, don't even give them a pair to shoot at. Go just on sunset to make it harder for them to shoot well but still enough light for us to see and meet up the other side of the hill.

As they started to discuss the plan they heard a thud on the front wall. It wasn't a shot, it was something less definitive and then, another; more of a dull thud than a heavy impact. Nick crept to the front window and peered out, he saw the third flaming arrow arching through the air and heard the thump as it hit the roof. "They're going to burn us out, they have flaming arrows, they're going to burn us out". Ramble thought only for a moment and yelled out, "We go now, they will expect us to wait until it is well alight, we go now. Somerton, McEvoy, you first, go, go, go."

Somerton hit the door first and tuned left, McEvoy was close behind and went right. They sprinted to the end of the shack and darted down the sides. Their sudden action took the soldiers by surprise and not a single shot rang out to greet them. They had almost reached the shed with the horses before Spit Walker let



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loose from behind the shack. They reached the shed safely and grabbed for their horses. They had been left saddled for just such an emergency and with all the shooting today the horses were on edge and ready to run. As they clambered aboard Farley and Nick hit the doors of the shack and sprinted for their lives. This time there was a chorus of gunshots as they sprinted each way down the front of the shack. Farley felt the pull on his shirt collar as a bullet tore a hole in his shirt but they both made the side of the shack that gave them temporary safety before turning at the back to head for the horses. As they arrived McEvoy and Somerton were spurring the horses into action, heading out of the shed and aiming for the hill.

As they made their own sprint for the horses Ramble left the building on the same desperate run and was the last man out. Again the bullets rained down but although the soldiers were close, nothing hit home and he too hit the safety of the building side. He heard the horse hoofs pounding as Nick and Farley headed out of the shed. As he turned the back corner heading for the shed he saw Farley's horse falter and crash to the ground. A low bullet had brought the animal down and Farley hit the ground hard. Ramble didn't look again; he leaned forward and ran as hard as he could. Nick wheeled his horse and circled round behind Farley who had now gained his feet and was running. Nick leaned down to grab his hand so they could ride two up. Just as their hands touched, a shot from Walker's rifle spun Nick out of the saddle, dead before he hit the ground. The horse pulled up and Farley grabbed it and mounted smoothly, spurring the beast on and heading for the hills.

As Farley was mounting up Ramble raced past with a flurry of lead all round him coming from the wildly firing Walker; but nothing hit home. Steve Farley was slower but riding low, up

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against the flank of his stallion, he was shielded from most of the firing and eluded every bullet sent his way. As they came into view again for the soldier at the front more lead sought them out but with the speed they had gained they were a difficult target in that wildly stressful moment in the dimming light. The dappled patterns of light from the setting sun were spectacular but neither the fleeing outlaws nor the Army men had time to properly appreciate it.

Masterson wasn't shooting at the riders near the house, he was aiming for the first pair that although further away, they were running straight from him and he figured they presented a better target. He fired over and over and saw one of the horses fall and a rider spill. He thought he had hit one but he had aimed low. Somerton's horse was hit in the rump and although the shot would not be fatal to an animal that big, the shock made him falter and fall. Somerton hit the ground hard as he went head first into the dirt. Stars swam and bright lights flashed momentarily and then; darkness, utter darkness enveloped him as his consciousness faded.

Ramble and Farley raced past and quickly faded into the distance. Several of Masterson's shots came close but none hit home. Soon the surviving outlaws were racing through the woods and had reached safety, for now.

As the sun set they raced over the hill and looked for a spot to ease up and regroup. Meanwhile, White told his men there was no value trying to chase them now, darkness had nearly arrived. They went over to the shack and doused the flames. The wood was tough and the fire had not taken well. It would have taken a long time to catch light properly and the flames were easily extinguished. White grouped his men near the shack and sent

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Masterson and Walker in to check out the cabin. They didn't know if the whole gang had left, they didn't exactly know how many of them there were to start with.

Masterson carefully prised the door open and glanced in. The door opened inward so he could only see left; he crouched down, gun in hand and peered around the corner to look left, the direction he could see. Bradford stood a few feet behind him and watched for movement. Neither of them saw anything and Masterson crept forward slowly and checked to the right around the end of the door. Meanwhile Sergeant White covered as much of the room as he could through the front window. The operation continued carefully until they were satisfied the room was empty. One by one the men entered and checked out the bare room. There was nothing there but a box on a table right in the center of the room and mess all over the floor.

Bradford checked out the box and let out a holler. "Whiskey", he screamed and threw the bottle to his comrades as they came in the door. "Not yet", yelled White, "You'll get your chance later but right now, there's still work to be done". He set about handing out tasks. He sent White Bull to check on Turner and bring him back if he was still alive. He sent Rogers with him; he used to be an Army medic and might be able to do something for him. Walker and Masterson were sent to check on the rider they saw come down during the escape and Nickman was sent to check out the shed, any horses left and the man he said he had brought down. As Nickman headed out he called, "Hang on; Gallagher go with him. Be careful at that shed, someone might be there, you never know". Everyone went to their tasks.

Rogers grabbed two bottles of whiskey and White intervened. "For Turner Sarge, he might need it. And we might need to

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operate, he sounds pretty bad". White nodded gravely and Rogers whipped up a third one and headed out.

The man out back was dead, clean shot. There was nobody in the shed but three good horses out there, saddled and ready. When they found Turner he was a mess and screaming in pain. The bleeding had stopped, mostly, but half his leg was missing at the knee and there was no hope of saving it. It was almost off actually and Rogers handed him a bottle of Whiskey, saying "No choice Mike, its gotta go or you are dead". Turner nodded and took the bottle and began gulping it down. In his dehydrated condition he gagged hard and could hardly breath but took another gulp as soon as he could. This was going to be a hard night but if he lived through it, he would probably be alright.

Nickman and Gallagher found the fallen man. He looked dead but when they got close they saw he was breathing. He had no gunshot wound but great lumps of hair missing and plenty of blood had come out of him that way. They prodded him and then kicked him. Alive but unconscious, he was unceremoniously draped over a horse and taken back to the cabin. He was dumped in the corner and hog tied until he came to. Then they got to drinking, they had no idea how long Rogers and White Bull would be.

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### **12 - On Their Trail Again.**

**At first light White was ready to head out and chase down the** remaining survivors of the gang. He left Walker and Gallagher to guard the prisoner. He left strict instructions he was not to be harmed; he was needed to help find the money and if this day was unsuccessful, they needed to know who these survivors were. At the moment, they were just a gang, no names, not even a clue. That was one of the benefits of shooting everyone that saw you, nobody left to identify you.

He told Walker twice, then a third time, “Do not harm this man. This gang shot your brother and he might still die. We want them all and we need him to make sure we know who they are”. He told them to keep watch outside and if the gang came back, stay inside. There were only four of them that got away; not enough to storm this shack and make it work.

Soon enough he was heading out with the rest of his crew, White Bull riding ahead to scout the way. With Rogers, Masterson, Rickman and Patten there were six of them now but mostly these men had worked out well. They had stood up to the tests dealt to them and the Sergeant was confident in all of them except Patten. He was unsure of him still, he seemed to conveniently disappear when the shooting started but in the heat of battle, it was hard to keep track of every man.

They headed out past the bluff that had allowed Barnett to cause them so much trouble. As they rode past his body had already been ravaged by the wildlife and would soon be gone. White would be gone for several days and if the chase did not go well, maybe a fortnight or more. He hoped that Walker would stay in

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control. He was a good man but his brother might die and Gallagher would follow his lead, wherever that took them.

White Bull picked up the trail soon enough but the gang had a strong head start. The country was varied here and tracking was quite problematic. Travelling through wooded country was easy. The tall trees and heavy foliage created a thick coverage on the ground that was soft and left clear horse hoof impressions. A child could follow the trail there.

The land was crossed with small rivers and creeks everywhere you went. If a rider entered the water and followed the creek, only the best of trackers could follow that trail and tell which way the rider had travelled. White Bull was one of those trackers but even for him, this was not easy and it took time to read the signs. When you knew the direction of travel, all you needed to do was follow the water's course until the rider climbed out of that water. The rider had to, they couldn't stay there forever and the sign of a horse coming out onto the soft bank was hard to hide. If you chose the wrong direction, it could be hours before you had back tracked and found the exit point.

In other places the ground became rocky and hard. Here it was very difficult. White Bull picked up the marks of metal horse shoes on the rocky ground, the disturbance of dust layers on the hard surfaces and the unmistakable horse waste dropped as they travelled. It was slow going though, looking for such subtle hints of their trail.

On two occasions he lost the trail completely over this hard ground. White sent riders in every direction, looking for the clearer sign that would be obvious when the gang returned to areas with soft ground. None of this was too hard but again, it

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slowed them down. Both times this happened it took an hour or more for someone to pick up the trail and then it took up to two or more to get everyone back together. Half a day had passed by the time they were back on the job.

On the third day of this tedious and dangerous task, the twists and turns the gang were taking had become frustrating. There seemed no pattern to their rambling route and in several places, they had almost double backed on their own trail and travelled very close to the earlier trail. White and White Bull sat discussing this and trying to fathom their erratic behaviour. It had taken most of the afternoon to follow their trail to a point where they were less than 50 yards away from the trail they followed at midday. The trails were within sight of each other but never crossed.

White Bull suggested there were two possibilities with what was going on. Either way, they weren't running hard they way you would expect them to. This was controlled and planned, even if the plan was not immediately obvious.

The first possibility White Bull put up was that they were leading them into a trap. Somewhere, soon, they would find themselves in a spot where ambush was easy and they would find themselves at a distinct disadvantage. The trail had already gone through at least two places where this had seemed to be exactly what was happening but there was no sign of the gang and they had passed through safely.

White Bull had no way of knowing that he was right and that at this very moment, the gang had chosen the right place for that trap. Ramble had scoped out several possibilities along the way but discounted each of them until now. He had told the gang too, that he wanted to put the soldiers off by making them wait.

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White Bull told the Sergeant, the second possibility was that the gang was actually heading back to the shack. This made no sense except if the money from the bank job was there. If it was, they would not leave it behind.

White pulled his men up and told them to make camp and get a meal going. He needed time to think and decide on his next move. If they were heading back to the shack, Walker and the others were at risk and the gang could get the prisoner back and strengthen their position. If they were setting a trap, that wasn't good either. These men were exhausted and none too keen for another run in with a group that had already taken such a heavy toll on their numbers.

After the meal, White ordered the men to mount up and be ready to head out. They were going back to the shack by the fastest route they could. Everyone sighed with relief and were very glad to take a break from this man hunt.

As they rode out, White could not have known that this decision may have been the one that saved his life, for the moment at least. If he had continued to follow the trail, sometime tomorrow they would have found themselves in the very trap they had talked about. He could not have known either, just how close the gang were. Less than three miles away on the other side of the hill they were traversing, the gang had set themselves up for the kill.

Part of Ramble's plan with the wild erratic trail he had left was to be able to see the soldiers following their trail and have a long warning time before they caught up. White Bull was right when he said they weren't running hard, Ramble had slowed up



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deliberately so as to control where and when the coming confrontation would happen.

Ramble had set look outs to give him plenty of warning that the soldiers were coming. One of them was lucky to see the men riding over the ridge, heading back to the shack. Lucky, because White had strayed from the trail that Ramble had set out for him. The man reported to Ramble who made an insane decision but one typical of him.

If the soldiers were going back to the shack, so was he. He would trail them now and make it so they would never come after him again.

### 13 – Torture Backfired

**Sergeant White's concerns were completely justified and he** regretted his choice of who to leave behind. Two hours after they left, Walker was slapping the prisoner around; not to get information about the gang or the money, this was to hurt him, to get revenge. Gallagher joined in and was enjoying the game. But the prisoner kept losing consciousness and they had to wait for him to come round. When he was awake, they set back into him with a savage fury. Around lunch time the man once again came to and the pair eyed him, ready to start up.

As they had done before they placed their guns on the table in the middle of the room and Gallagher held the man, dragged him to standing and pinned him against the wall. Somerton tried to fight but he had no strength, was hog tied and his head was spinning. In this state he would not take much more of this punishment before that last spark of life left in him would be extinguished. His vision was blurred and blood was leaving his face in several places from the pounding he was taking. Gallagher and Walker were enjoying themselves and did not notice the movement behind them.

Nairn had decided he had been here long enough and carefully pushed up the lid of the wood box. He saw through the crack he created, the men belting the life out of Somerton. Ever so carefully he pushed the lid to the side; making sure there was no sound as he knew he would get only one chance at this. When the lid was sitting up behind him he propped himself up inside the box. He placed one gun in his belt and lined up Walker with the other. He squeezed off two shots and Walker pitched forward and landed hard up against Somerton. As he slid to the floor Gallagher jumped aside, saw the man in the box and went to draw

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his weapon. Sadly, he didn't have one to draw as he had put it on the table. As he processed that fact Nairn fired again and missed. Gallagher leaped to one side and Nairn fired and missed. He leaped forward and tripped in his haste, Nairn fired as he lurched forward, fired and missed. He fired again and came up on an empty chamber.

His awkward position, the pain from his wounds and being stuck in the box for so long, had all conspired to destroy his capacity to aim properly.

Gallagher struggled to his feet and reached for his gun on the table. Nairn pulled the other gun from his belt. He fired and missed, his pain and injuries making it difficult for him to concentrate as he fired and missed again; and again. Gallagher had his hand on his gun as Nairn fired his fourth shot from this second gun, and missed. Gallagher aimed and fired while still moving and well off balance. He also missed.

Nairn was shaking and his vision blurred, weakened from blood loss, scared half to death by the bullet that just missed him and deeply regretting his foolhardy decision to do a hero's ride. Sweat filled his eyes and he took blind aim whilst firing his last two bullets. They both thudded home as Gallagher fired his third shot, the one that came closest of all to Nairn but still missed. Gallagher screamed once, clutched at his chest in disbelief and then, he was gone.

Mike Turner was sitting in the bed; watching numbly. With his leg gone, his movements were limited but the man in the box had not seen him yet. He reached for his gun but it was too far away and he tumbled from the bed. Nairn saw him at last and then fired but his gun landed on an empty shell. While he hastily emptied

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the gun's cylinder and reeled a bullet out of his belt, Turner threw himself on the floor and dragged himself over to Gallagher's gun. He reached the weapon and looked up to take aim. He never saw his quarry as the reloaded gun in Nairn's hand erupted and the bullet tore in his shoulder and knocked him back and away from Gallagher's weapon.

Turner may have lived through the shot but with his other injuries he didn't stand a chance. He hadn't noticed in his effort to reach the gun that he had torn his bandage off his leg and it was bleeding badly as he dragged himself across the floor. Even without the new slug in his shoulder, the blood loss now on top of yesterday, would have seen him dead without immediate help. He forced himself to make another move for the gun but it didn't work. His arm wouldn't go and then he lost consciousness, never to wake again.

Nairn tried to get out of the box and could not. He called to Somerton but there was no response. He fired another shot near Somerton's head; no reaction. He didn't know if the man was dead or just unconscious. Either way, he could not get out of that box alone, he was weak and the leg he had been shot in was simply refusing to work. He waited for a long time and was elated when Somerton did come to and he shouted to him. He needed him to get him out this box so they could get going. Trouble was, Somerton was still tied and not in good shape himself.

Nairn, frustration building, summoned his strength and found some he did not know he had. He dragged himself out of the box and fell to the floor. As he hit that floor the pain in his leg flared and he screamed in agony. He tried to keep the noise down but this was pain like he had never experienced before. He thought it

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was like being shot again. The pain was more from the infection building in his leg from the sloppy and dirty operating that had been done on him. When it settled he dragged himself across the floor and cut the ropes binding Somerton. Next time Somerton woke he was free and able to move.

Somerton was weak and his vision blurred but he was with it enough to understand that Nairn was talking to him and take in the situation. He saw the dead men on the floor and knew he had to get out of here. He saw Nairn laying there, next to useless with that leg and went to get up and leave. If he could have, he would have done so without a one second regret; but he could not.

Somerton passed out again but came to after a half hour or so. Nairn had been thinking and had worked out a plan. He explained the deal, telling Somerton they were both pretty bugged but together, maybe they could do this. He told Somerton that he could not get to the horses or onto a horse without help but once on, he would be fine and could ride okay. He told Somerton, he would not be able to ride for long because he would pass out again and just fall off. "Help me", he said to Somerton, "Help me to the horses, help me on and then I will tie you into the saddle. I'll lead you and if you crash out again, you'll be tied on and I'll lead you, all night if I have to until we are clear. Either of us is bugged on our own, together we might just have a chance"

Somerton did not like it but he knew he had no choice. They had no idea how long it would be before the soldiers returned so they got to it. Somerton passed out three times before he got to the horses and twice more before they were both on board. Nairn was right, once he was actually on the horse he could ride and move quite well regardless of the pain. They worked together and tied Somerton's boots to the stirrups and decided they would take all

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the horses. Nairn grabbed some rope and strung the leads together. By the time he had done this Somerton was already out to it again and he just moved out and started heading for the nearest woods that were not in the direction that the soldiers and Ramble had gone.

If the soldiers came back earlier than expected he did not want to meet up with them. If Ramble came back for him as promised, slim chance, he would come in the other way and maybe they would meet up. Most likely he and Somerton were alone now. They stood a better chance together and they stood a better chance if they could put a lot of distance between themselves and this shack before the soldiers returned. When they saw three more dead men in that shack, they would be furious and were sure to come hunting for them.

Nairn pushed himself all through the night. Most of the country they travelled over would not have caused much trouble to a couple of good riders with fresh mounts. For Nairn, it was damned hard work forcing his horse onward whilst dragging Somerton and the other horses along. Several times he had stopped to straighten the man up and had strung another rope across his shoulders during the night to stop him sagging so low.

Without the ropes he would have fallen a hundred times and more than once he had struck over hanging branches as they rode. Somerton's face was scratched and cut and his shirt badly torn from these obstacles and when he regained consciousness, these things would hurt. He was lucky to be alive though and Nairn was not going to stop or slow down to worry about the man's face tonight.

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It was well after first light when he pulled up on a river bank in a well protected area that would give them some chance of success. He had not heard from Somerton for hours now but he still seemed to be alive. He unhooked the extra horses and rode out into the middle of the river with Somerton in tow. He reached down and undid the ropes that had done such a great job of keeping Somerton in the saddle. As soon as they were both untied he shoved Somerton off the horse and let him fall into the cold water.

Somerton popped up, awake and yelling. He screamed abuse but Nairn just reached down, grabbed his hand and dragged him to the bank. Somerton lay there panting but seeming to stay awake now. Nairn hoped he was up to putting some grub together because he was about ready to fall out the saddle himself from sheer exhaustion after riding all night. Somerton said that in fact, he thought he could put something together and was feeling somewhat better. Nairn decided falling into the water was a good idea. He rode back into the middle of the river and let himself slide off. The water was only a couple of feet deep and he used his good leg to push himself to the bank.

He would lay there until Somerton had made the meal. Then he would rest. That was the plan but he was asleep long before breakfast was ready; not the least reason was that Somerton took a long time because he was still in a bad way. He was good enough though to put some food items together, not cooked that would be too much; but food none the less. He grabbed several canteens and filled them with fresh water and used one to wake Nairn. They enjoyed the meal even though it was cold. They drank heaps of water and Nairn drowned his leg in the Whiskey to try and clear up the raging infection that was burning him.

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After they ate, they set themselves up under a rocky overhang. They both leaned up against the rock wall and used a sleep roll to pad it a little. They laid out their weapons close by including six rifles they found hanging off the scabbards on the military horses they had stolen. Within moments they were both asleep; they had agreed to take turns watching in case anyone turned up but after what they had been through, there was no hope in hell either of them could stay awake. They both knew they were a gang of two now, dependent on each other and neither of them had what it would take to make it alone. They knew also that the soldiers would be livid when they returned to the shack.

It was another two days before White did return and when he did, with no success hunting down the survivors, he howled in rage to see three more soldiers dead because of these bastards. He could not imagine how the prisoner could have bested his men but when he saw that all the horses were gone it was clear to him, those four they were chasing had slipped back and taken out his men before taking every horse that was left. He consulted with White Bull who rode around checking the trail. He reported back that the horses had left two days ago but there were only two riders. That couldn't be right, the gang would not have done this using just one man when they had four men available and with the prisoner that was gone, there were now five. Nothing about this made sense but it just didn't matter, his men were dead and that made ten dead.

Ten dead and nothing to show for it. Ten dead men and he was responsible. Sergeant Bradley Ernest White was not a happy man and swore an oath that he would find these men and bring them to heel.



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### 14 - Surprise

**White and his men took care of house keeping and made** shallow graves for the fallen. It was a solemn time with so many of their mates no longer with them. With slow and grudging steps, they were trying to bring together a meal; difficult after such a hard few days but of course, absolutely necessary. Patten set about the task of getting a fire started in the little pot belly stove. He went to gather some wood and noticed that the wood box was open and there was bedding in the bottom. He called White over.

“What do you make of this Sarge?” he queried, “This here box has got a bed set up in it”. Everyone came to look but nobody had any idea what it meant.

White gave the orders, “I don’t give a damn. Just get on with this meal so then we’ll plan what to do next. Masterson, take Paul out with you and gather some of that small wood near the end of the house so we can get on with this.” Nobody said a word and each set about his job. They hated it but they were bloody hungry.

While they had been going through these motions, Ramble had been watching them from the woods with Farley and Nick. The soldiers had been focused on getting back to the cabin quickly and gave no thought to covering their tracks. The last thing they had on their minds was any possibility that the outlaws would be following them.

Without White knowing it, Ramble had turned the tables on them after losing the soldiers in the hills, on ground so rocky even White Bull had lost their tracks in some places. The gang had started trailing them back to the cabin. Sitting over looking the

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cabin he gave instructions. He made it clear they were not here to get revenge or try and kill all the soldiers. “If we get one or two, that’s all right” he said, “But there are at least half a dozen men between those that were following us and those back at the cabin. Today we stop them from hunting us, that is all.”

He issued orders and Nick made the move around the back of the shack, knowing he could not be seen there from within the building. McEvoy joined Ramble in taking up positions very close to the front door of the cabin, within can’t miss range but also well within the danger zone when the return shooting started. They were already in place when they saw two of the soldiers come out the door and head to the wood pile. Both men grabbed an armful of timber and started back to the door. With the door open they had a good view of another man they thought was the Indian, but the angle was not clear. Farley was positioned towards that end of the building and had a clear view through the door.

As the two men ambled back with the wood, the outlaws lined them up. Without speaking they instinctively knew which soldier each of them would be aiming for. Ramble whispered so only McEvoy could hear, “On the count of three; one; two; three.” Within a couple of seconds of that final number each of them had fired at least four shots at their intended target and two men fell heavily to the ground, no chance at all under a heavy barrage from two outlaws that were good shots. Farley aimed quickly at the man they could see through the door and fired twice before the soldier had time to fully take in the situation.

Never the less the man had already began to move and although Farley thought one of his shots had hit home, he could not be sure. He could not know either from his obscured angle, that he had just sent a slug into Sergeant White’s neck. The slug had clipped the

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edge of the door frame on the way through and this had taken the speed right out of it and luckily for White, it didn't penetrate far and had touched nothing vital; but it hurt to hell and sent him flying to the ground.

As White hit the deck only one word graced his mind, "Twelve." That was how many were dead now.

Out front Ramble kept up an irregular firing pattern, shooting in sudden, wildly unpredictable bouts sending bullets sailing into the door and through the front window. Meanwhile Nick was following his instructions and had headed to the shed with the horses. He had made the shed door during the first burst of shooting and waited until another heavy volley began. He lined up the nearest horse with his .45 Colt and fired, sending the animal to the ground. As the firing continued he killed each of the tethered animals and waited for their death throes to stop. Then he walked through and gathered up ammunition bags and belts and took them to his horse, he left no bullets behind. Then he found four rifles and laid them on the ground. He shot out the firing mechanism on each; he had no use for more rifles but the soldiers were not going to have them either. Then he mounted up and rode back along the track he had used for his first escape a few days ago.

When he reached the nearest grove of trees he dismounted, hid his horse and secured him to a tree. Then he took up a position and joined in the firing. Ramble saw him start and signalled to McEvoy. They both stopped firing and dashed for their horses and were soon racing to join Nick. They all put down cover then to allow Farley the chance to clear out. Inside the cabin they could hear the horses running but the continuing rain of lead across the door discouraged them from going anywhere near it. It

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took only moments for Ramble and his three remaining men to be clearing out fast, out of range and knowing that with no horses, it would be a long time before those soldiers would come after them.

Inside the cabin White Bull was tending to the Sergeant's wounds. After the shots had been stopped for several minutes, Rogers carefully eased outside to check whether anyone was still there. He carefully circled the cabin, going past the shed. When he saw the dead horses he cursed long and loud; it would take days to walk out of here and it would be none too pleasant. He went back inside and reported. White Bull went out and checked where the outlaws had been shooting, checked the dead horses and for signs of movement all around. He reported back to White who was in great pain but determined not to show it.

He asked White Bull what he had found. "Well Boss, there were four of them, three out front and one out back. That one, he killed all the horses. They are the men we have been tracking, they tracked us this time and got us good." White cursed, grabbed his gun and emptied it into the roof of the building; rage showing in his eyes. He looked at White Bull and said, "There is more, isn't there."

"Yes boss" White bull replied hesitantly, not wanting to go on because he thought White would not believe him. "These men are not the men that left here with all the other horses while we were away. Someone else rescued that prisoner, not these outlaws." White didn't want to believe him but did, White Bull was never wrong about these things. Well whoever it was, it was time not to get caught out again and he grabbed the food that had been half prepared on the stove. It had not been cooked but they had no time for that. They ate and packed.

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White was going to get them out of here and into the woods as soon as it was dark; if these outlaws or the bastard that rescued his prisoner came back, he was not going to be a sitting duck again, never again. He would not even allow time to bury the latest dead. Nickman and Rogers were history now and there was no point endangering themselves further for these two.

As White prepared, Ramble and his men kept on riding. He was taking no chances this time, he counted himself lucky to get away at all and to do so in these circumstances was amazing but, you never knew. They swung by a small cave they had found some days before and collected the bulk of the payroll money they had stolen. It had been decided to hide it and make sure that if they did get caught up with, the money would not be easy to find. They shared it out, large shares now there were only four of them. None of them dreamed for a moment that Nairn and Somerton might one day come looking for their share.

They headed south for a while and then just roamed aimlessly for a day, not caring where they were heading except that they would not go back to Laramie and all agreed they should stay away from all towns for a good while and let the dust settle. They now had a huge amount of money each and wanted to go somewhere to spend it and have a right time of it. They rode steadily for long days and often into the early night for three weeks, stopping to eat, hunt and sleep. They had covered a lot of ground and were headed for country that would one day become known as Crook County. They had no idea where they were but that didn't matter, as they travelled they had all they needed and had come across a couple of homesteader shacks along the way.

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Ramble had gone into each and taken what he wanted, each time leaving the occupants dead as they departed. Out here the law was scant and the country wild and untamed. Nobody would find them now, they were completely confident in that.

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### 15 - White's Solemn Promise

**The three weeks Ramble had spent travelling was almost as long as it took White to find a town and recover.** White and his men had eventually found a track and followed it until they ended up in a small town of about eighty people.

To get there had been torturous for them all. As they left the shack, the men were terrified that Ramble was simply waiting for them and because he had horses and they did not, he could take his time and just pick them off one at a time.

They were also terribly short of supplies, most critically, ammunition. They only had what they carried on their person and some from saddle bags that had been inside the shack when the gang attacked. Food was also low so they would need to hunt and this would take up more ammunition. Hunting would also mean they would be splitting up and making themselves even more vulnerable.

Everyone of them was tired, dog tired. The stress over the last few days was immense and had not eased up now. Their discussions centered around when they would die rather than if they would. Even White Bull and the Sergeant were scared although they managed to not let it show. White knew his Indian guide very well and was completely confident he would lead them out of this but even he was fearful of Ramble's next move.

Patten held more fear within him than the other three combined. His thinking was completely fouled up and he had planned to leave the others in the night and travel alone, thinking he would be safer alone than anywhere near Sergeant White. His only chance of living was to stay with the group but he could not see this. He

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never had a chance to put his plan into place though because on the second night, as he ventured alone into the woods to expel his bodily waste, he was bitten by a rattle snake he had disturbed.

After the strike he reeled back and reached for his gun. In his haste and panic, he tripped and fell forward, landing on the snake. He rolled to get away but the snake was much faster and twice more, Patten felt the fangs bite into his flesh. With three strikes pumping venom into his body, he did not make it through the night.

With Bert Masterson the only other survivor, there were now only three of them left and Masterson had been hurt badly during the last encounter. He hadn't been shot in the neck as White had, but wooden shrapnel from the window had impaled itself in his chest and left arm. Shards had damaged his left eye as well but he could still see but the pain was considerable.

White Bull was the only one not injured and over the first few days, he would be nursing Masterson and White along and doing all the hunting for the group. It took over a week for Masterson to be getting on top of his injuries at all but by then he had regained the use of his left arm and the pain had subsided unless he exerted himself particularly hard or took a knock. Travelling through this harsh country provided plenty of knocks and plenty of opportunities to exert yourself.

White slowed them down most of all. The bullet to the neck had weakened him physically. The loss of so many men had weakened him mentally. At the end of each day he collapsed and was basically no good for anything. He developed a raging infection from the wound and was running a huge fever for



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several days. It didn't help to be pushing himself hard when he ought to be resting totally.

Only in the last two or three days before reaching the little town did the Sergeant show any signs of recovery. Even then though, he was still weak and fuddled in the brain. Without White Bull he would have wandered in circles until he died, such was the confusion his fever created.

Toward the end of the three weeks, White Bull too was approaching the end of his strength. On some days, they travelled only three or four miles. Much of that was with him pulling both the other men, one at a time, across a creek or up a hill. When they stopped he then had to do all the hunting, was the only one truly aware of dangers and watching for Ramble and doing all the domestic chores of cooking and packing.

Eventually, the men staggered into a little town that seemed to have no name but did have a saloon and a few quite decent buildings. They found a hotel to grab a descent drink and get cleaned up. The walk had been long and hard. White had been lucky that his neck wound had not been fatal but it had weakened him a lot and wandering around the woods on foot had not helped his recovery at all. The infection that had set in still had him running a fever when he arrived but at least the worst of it was over.

Masterson booked rooms while White Bull took the Sergeant to a the town's doctor. He was lucky to have stumbled into a town with a doctor; most places didn't have one in these parts. Doc Shepherd was getting on a bit but knew what he was doing and with some good disinfectant and a sharp knife, the wound was dealt with in quick time. While he was working he chatted

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amiably, “You know Sergeant, you are pretty lucky. A few more days and you would have ended up dead like a joker that came through here a week ago. He had a smashed up head and had been beaten something terrible, said he had come off his horse, which he might have done, but he had been shot and beaten something shocking. He lived through that and then an infection he got wandering through the woods for two weeks killed him. His mate was a mite luckier, he said he had fallen off a horse too but he had been shot in the leg and in the chest and was close to death from the infection too. When I called them on their story they fessed up, sorta. They reckoned a bunch of soldiers set on them up in the high country, shot their mates, tried to burn them out of a cabin and then beat them mercilessly when they took one of them prisoner. Only way they got away was one had hidden in a goddamned wood box until most of the soldiers had gone off for a while and they fought their way out.”

White listened to the story and then got a description. The first man sounded like the prisoner that had escaped. As soon as he was patched up, he headed for the Sheriff’s place and told him the story of what had gone down. The Sheriff hereabouts was Geoff Bridgemont and he described the dead man to a tee and White was sure he was the prisoner that had escaped. The Sheriff said the man had died but his body had disappeared. What they didn’t know was that the doctor had been threatened with a bullet. When the man recovered the doctor lied and said he was dead and told them where they could find an abandoned cabin to hide out in. As far as the doctor was concerned, these men were far more dangerous than the Sheriff and he was not taking any chances. In these parts a body disappearing didn’t warrant too much attention, he was dead after all.

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The Sheriff said the other man was still in town and had taken a job at the livery stable down the road. White gathered up Rogers and White Bull while the Sheriff grabbed two deputies and they all headed down to the Livery. White took up positions outside while the Sheriff and his men went in.

The arrest was straight forward and simple. Brad Somerton was trying to look inconspicuous for a while and had hidden the money he had on him from the robbery. Keeping low had not worked and soon Sergeant White had a live prisoner in the jail and this one would not be allowed to get away. This was the second time Somerton had been in Army custody and Sergeant White was determined that he would not be permitted to escape again. It took some little while but White got the whole story out of him and now knew all about Kid Ramble; now he knew who he was hunting.

On the evening of the day he found all this out, White sat in his room mulling it all over. He would not let these men escape. He shouted to the heavens, “**I’m coming for you Kid Ramble**”, and the after a long pause, “I won’t stop ‘til I gets ya Ramble.” White swore an oath on the lives of the dead soldiers, he would not rest until he had sent Ramble to Hell. Then he named each of the men he had lost and burned the names into his mind forever’ Barney Smith the outlaw, the twins Mike Turner and Spit Walker, and those drafted into his squad, Darren Gallagher, Dusty Cameron, Dirk Ballinger, Ron Bradfield, Rob Clarke, Daniel Rondel, Gerry Rogers, Paul Nickman and David Cameron. He would remember them and carve their names on Ramble’s tombstone.

What White didn’t know was that Nairn wasn’t dead. He had been mighty crook and looked like dying. When he started getting a bit better, Somerton had taken him out of town and set

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him up in a cabin he had found by following the doctor's directions after they had threatened the doctor's life and family. He decided he should lay low there until he got all his strength back. He made sure there was plenty of food and drink and left him there to heal up. He made sure he was well armed and had a good horse too.

Ten days after Somerton had been locked up, Nairn decided it had been too long since he had been by to check on him. He still felt weak but was building up well. When he rode into town, he did so in the late evening as the sun set. He went to the saloon and got himself settled with a drink. People here knew him but with two weeks growth and different clothes, he wasn't recognised.

It didn't take long to learn what had happened. Somerton getting arrested was as much action as this town had seen for some time. Although it was close to the rail line and in close proximity to some of the big mining areas, mines here tended to have good pay dirt but nothing spectacular. As such, it never attracted the rush other towns had and was quieter than most. Nairn learned that Somerton was in the local jail, the only occupant for many a month. He also learned that a federal Marshall was scheduled to call by and collect him to be tried for his crimes.

Nairn wasn't about to let that happen. Somerton was nothing special to him but the money he had was. Somerton had taken the money both of them had and hidden it, if he was hanged Nairn would lose the lot. He determined to break him out and get his share of that money back. In the early hours of the morning, just before day break, he went to the back of the jail and hitched his horse. He quietly sneaked around the front and looked inside. A single deputy was there guarding Somerton, the key to the cells hanging off his belt.

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As the deputy slept, seated in his chair with his head on the desk, he never knew what happened. A single shot from Nairn sent him heaven bound and a second shot from Nairn sent the door lock flying in shattered pieces. He shouldered his way into the room and grabbed the keys. He quickly unlocked the cell door and Somerton, wide awake from the noise of gunshots, was ready to go.

They quickly exited and headed out of town at a fast clip. Somerton led the way, telling Nairn they needed to grab the money he had hidden and get the hell out of here. The pair headed back for the shack and began to pack to depart these parts as quickly as they could. While they were doing this, Somerton told Nairn what he had learned from the Deputy. He told him Kid Ramble had come back to the shack and shot the horses and two more of the Sergeant's men. He didn't try to rescue them though, he just shot all the soldier's horses to strand them there and left his loyal gang members to die.

After packing their gear, they headed out and made a pact with each other. They agreed to stick together for as long as it took to find Ramble and the others and gun them down. If they could get their hands on some more of the money from the bank job, they would. That was not the important thing though, Ramble had left them to die and he was going to pay for that. As they set camp that night they extended their vow to each other, to kill Ramble, no matter how long it took. Before they laid down to sleep in a small cave they had found, the men shook hands to seal their pact, saying together; **“We're coming for you, Kid Ramble”**.

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### 16 - The Encounter

**Quaid had been working all morning and was just heading in** for a meal and rest during the heat of the day. As he ambled across the field towards the cabin he saw three riders heading in from the valley. There seemed to be a lot of people travelling these parts recently and he had done quite well from the passing trade with his vegetables, fruit and other produce.

For most of his life, Quaid had been a cautious man but now, since having several groups come by and buy produce, including one trail boss who gave them a steer for food, he had become more relaxed. The farm had grown and that one steer had been the start of a small herd. There had been trouble with a couple of the rough riders coming through, but nothing he had not been able to handle.

The riders coming in showed no sign of being a problem but never the less, he checked his rifle as he headed for the home he shared with Molly. The riders would get there first and Molly would greet them, knowing he was only a few minutes away.

When he arrived Molly was talking to Kid Ramble, who had identified himself to her as “Mr Ramble” and was chatting amiably while they waited for her husband to come in from the fields. John Quaid observed the men looked different to the average trail herders or homesteaders that passed through. These men were younger and wore guns that hung low, more like a gun slinger than a rancher. Molly obviously wasn’t concerned though and they had caused her no alarm. Over the past few months, she had become much more relaxed with visitors and she was today also.

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As he passed the frame that was the edge of the barn, he called out and waved, “Howdy fellas, what can we do for you?” Ramble had been watching him approach and as he reached the edge of the cabin, with a cool and fluid motion, he drew his colt and fired a single shot. John Quaid dropped his rifle and was propelled backward by the impact of the bullet hitting his head. He hit the floorboards hard and blood sprayed the wall behind him. At the same time McEvoy and Farley slid from their saddles and grabbed Molly and dragged her into the building.

With no preliminaries and not a word spoken, they ripped her clothes from her body and abused her viciously. Each of them had his way with the woman and they were rough with her like she had never been treated before. Even though she had been abused as a young girl, she had never had anyone thrash her this way at the same time. When each of the men had finished, she lay on the floor, unmoving. The men laughed at her, believing she was so frightened now she could not move, not even to run away. What they didn’t yet know was that they had beaten her so badly, her spine was damaged and she was laying so still because she could no longer move her legs.

Kathleen was four years old now and had learned from her parents to stay out of sight until she had the signal from her mother that it was all right to come out. This time she had heard the men cursing and she heard her mother screaming and she had heard the shot from Ramble’s gun. She had spent a lot of time with her father in her young years, doing everything on the farm including hunting small animals. She was very familiar with guns and in fact, there was a small calibre hand gun in the house that her father had said was hers and that she would have it when she was big enough to handle it herself. In the meantime, she had used it

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with him hunting rabbits and rats around the farm. She knew how to use it and where it was kept.

Kathleen determined that she would chase away these men that had frightened her mother and look after her mother until her father returned. She did not know he had been shot and lay in a pool of blood on the front porch. She grabbed the gun, made sure it was loaded and pulled the hammer back. It was a hard job and she had to jam the weapon against a door to get it back. When she was ready she boldly stepped out into the main room where the men were still standing around laughing. In her bravest voice she said, "Get out of here, you don't belong here." The men turned toward her and saw the four year old stood there with the gun in her hands trying to look threatening. McEvoy and Nick laughed but Ramble turned toward her and shouted harshly.

Kathleen was suddenly scared, more scared than she had ever been in her life and she took a couple of paces back. Then she aimed the gun at Ramble and fired. As the report knocked her off her feet the bullet sailed fast and true; but not at Ramble. Farley clutched his chest and screamed a long, haunting scream that seemed to hang in the air for minutes. In less than a second after the shot had been fired Ramble had pulled his own gun and fired. The little girl's chest exploded with the impact and she fell backwards and up against the wall. All this took only a few seconds and Ramble turned to check Farley. He was laying on the floor clutching his chest and asking McEvoy, "How's it look Rob, is it bad?"

Before he could reply Ramble leaned over, pulled the man's hand aside and said coolly, "It's bad Steve, you won't live, no chance." Ramble then aimed his gun at Steve's head. Steve Farley, even though he was in pain realised his life was in danger and he



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reached for his own gun and clutched at the butt. Too late though, Ramble already had him lined up and fired. Then there were two dead in the room and soon, probably a third.

He walked over to the woman and looked down into her terrified face. “Get up bitch,” he screamed, but she could not. He kicked her and then kicked her again. He reached down and dragged her part way up and let her fall. The way she fell was odd, there was no resistance, just like an unconscious man. This observation made Ramble realise how badly hurt she was and he aimed his gun at her. Then he spoke to her, “I should put you out of your misery but the little bitch over there cost me one of my men, so you can just lay there and die when ever you’re ready.”

He and McEvoy then ransacked the shack and took the food and drink they wanted. Then they packed up saddle bags and headed out. Before they left, they shared the money sitting in Farley’s bags between them, two thirds for Ramble and one for McEvoy. As they rode off barely 60 minutes had elapsed from when they arrived to when they left and the devastation they left behind was typical of them.

They had not bothered to check the man Ramble had shot outside and didn’t notice he had moved. During the commotion inside he had regained consciousness and dragged himself slowly to the door. He had heard everything that happened inside in the moments before Kathleen acted, he heard one of the men call the leader “Kid” and then after the shots, he heard the other one call him “Ramble”. This meant nothing to Quaid but he heard the name. Then he passed out again; he had lost a lot of blood and was still bleeding from the head wound.

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Almost two full days passed before John Quaid regained consciousness again. When he did the pain in his head was almost unbearable and he was weak, very weak. He struggled to his feet and surveyed his surroundings. The deck where he stood was stained a dull red from the dried blood; part of his weakness was from that blood loss.

Part of the weakness was from his head injury and part from two days without food and exposed to the elements. He was in bad shape and knew he needed to get inside and get himself sorted. He remembered what had happened and knew his wife and daughter were dead. He stepped into the cabin to look around and the first thing he saw was his dead daughter laying on the floor with flies buzzing all around. He stared for a moment and then vomited, even though he had nothing in his stomach. When he settled he covered her with a blanket and went to find his wife.

He stepped into the main area of the cabin and saw his wife laying flat on her back, almost naked with just the remnants of her dress left on after it had been torn from her body. She laid with her eyes wide open and he went to kneel down and close them. Molly twitched twice and then turned her head toward him. John was startled for a moment but overjoyed that she was alive. With tears in his eyes he leaned down to her and told her it would be alright, he would get her up and it would be all right.

“No John”, said Molly, “It won’t be all right, I can’t get up.”

John took a while to understand what Molly was saying. The men had beaten her so badly her spine had been damaged and she could not move her legs at all and her arms could only be moved a little with a great deal of effort. The only thing she could do well was move her head. John went and got another blanket and

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covered her. He held her for a while and confirmed her fears that Kathleen was dead. Molly had heard what went on but had been unable to move for two days and could not see her daughter. It took a while but John finally shook himself loose of the shock and started to get things set up. First of all, he grabbed some food for himself so he had the strength to work and satisfied his thirst that was mighty strong. Then he pulled Molly up and propped her into a corner and fed her as well. Finally he moved a frame to next to where Molly was and set it up as a bed and carefully slid a blanket under her and used it to lift her onto the bed.

John cleaned her up then because Molly, with no control over her body, had messed herself badly and did not smell at all good. After this he slept, on the wooden floor beside her. He slept like a baby, absolutely, totally exhausted. He dreamt, but he didn't dream like a baby. The memory of what happened played over and over again in his dream. Some time during the night, he did not know when, he woke and lit a lamp. He scratched two words into the wood of a table and then slumped back onto the floor beside his crippled wife and was immediately asleep.

The words he wrote were "Kid Ramble" In his dream he ran those two words through his mind a thousand times. In his dream he imagined the end that Ramble would come to and that he, John Quaid, was the architect of that end. In his waking life John knew he was not a violent man nor did he have what it would take to hunt down such a man as Ramble. In his dream life it was different and in that dream he made an oath and screamed to the world, **"I'm coming for you, Kid Ramble."**

In his waking life, the next morning, the horror of the situation finally sunk in. He knew he would need to find a way to get Molly to some help. He knew too that he had to make that dream

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come true, he would hunt down Ramble. He knew he was not a gun slinger and not a fighter, hunting down such a man may mean his death but right now, his love for his lost daughter and his injured wife was greater than his fear of death. Ramble had destroyed everything and he would be made to pay or Quaid would die in the attempt.

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### 17 – His Quest Begins

**John Quaid knew he was not a fighter, he knew he was not a tough man.** He knew that if he found Kid Ramble and took him on in hand to hand combat, he would probably lose. John had been in a lot of fights during his life, he lost nearly all of them. He had often been the target of thugs because of his weight and he was known to be a gentle man. Problem was he was never prepared to take bad treatment without a fight. This was a bad combination, he would not back down and he could not fight.

He knew that if he took ramble on in a gun fight, he would definitely lose. But he also knew that he was a good hunter.

When Ramble came to his home, he used his best skills as a gun slinger to take down Quaid and never gave him a hint of a fair fight. Quaid had gone down before he even knew he was in a fight.

Quaid was a good hunter and a passable tracker. He had hunted all his life and tracked almost as well as the local Cheyenne Indians, almost. He could certainly track two horsemen through these ranges. He had hunted bear and many other dangerous animals. He understood that to be successful, he had to set a trap and spring without the hunted having a chance. He would do that to Ramble in some remote place that would mean the law would have no chance of knowing what had happened. Wyoming Territory was a wild place in 1881 and most murders, and there were a lot of them, went unsolved and largely unreported.

He had made arrangements for his wife to be looked after. After he patched her up as best he could, he took her into the little township of Crook that was not far from his farm. Crook boasted

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200 honest citizens or a bit more in 1881, and a few more citizens that could not be placed in that category. It had no doctor and there wasn't one for a long distance. What it did have was a midwife, a famous midwife, famous in these parts at least.

Kim Hawker was not a Doctor, no sir, but she was the next best thing hereabouts and many people in these parts would swear on a stack on bibles that she was better than any doctor they had ever come across. Kim knew all about the magic healing of herbs and plants, how to use good food and poultices to make your body heal itself. She had potions and concoctions and knew some surgery too. She had saved twin baby girls in an awful birth that should have meant the death of the babies and the mother. But she saved them all and the townsfolk counted it as a miracle no doctor could have performed.

Kim had travelled extensively in her youth and worked all down the east coast and over seas as well. She had studied Chinese Medicine and learned about local Indian remedies. She had applied all of this knowledge and experience to create New Ways of approaching illness and healing, one of the first to embrace natural methods. Using these methods, she had saved many whom doctors had given up for dead.

Quaid took his wife to her and gave Kim half the money he had to look after her. He told her husband to take everything he wanted from the farm, particularly the food that was growing. There was plenty of it and it was good; take it as payment for looking after Molly. "Tell her too, that I'll be back for her when I get done with what I have to do" was the last words he had left for her. This was some months ago now and since then, he had tracked Kid Ramble.

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Tracking him had not been hard but it had been slow. Since Sergeant White got to interrogate his prisoner, he had found out who most of the men were in the gang that hit the Army payroll and particularly, who the leader was. Kid Ramble was famous now and there was a reward out and posters going up all over the Territory. He was worth a thousand dollars, dead or alive. When Quaid first set out he didn't know this, he was just after revenge. But he knew the man's name, he had given it to Molly. He had heard him called "Kid" and he knew this was a term often used to refer to an outlaw who was very young. Now he knew the law was on his side to hunt the man and kill him; and \$1,000 would go a long way toward getting Molly looked after in a proper hospital. She needed that and it would cost a lot of money.

Even with the posters out, information came through slowly and it was sometimes weeks before news of a sighting came to Quaid's attention. He was not a law man so he did not get direct information and most of the law men he came across were not overly helpful when they thought someone else might be on the trail of a reward like this one.

After nearly six months on the trail Quaid found himself riding into Deadwood, a booming mining town in the 1880s. It was almost sunset when he arrived and he was looking for the first saloon he could find. Exhausted from a long day in the saddle, he needed a rest. Exhausted from months of fruitless hunting, he was on the verge of giving up when he hit town. As he rode slowly along a dirt street he heard shots coming from not far away.

He counted at least a dozen and then half a dozen riders heading out. Two headed out in the lead and four others followed one at a time a few moments later, heading south, going out the way he had just come in. He watched them in the fading light and then

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headed down in the direction the shooting had come from. He found the saloon without difficulty, men were milling around and bodies were being brought out. He saw two men being laid in the street and noticed one wore a Sheriff's badge. "A hard life, that one", thought John, "Not for me, no sir."

He walked past the milling crowd and went to the bar inside. He ordered a drink and it arrived with remarkable efficiency considering what had just gone down and that there was blood all over the place and a dead man laying right there next to the bar. He asked the bar tender what happened and got the usual bar tender type reply, "Don't know, just some shootin'."

He looked around and saw a group of young bucks milling at the other end of the bar, animatedly discussing the events of the night. They would know and no doubt let him in on it all as soon as he parted with a couple of dollars for a drink or two. He got to talking, put some coins on the bar and soon each of them had a fresh drink courtesy of their new best friend. One young man, "Martin" he said his name was and "Martin Shoresby" he shouted for emphasis. He was quite drunk already and certainly intended to get more so. "Bit of shooting went down according to the bar keep," said John.

"Bit of shooting", yelled Martin, best damn shooting I ever see'd. You missed it buddy, you don't know who was here, does ya?"

Quaid agreed he had no idea and asked him who had been here. "Why none other than Kid Ramble his self," yelled Martin at the top of his voice, "Why I was so close when he shot these twelve men I could'a touched him." Now they had John's attention and he ordered two more rounds of drinks for everyone but made sure he got the story in full for his money. He got a story all right,



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much exaggerated and the story of Kid Ramble grew this night to legend status. Now it was twelve men he had killed and he was all on his own. No-one knew anything about McEvoy or the others.

What really happened was still dramatic but Ramble had help and most of what went down was McEvoy's doing. He and Ramble had ridden into town looking for some action. Now that Ramble was famous and his picture was up around the place, they took things a little easier when they were in a bigger town. They took it particularly easy if the town was big enough to have its own law on hand.

They found the biggest saloon and while Ramble tried to blend in outside for a while, McEvoy went in the case the joint. If everything looked okay, he would stay inside and Ramble would join him after a quarter hour or so. The other part of their plan was to look for more men to join them. Two was not a particularly powerful gang.

McEvoy had walked in and ordered a drink. He surveyed the place and decided to join a group that appeared likely candidates. Midwest towns always had plenty of lawless wannabes that would never make a stand on their own but would jump at the chance, any chance, to join someone like Ramble and make a name for themselves. It was a dangerous game though because just as many other fellas would promptly tell the law who you were. Luckily though, no-one seemed to know who McEvoy was, no posters for him and no reward.

He introduced himself and smoothed the conversation with a couple of bottles of whiskey. He placed the bottles on the table in the middle of this group and said, "Help yourself fellas, my treat".

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They didn't hesitate and McEvoy found himself a pretty popular bloke at this table. Four young men sat at the table, all wearing cowboy garb and carrying twin colts, low slung in the style of the lawless that ran in these parts. McEvoy checked them out and could tell they were wannabe's, all the signs were there.

The men had new, clean clothes. The guns they wore were clean and shiny, the leather smooth and consistent of colour. Their hats carried no trail dust and their hands were smooth and without callous. No, these were town boys looking to make themselves seem tougher and wilder than they were.

McEvoy covertly checked out the rest of the bar, a bustling place with some fifty or so men making to enjoy themselves tonight. None of them looked out of place and there was no sign of the law. McEvoy asked his new friends about the law in these parts and was greeted by loud laughter from all four. He was informed that the local law were useless, cowards and drunk most of the time.

As they sat talking, another joined them. Although the group welcomed him it didn't seem like he really belonged, as if he was different in some way to the others. Paddy Jenkins was his name but his manner and speech did not fit with the Irish heritage his name implied. McEvoy slid him a bottle and he rapidly filled his glass, nodding thanks as he did so.

McEvoy got the names of the others during the conversation. Kevin Maley was obviously the leader of this group and they all referred to him as Bat. Joe Little was also a player in this small group and held sway with the others. Marty Reagan and Pat Sheen were just followers and didn't contribute much to

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conversation. Paddy Jenkins had a lot to say but the others simply ignored him and he wasn't really part of the group.

It didn't take long to work out that this group, except for Paddy, were keen on making a name for themselves any way they could. They spoke big but probably did little more than bully the weak and defenceless when they could. He felt they would join him and Ramble in a flash if they got the chance. Maybe he would give them that chance tonight and see if they were up to it.

He had been watching the bat wing doors as he spoke and saw Kid Ramble walk in. He stopped just inside the door, seeking out his friend. McEvoy stood up and stayed up long enough for Ramble to see him. They acknowledged each other and Ramble headed for the bar and ordered a drink. McEvoy sat down and tried to continue the conversation with his new friends, looking to lead the conversation around to enticing them to join him and Ramble.

He didn't need to wait for the opportunity or create it. Bat threw the chance at him headlong, "Who is that bloke that just walked in? he asked. McEvoy shrugged, feigning ignorance of who he meant. "Don't play coy with me" he said, "that fella with the twin guns that you just exchanged nods with."

"That my friend" said McEvoy, pausing now to create a little drama, "is Kid Ramble. We ride together." There was a round of laughter and general agreement that Kid Ramble wouldn't come here, he was a wanted outlaw, not a cowpoke looking for a drink. Then there was a pause and Pat Sheen stood up, moved around the table somewhat to get a better angle and checked out the stranger. Just then Ramble turned and looked around the room, giving Sheen the look we wanted.

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He fair jumped out of his skin and was back in his seat in two seconds flat, shaking Bat's shoulder and talking with a hint of fear coming through, "That's him, that's him. I saw his poster down the road, that is Kid Ramble, in the flesh". Everyone looked over and took a second look and it was then that Joe Little agreed and said it was him, just like the poster. McEvoy confirmed it again, "That is him alright. Like I said, we ride together. Have been for years".

Bat, Joe, Martin and Pat sat staring at Ramble, trying to take it in. They had never seen anyone with a reputation like him. Paddy Jenkins jumped up and headed out the door with a head of steam, a pale expression planted on his face. McEvoy watched him leave and laughed, "Even the name of Ramble is too much for you kid."

The others settled and began to question McEvoy. They wanted to know everything and McEvoy wanted to tell them. They blurted out what they thought they knew about Ramble. "He pulled a big bank robbery not long ago". "He's killed twenty men already". "He's faster on the draw than Pat Garret". There was a pause as everyone thought about a man that every lawman in the Territory hated and feared. Then the topic came back to Ramble and one of the group pointed to him and said, "Even the Marshall's are scared of him, he is good."

McEvoy confirmed everything they said, even if it wasn't true. He added that the men he killed were all law men or soldiers sent to hunt him down, telling them he had never killed a woman, a child, a coward or a man without a gun. That wasn't true of course, he had killed everyone one of them, women, a child and men tied up and helpless. The boys were impressed and lapped it up.

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This went on for several minutes before Reagan made a comment, “I bet that snitch has headed for the Sheriff’s office”. “Just the sort of thing he’d do, that bastard”, added Sheen. McEvoy asked what they meant and had it described to him. The reason the others didn’t like Jenkins was that he would tell tales on you, did at school when they were kids and still did it now. McEvoy quizzed them, checking to be sure they meant they thought Jenkins was on the way to the Sheriff to tell him that Kid Ramble was here. They all agreed that was where he was headed. McEvoy smelled the trouble that was coming and asked how many lawmen this town had. At least five they said, and from time to time, Marshalls and Pinkertons travelling through. Quite a lot of them passed through and you never knew how many was around at any given time.

His pulse raced and a panicked feeling struck hard. He stood to warn Ramble and get him out of here. Before he was fully erect, he knew it was too late as the local Sheriff and his deputy walked through the door. Their stance and attitude said with no mistake, trouble had now arrived.

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### 18 – A Reputation Made

**As McEvoy stood transfixed, the saloon began to quieten.** If you live in a Midwest town, you learn to recognise the signs of trouble about to raise its head and to avoid it whenever you can. Being in a saloon when two lawmen walk through the door, double armed and with the stony faced expressions that tell you trouble has arrived, limits your options when it comes to avoiding the particular kind of trouble that tends to foretell.

As the lawmen entered, the quiet spread quickly and everyone looked their way. People knew that trouble was probably here well before they arrived, the trick now was to identify who that trouble was and get out of the way. Men looked around nervously, trying to identify who that was.

Sheriff Jones and his deputy, Gerald Ramsay, stood side by side. They both had their right hand hovering above the gun on that hip and each surveyed one side of the room looking for Ramble. They knew him only from a drawing on a poster and in this room, fully one quarter of the men fitted the general look of Ramble. They didn't need to wait very long to pick him out, Ramble did that work for them.

He stepped forward and faced the men defiantly. He was confident but knew coming up against two lawmen could be a real problem. Sheriff Jones looked tough and he looked experienced. Deputy Ramsay was young and despite his bravado, had the look of a frightened rabbit. The Sheriff moved with slow and deliberate movements whilst his deputy was shaking, trying to control his fear.

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Ramble sized them up quickly and got it right. He knew instantly that he would not go in with these men, he would rather die and knew he might well do that in a minute or two. His decision was made, he would draw down on the Sheriff and he knew his chances were good that he was faster than him. He knew his chances of out shooting two, even with one being so nervous, were pretty poor. With the Sheriff out of action though, the young one might be hesitant enough to give him a chance. Ramble decided too that he would draw first, at the slightest sign that the Sheriff was not going to back down.

Ramble took another step forward and spoke with confidence, “You looking for me, Sheriff?”

Sheriff Jones took a step forward of his own, “You Kid Ramble?” he asked. The crowd heard the name and knew it. There was no indecision now and men began moving quietly out of the firing line that had suddenly become all too clear.

“That’s me Sheriff, what of it” said Ramble.

“Your coming with us Ramble, your time in this town is up” said the Sheriff.

“You got no chance against the two of us Ramble” said the deputy, “Just give it up before you get lead from two.”

Ramble looked squarely into the eyes of the Sheriff, “He’s probably right, but I intend to shoot you first and you ain’t fast enough to stop me. If he gets me, too bad, I don’t care but you have one decision to make Sheriff.” Ramble paused a moment to create more tension before continuing, “You just have to decide, is this a good day to die? If you are going to live for even one

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more minute, if you want to live a long life, you have to leave this place right now.”

The Sheriff said only one word, “Now”. This was his prearranged signal with the deputy to draw and shoot. His right hand flew down toward his gun and he had it well clear of leather when he heard the first shot from Ramble. Ramble was faster and his reaction was like lightning. Starting behind after the Sheriff began his move, Ramble caught up quickly and had drawn his gun and fired before the Sheriff had finished bringing his gun high enough to aim. The slug struck him in the chest and took out his heart as it passed clear through him and hurled him back through the door. Ramble moved to re-aim at the deputy, fully expecting to be cut down before he had time to do so. The sound of a shot that was not his own was not a surprise but to see the deputy drop his gun, clutch his bloodied right shoulder and then take a second slug right to the center of his chest was a huge surprise.

Ramble didn't see McEvoy or even think about him at this stage or in the melee that followed. He heard the running feet of men getting out of the way and heard the stern command from behind, “Drop it Ramble, we got you covered”. Ramble turned and saw two more deputies at the other end of the bar, both with guns in hand levelled straight at him. He had no hope and paused, ready to give up.

A shot rang out and the deputy next to the bar went down clutching at his stomach as another one of McEvoy's shots hit home with a thud. Ramble drew his gun up and fired, instantly knowing his aim was off and the bullet ran high, slamming into the wall behind the second deputy. A split second later another shot rang out, again from McEvoy and now both deputies lay dying on the floor of that saloon.



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Ramble heard movement above and went to look up. Before he had finished looking up he saw movement to his right and there was a man he did not know standing there with a gun in his hand but it was not pointed at him. The man fired and there was a scream from above as a Marshall that happened to be in town, coming to help out and leaning over a railing from upstairs with a shotgun in his hand and one second away from blowing Ramble away, copped a bullet of his own. He dropped the shot gun and it thudded to the floor. He cursed and clutched his side where he had been hit. Two more shots rang out, both hitting home and taking the spark of life clean out of the man. The impact threw him upright before his body crashed down again, breaking the banister and then flopping to the floor and landing on his back at Ramble's feet.

Ramble turned to look at the man who had just killed the Marshall. He didn't recognise the man but before he could ask him who he was, McEvoy arrived and said, "Come on, we gotta get outa here, now". Ramble started to follow him out the door, not wanting to hang around now there were five dead lawmen here. As the reached the door McEvoy turned and called out to the man who had killed the Marshall from upstairs. "Come on Bat, you're big in trouble now. If you and the boys want to join us, you got one minute to get mounted and head south."

With that Ramble and McEvoy ran for the door and raced across the road to their horses. They mounted smoothly and were thrashing the horse's rumps to get them up to full speed. As they climbed aboard, Maley raced out the door and down a side street to his horse. He was followed one at a time by Little, then Sheen and finally Reagan. One at a time they reached their horses and headed out of town, riding hard to catch up.

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Ramble saw a soldier walking along the board walk towards the hotel. He was probably wanting to buy into the action thought Ramble and for a moment, he thought about putting a bullet in him too, then he thought again and stopped. The last thing he wanted now was to have the Army on his trail again, especially after the disaster back at the cabin with his gang getting wiped out. If he had recognised Sergeant Brad White, he would have shot him, for sure.

If White had recognised Ramble or McEvoy, he would have shot them, for sure.

Quaid had pushed this group of men at the table hard to get the whole story and as soon he got it he was racing out of there in a blur. He knocked into a soldier just outside the saloon and for a moment, Quaid and Sergeant White stared into each other's eyes.

Quaid apologised quickly and raced to his horse, hoping Ramble had not gotten too much of a head start.

Sergeant White pushed past the milling crowd and went to the bar inside the saloon. He ordered drink and it arrived with remarkable efficiency considering what had just gone down and that there was blood all over the place and a dead man still laying right there next to the bar. He asked the bar tender what happened and got an offhanded, "I don't know buddy and I wish everyone would stop askin'. Just some shootin', that's all."

The Sergeant looked around the saloon and saw a group of young bucks milling at the other end of the bar, enjoying their drinks and drunkenly discussing the events of this night. They would know what had happened and he held no doubts they would let him in

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on it all as soon as he parted with a couple of dollars for a drink or two. He got to talking, put some coins on the bar and soon each of them had a fresh drink courtesy of their brand new, best friend. One young man, "Martin" he said his name was and then "Martin Shoresby" he shouted for emphasis. He was very drunk already and plainly intended to get even more so. "Bit of shooting went down by the look of it," said White.

"Bit of shooting", yelled Martin, "best damn shooting I ever see'd. You missed it buddy, you don't know who was here, does ya?"

Sergeant White agreed with him that indeed, he had no idea and asked him who had been here. "Why none other than Kid Ramble his self," yelled Martin at the top of his voice, "Why I was so close when he shot these twenty men I could'a touched him." Now they had White's attention and he ordered two more rounds of drinks for everyone but made sure he got the story in full for his money. He got a story all right, with the exaggeration increasing with every telling and the story of Kid Ramble grew this night and was now at legendary status. Now it was twenty men he had killed and he was all on his own. No-one knew anything about McEvoy or the others.

White thought he was too late to chase them down tonight and then Martin asked if he saw the fella that ran out of the saloon not two minutes ago. White admitted he saw him and told of how he had almost knocked him down. "Well he's one of 'em too" said Martin, "Ran out trying to catch up I reckon."

When White heard this his ears pricked up even more. He pushed the men for the full story and a description of that last man. As soon as he got those details he was out of there in a blur. He raced out the door and bumped into another deputy who was coming in

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to check out what had happened. For a moment, Sergeant White and the deputy looked into each other's eyes. They paused a moment and then White apologised before rushing on.

He ran to the stable where his horse and gear were stored. He saddled up and spurred his horse into action, hoping that last gang member had not gotten too much of a head start on him.

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### 19 – A Death Filled Confrontation

**Under the fading glow of the setting sun, Ramble and McEvoy** raced across the open country and into a canyon not five miles out of town. They paused on a small ridge and looked back the way they had come. McEvoy filled Ramble in on the man that was following him and told him that it was the one that had stepped in and killed the Marshall. They both grinned, killing a Marshall was a hanging offence and that man was on the run now. He would join them for sure and they needed more people to make this gang work.

As they looked back they saw the rider chasing hard and McEvoy said it had to be Bat Maley. He was too far off so be sure so both men rode slowly down the slope and positioned themselves behind a small ridge and waited for the rider to come by. No risks would be taken at all now, for that part of their night was over. From this moment on, they would both be extremely careful.

As Maley raced past, Ramble fired a shot over his head and as he reined up, the gang leader called out, “Hold it right there stranger. Turn around slow now”. Bat did as he was commanded but made sure he was ready to draw fast if he had to. He turned and saw McEvoy and Ramble with their guns aimed at his chest. “It’s me, Bat, Bat Maley, don’t shoot.”

They both kept their guns trained on him as McEvoy slowly rode closer. In the fading light he needed a closer look before confirming that this was the man. The guns were returned to their leather homes and the new man’s face relaxed a little. Just as introductions were about to be started, they heard hoofs pounding toward them. Guns were drawn again but Bat told them it was his

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boys coming in, they all wanted to join the gang and were not far behind.

Soon, six men were gathered together, introducing each other and becoming acquainted. Ramble then led them down the slope toward the creek and soon they were setting up camp for the night. They weren't far out of town but it was fully dark now and they were confident that the law was not chasing them down this night, how could they, they were all dead. The new members confirmed that there were only four regular lawmen in the town and Ramble had killed them all. McEvoy was annoyed that these fellas didn't know what part he had played but he said nothing. If they didn't know, chances were nobody else at the saloon knew either and Ramble's mystique would only grow stronger. Besides, there were still no posters out for McEvoy and if things went wrong for them some time, he would still be able to slip into a crowd and not be recognised. Ramble would never be able to do that again.

Quaid came riding to the ridge where the men had met up, not more than ten minutes after they had ridden out. He had lost ground on them because his horse had spent a long hard day getting to town and was not rested up for a hard run. By the time he arrived, it was too dark to see the sign of the other riders. A rocky outcrop nearby seemed to give a good view of the valley below and he decided to set up camp there. He settled the horse and unpacked his bags.

He scoured the country for wood and soon had a large fire going and cooked himself up a mess of beans and bacon for supper. He had nothing but water to drink but that wasn't a problem. In any event, he did not want to be nursing a hangover in the morning, there might be some shooting to be done and he wanted to be at his best. After supper he found more wood and built the fire up,

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bringing in extra for the night and for the morning meal. He decided a good breakfast was what was needed in these circumstances and made the arrangements before settling down.

An hour or so later, White was riding slowly toward the ridge. Although it was dark, he knew this was the general direction the riders had taken. He took it easy so as not to make too much noise and to give himself plenty of reaction time, should he come upon the group. As he continued he saw the glow of a fire in the distance and was mightily surprised. Surely this would not be Ramble, he would know better than to announce his position like that with a raging fire.

He considered the position for a moment and decided now was not the best time to approach them. If he reckoned right, there were now seven men including Ramble and he didn't want to take on those odds in the dark. If there were seven, there would be guards set. Besides, he could be wrong and there might be more than seven. He scouted around, taking his time and found an outcrop with good wood for shelter and a rocky ledge that would give him a clear view at sun up.

At this moment he truly wished his friend White Bull was there with him. The General had ordered him to stop the pursuit of the gang though and White Bull had also expressed his wish to return to his people. He had probably seen the last of the Indian after he had left to find his tribe and rejoin that life. White would miss him for a long, long time. Now he was on his own, going against the wishes of the Army and with no back up.

The Sergeant was hungry and would have loved a hot meal. As it was, there was no way in hell he was lighting a fire tonight and he had very little food with him anyway. He would just have to suck

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it up and wait for tomorrow. He unrolled his blanket and tied the horse to a tree well out of sight. He set himself up sitting against a rock, facing the direction of where there would have been a fire in other circumstances, imagining the warmth he badly needed. He would not sleep tonight; he was taking no chance of being surprised out here.

Ramble and his new gang arrived at the creek, a prearranged camp site that he and McEvoy had scouted out previously. Although in the bottom of the valley, they had a good view of anyone approaching that position from any direction and there was good timber and a deep farrowed creek to give cover if it came to shooting. There was food here and whiskey. They would eat cold tonight but the whiskey would keep them warm.

He handed a half bottle to Sheen and Little. He ordered them to take first watch tonight and told them if they went to sleep, he would shoot them himself. They believed him and headed up a slight slope to a spot that would give the best view of the way they had come in. McEvoy rounded up the grub and passed it around. Ramble pulled out more whiskey and shared it about. The four remaining men sat around half the night, talking and telling greatly exaggerated stories of their deeds. The new men wanted to hear all about Ramble's great doings and he was more than happy to tell everything, and a bit more for good measure.

McEvoy was the only one not drinking. He saw the others getting very drunk and knew that he would be the only one on watch tonight. Sheen and Little were terrified of Ramble but the drink and their weariness would soon be stronger than that fear. Being so close to town, even without lawmen, there was every chance a descent size posse would be coming after them tomorrow or



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maybe even tonight. He didn't fancy meeting his end out here, he would stay awake.

More than anything he wanted to make sure Ramble was safe. What ever it took, he would do it even if he had to be awake alone all night.

As the sun began to rise slowly, McEvoy was awake and staring up the valley to the ridge where they had met up the night before. In the half light of the morning it was hard to be sure but he thought he was seeing a wisp of smoke from a camp fire up there. As he watched, Ramble joined him and looked up the slope. He had no doubts at all, there was a small fire up there and that meant a camp. It was right near where they had been the night before and there was nobody up there then. This could only be a posse.

McEvoy disagreed, surely no posse would have a camp fire going while chasing outlaws; surely they simply couldn't be that stupid. What ever the case, they needed to either get out of here or go up and take that posse on. Sitting here waiting for them to make a move was not an option. Ramble went around and kicked the others awake, kneeling down each time to ensure there was no loud noise. He pulled the team together and explained the situation. After a chat, they decided as one that the way to go was straight up there and take the posse by surprise. The posse must know they are close by and be getting ready for them now.

With a surprise attack, if the posse was small, they could take them all out. If it was larger, they might take out two or three of the men and then make a run for it. In the following mess it might put the rest of them off the chase or at least, it would slow them down and give the gang a better chance to get clear. They talked

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about quietly slipping away but this just didn't appeal, especially on the back of the bravado left over from last night.

Ramble gave out orders and everyone got ready. Sheen and Little were to wait a few minutes whilst the others got into position. Their job was to then ride straight up the slope heading for the ridge. They were to stay in sight but use any cover to protect themselves and be ready to take heavy cover with rifle ready.

Ramble and Maley would go wide left. McEvoy and Reagan would go wide right. They would move as quickly as they could to flank the posse whilst staying out of sight and take up a spot with line of sight to the posse. When Sheen and Little were half way up the slope or when the posse saw them and started shooting, what ever happened first, the others would open fire from cover both sides and cut down as many men as possible. They would all then meet up back down in the valley and keep heading south. Ramble asked if they all knew what to do and they all nodded agreement. Before leaving, he reminded Sheen and Little one more time, "Don't rush. Wait for at least a half hour and then ride slow. You have good cover for the first half, not much chance that you could get hit but I want them to see you."

They all moved out and cautiously moved to their positions. When Ramble reached his position, he was confused. There was smoke and a camp fire but only one horse there. He could not see a rider any where, not even one man. Around the other side, mid way between White and Quiad, McEvoy was in place and puzzling over the same situation. Surely this couldn't be a lone rider who had just happened along late last night. If it was, bad luck for him. He would soon have six men intent on gunning him down and they didn't care who he was.

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As they slowly rose up the slope, Sheen was nervously hugging close to any tree or rock he could find. He was terrified the posse would see him and cut him down. He suggested to Little that maybe they should turn round and get the hell out of here. “Are you crazy?” asked Sheen, “Would you rather take on a posse with help or go up against Ramble all by ourselves?” No answer was required and they pressed on. Sheen remained nervous though and this was his undoing.

He pushed his horse just a little too close to a rocky edge and the horse slipped. It slid back against a boulder and nickered loudly in fear. It regained its footing quickly enough but the noise finally woke the sleeping Quaid.

Quaid may have been naïve about many things and he was certainly just plain stupid for leaving his fire burning through til morning. It was downright insanity to let himself sleep past sunrise when he knew there were outlaws around that had tried to kill him once already. As soon as he was awake though, he sprung into effective action. He grabbed his rifle and peered over the edge of the rocky outcrop he had been sleeping on.

Quaid had not stood up, laying low and keeping himself out of sight. If he had stood up, four rifles would have torn him apart in moments.

At this distance he could not recognise the men, they were too far away. He did however, recognise Sheen’s horse. Even in last night’s half darkness as he raced through the town, the distinctive white with black patch markings of the horse were unmistakable. The manner of their riding, rifle out, watching carefully, staying behind cover, all meant they were coming for him. If they were coming up that way, Ramble and the others would be close by.

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Quaid made a decision that was out of character for him but showed that at least he had learned something in the last few months. He placed his rifle in a natural groove in the rock and took a bead on Sheen. He waited patiently for him to move so as he had a clear shot whilst listening carefully for riders or men on foot who were already up and out of the valley.

Sheen rounded a corner and came into clear view. He spurred his horse forward quickly, looking to take advantage of the next piece of cover available. Quaid lined him up and fired. He missed and both Sheen and Little jumped out of their saddles and returned fire. Quaid recoiled for a moment and then fired again. This time his shot hit home and Sheen lay dead on the trail. Little saw his dead friend and made the decision right then to make a run for it. He sprinted for his horse and although Quaid fired several more shots, he was quickly out of sight and safe.

Quaid stood up then to take a look around his spot. As he did, four shots rang out from four separate rifles. No-one knew who fired the telling shot but Quaid was hit in the shoulder and was spun round in a full circle before he hit the dirt. The pain was excruciating but he forced himself to reach for his weapon. He could hear hooves racing toward him now and knew he was only moments away from mortal danger.

Ramble reached Quaid first, pulled his pistol and fired. Quaid was hit in the leg and the rifle he had reached clattered to the ground again. He had come up on both knees and had the weapon aimed in McEvoy's direction but had, in his pain and confusion, chosen the wrong way to face. McEvoy and Maley got there next. They sat their horses looking down at the man. The other man arrived soon after.

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They all circled Quaid and discussed what they would do. McEvoy rode to the edge of the outcrop and looked down the slope. He saw Sheen and reported back to Ramble that both Sheen and Little were dead.

The gang leader jumped down and kicked Quaid in the head. Thinking that both Sheen and Little were now dead because they had not made an appearance, he snarled at Quaid, "I don't know who the hell you are fella but you just killed two of my men. You are going to pay for that my friend, and pay big time."

McEvoy rode over and looked down at him. Then he whispered to Ramble, "That's the bloody farmer from the place the other week, I swear it is. You know, the one with the kid you shot and the woman that got crippled."

Ramble stared but didn't recognise him, no matter how long he looked. He trusted McEvoy though, kicked Quaid again and said, "Hey farmer, I killed your kid, did you know that? I gotta admire you for coming after me, too bad you got it wrong. I'm gunna shoot you up now and just leave you here to die slow, no horse, no water, just death." Quaid tried to reach for his rifle but couldn't and he knew he was done for.

Sergeant White was watching this scene play out with interest. Nobody had seen him sitting up against his tree and he hadn't even bothered to move. If one of them had looked his way, he could hardly be missed. The trouble for the gang was, not one of them looked.

As he watched the scene play out, McEvoy and Reagan had come within twenty yards of him but their attention was entirely taken

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up in staying out of site of their 'posse'. McEvoy had found a spot to stay mounted and rest his rifle resting on a branch to steady it. Reagan had dismounted and lay prone on the ground using a small rock to rest his rifle barrel on. He didn't know it, but it was his shot that hit home when the action started.

A hundred or more yards the other side of Quaid, he saw two riders, well hidden but still visible as they moved into position. They had obviously found a good spot because they had completely disappeared from site now. This was four of the gang, by his figuring there were three more and he wasn't planning to move until he knew where they were.

That plan changed mighty quickly when the shooting started. White already had his rifle across his lap and he quickly scurried to a spot he had chosen last night that gave him good cover and a good view of the camp area. In the dark he could only see basic outlines and could not have known just how good his position really was. When he realised it, he grinned with delight.

His hidden place was elevated several yards above the surrounding ground, there was light scrub bushes all around that hid him from sight, there was a small cave not 20 yards away where his horse was tied and heavy rock behind him so he remained hidden to anyone approaching from behind. This spot might even give him a chance against seven if it came to that.

He could not see what was happening when the first few shots began but he surmised there was action going on over the edge of the ridge. He could see the nervousness and fidgeting of the two closest to him when the shots rang out but they didn't move. Then he saw Quaid stand up but had no clue who this was.

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The four in his sight opened up with their rifles and he saw Quaid go down, assuming he was dead. He saw all four riders racing in and he saw Ramble pull up first and fire another shot. He couldn't tell for sure but thought this must be his quarry. Something about his bearing and the unhesitating way he opened up when he got there, said it was him. That meant this was his gang for sure.

As the two riders near him pulled up he decided he would take them on and take his chances. He didn't know who it was but he lined up Reagan with his big carbine. He would have liked to take out the man on foot first but his line of sight made that difficult. A mounted man was easier and in any event, if they tried to rush him the man on foot would be slower to get moving and would need to get back up on his horse first. That would slow him down and spread them out.

Just as Ramble pulled his gun to put another bullet into Quaid, White's first shot rang out. Two things happened, Ramble pulled back and his shot went high, missing Quaid completely. At the same time Reagan slumped forward in the saddle, clutched at his chest and sat with a blank look on his face. He was in pain but could not comprehend why. His chest was on fire but there was no sign of injury.

No sign of injury at the front that is. What he could not see was the gaping hole in his back where the bullet entered. It had travelled most of the way through but had not passed out his chest. Inside, the slug had ripped the side of his heart apart and this was bleeding strongly. Death was only moments away and as the pain spread, he slipped forward in the saddle, stopped for a moment and then fell right on top of Quaid and lay there, body thrashing wildly in his death throes. Quaid didn't move, not knowing what

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was happening but certainly hoping that he had been given another chance here.

McEvoy wheeled sharply and spurred his horse quickly in the direction of the shots, zigzagging as he went to lessen the chance of being hit. Maley turned to follow and Ramble leaped for his horse. As they moved, more shots rang out.

Ramble gained his saddle, fired a single shot with his pistol and spurred his horse to follow. Another shot rang out and Ramble screamed in agony and went flying to the ground. McEvoy heard his call and turned to see him laying on the ground only a few feet from Quaid.

As the shots continued to ring out, he wheeled again, left the saddle while the horse was still running and jumped down beside Ramble. Ramble looked up in agony but they were both relieved to see the wound was actually not all that bad. His shoulder looked broken but that would heal. McEvoy helped him into the saddle and together they made the ridge before either of them got hit.

Maley had seen the rifle flash and emptied both his Colts in that direction. One bullet struck White in the hip but luckily, passed through the flesh without hitting anything too important and came out cleanly on the other side. Maley turned and saw McEvoy and Ramble hitting the ridge and raced off toward the edge himself, not wishing to continue the assault alone.

White recovered his composure and fired at Maley with a bullet stinging the man hard as it creased his shoulder. It spun Maley out of the saddle to hit the ground hard and roll part way down the



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slope he had just reached. He regained his saddle quickly and raced off.

The three of them hurtled through the wood, crossed the creek where they had camped and continued across the valley and up the other side.

They rode like this for several minutes, following a well worn animal track. As they entered a small clearing, they saw a ground reign horse they knew was Little's. He was sat hiding behind a log, swigging whiskey and relieved when he realised who the riders were. He stood up, put his gun down and said, "Its me, I'm here Bat."

They all stopped and Ramble said, "You coward. You are going down." He drew down on Little with his left hand. His predominant gun hand was out of action and the pain had slowed him down a lot. Little saw what was happening and responded more quickly than Ramble. He would have won this one if it was just against Ramble. It wasn't. McEvoy had seen what was happening and responded faster than Little, drew his gun and took the top off Little's head long before he brought his gun up far enough to fire.

Maley called out in horror. Ramble turned on him and aimed the gun square at his chest, "You got a problem with that boy?"

"No way" said Maley, shivering with fear, "He deserved it, coward. You just took me by surprise, that's all. I'm with you, all the way."

"You better be" scowled ramble, "You head up that slope and stay in front. If you don't, you're next."

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They all rode hard for the next hour before easing up and finding a spot to patch up Ramble's wound. McEvoy wasn't a doctor but he knew a little bush craft for a wounded man. It would do until they found a real doctor.

## 20 – A Pact Renewed

**Quaid laid under the dead man for over an hour. It was** causing him pain and made it difficult to breath but he figured that he had a chance of living through this day if he stayed still long enough. With this body on top of him, he hoped the others would have assumed he was dead, other wise he would have moved the man before now.

The pain was immense but he believed this was his only chance. He didn't realise that through sheer coincidence, the weight of the body and the angle it was laying, was actually helping him. The man's leg was pushing down against his hips and putting pressure on his own wound. Quaid had not even realised that his bleeding from that wound had almost stopped. He didn't realise either, that if it had kept bleeding the way it was when he was first shot, he would have been dead by now. He went to push the man away but failed.

Although the man's weight had saved his life, it was now threatening it. The bleeding had stopped but there was a lot of blood loss before that happened. Quaid did not now have enough blood left to do much more than sustain him. His strength was gone and he could barely move his arms, moving the bulk of a dead man was an absolute impossibility. He laid there trying to think of a way out of this but could not. He realised he was in trouble, big trouble. The heat, the wounds, the weight; they were all conspiring to end his days right here, right now.

Sergeant White had waited for several minutes before he moved. When he did, he carefully relocated himself to a patch of heavier wood that not only provided cover in all directions, it provided shade and contained his water canteen. He drank greedily and

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steadied his nerves. He was a brave man, tough, heroic. That did not mean he did not get scared or that he was stupid. When McEvoy turned and fired toward him, shots came uncomfortably close and he pictured the three men he could see being joined by the rest from below the ridge and a hail of bullets seeking him out. In such a situation, he would go down, sooner or later. As it stood, he had been extremely lucky. The bullet that struck his hip had been at just the right angle to pass through the fleshy part of his buttock, having travelled only four or five inches and passing out cleanly before starting to spin and causing more serious trouble.

He had fired wildly and was surprised to see Ramble go down. He thought it was Ramble, but was not entirely sure. He was surprised when the front rider wheeled to pick up the wounded man, this was not the act he expected from an outlaw. He was surprised that no more men came up over that ridge or in from behind him, still convinced that there were at least seven of them.

After the shooting, he sat patiently in his sheltered spot for over an hour. Then he decided it seemed unlikely they were coming back but he would take no chances. He had been taken for a fool before by these men, he would never let that happen again. He went to his horse, reloaded his carbine and checked his other weapons. Then he cautiously rode in a wide arc that enabled him to approach the battle scene straight on so he did not travel close to the edge of the ridge for too long. Riding this way gave a good view in both directions and at least some sort of a chance if men came up over that ridge unexpectedly.

He saw the two men and rode over. He prodded the dead men with his rifle and determined to leave. As he wheeled the horse he heard a voice and looked down. The man underneath was

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waiving his arm and making a sound. Quiad was trying to call out for help but had nothing more than a groan come out. It was enough, White turned back and dismounted. He poked Quiad gently with his rifle but evoked no further response. He jabbed it hard into his ribs and the man moaned loudly and flailed his arm around for a few moments.

White knelt down and checked that he was not armed. Quaid's rifle was several feet away but White picked it up anyway and put in his own scabbard to make sure there was no chance this man could reach it. He kicked the corpse aside and stared down into the barely alive eyes. John summoned his last ounce of strength, "They shot me. You gotta help," He wanted to say more but could not.

White went to the horse standing nearby his own and collected the water canteen from its side. He poured some on Quaid's face and some in his mouth. He gulped greedily and begged for more. He seemed to regain a little strength and White dragged him to a shaded area to sit awhile. He saw the man had lost a lot of blood and was still bleeding at the shoulder. He pulled the jacket off the dead man, cut it up and used the material to patch the wound. He was no medic and a quick bandage and water was all he knew to do.

Quiad drank some more water and found enough strength to tell his story. He told how his daughter had been killed and his wife left crippled by Ramble and his men. He told how he set about hunting him down but it had come to this. White felt an understanding of this man for he too hated Ramble to the point that was out risking his own life in the attempt to take him down. He could see from his condition that Quaid would not live if he

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was left here. He hoisted the man up onto the back of his horse and tied him on.

He had no idea if the man would live but he needed to go back into town before continuing the chase so why not take him and give him a chance. They were only a few miles from town and by lunch time Quaid was in the care of a proper doctor and he would soon have the bullets out. He had lived long enough to get there but the question still remained, would he make it through the night?

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Quaid did make it and when the sun rose, someone fed him and he felt some strength returning. He was still in a lot of pain that day but knew he would make it. "This is it then", he said to himself. He knew this was the end of his chase. It would take quite a while to get well and by the time he did, the gang would be long gone. Anyway, he was not up for going through this again. He had been shot twice by Ramble and lived, the chances of that happening again were slim. Besides, Molly needed him now.

He would recover, return home and look after her. Not on the farm, no way. He would find somewhere quiet and safe for her and look after her for the rest of her life. He had to do that, it was his fault she got hurt.

While he was thinking this through, Sergeant White paid him a visit. White didn't care much about other people, unless they were soldiers, but he was curious to learn more about what happened to this man and his family. He hadn't heard this story about Ramble but didn't doubt it one bit. Ramble had been reported to have done several similar things during his time on the

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run and after what happened in the saloon here, he had no doubt now that Ramble was simply insane and had no care for anything or anyone.

He spoke at length with Quaid and got the full story. Quaid also heard about the bank robbery and other things Ramble had done. As he lay there he thought it through, deciding he must be the one that was insane, thinking he could go up against such a man and have any chance of winning. It helped him make his decision firm and he told the Sergeant he was quitting now and heading home as soon as he was up.

White told him it was the best thing to do. He told him to leave the chase to him and that he wouldn't give up until the job was done. Then he asked White if his horse had been brought back to town. He was told it was and that it was at the stable. He asked White a favour and the soldier said he would do it. He had told White that there was money in the saddle bag, quite a bit. Take what was needed and pay for the stable and pay the doctor. The rest was his, as a thank you for saving his life and keeping up his hunt for Ramble.

White went down and found the man was right, it was a lot of money. A lot of money for a farmer that is, or indeed a soldier, but the \$327 in the bag certainly did not compare to the money taken by Ramble and his men during the robbery. He did as he was asked and paid the bills. He took \$50 and left the rest in the saddle bag. He made a silent, solemn vow to Quaid to get Ramble, no matter how long it took. He wasn't a church going man but in the moment as he started out on his mission, he sent a prayer heaven ward that Quaid would have enough sense to do what he said he would do and go home. If he chased Ramble again, he would die for sure.

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White rode out of town and back to the ridge where the shooting had taken place. The dead man Reagan, had already been ravaged by wildlife and his remains scattered. The smell was revolting. He continued down the valley and found Pat Sheen in the same condition.

He continued on the trail until he found Joe Little, who had somehow escaped the ravages of nature and except for his wound, looked like a man asleep.

He followed the trail for an hour or so more and came across a creek crossing. The signs were clear here that three men had stopped and camped the night. There were food scraps, a whiskey bottle and human waste nearby. Everything was there for a normal camp except there was no fire. This confirmed it was his quarry, they would not have had a fire going while concerned there may be a posse coming after them.

They needn't have worried about that. Since the incident in the saloon, Ramble's reputation had grown and no-one was interested in coming after him. No-one that is, except White. He decided this was a good spot for him too and set up camp. He did have a fire because he was alone, cold and nobody was hunting him. In this wilderness however, something else might and the fire made it safer. After a cold meal because he was too tired to cook and a personal clean up at the creek, he settled in for the night and refocused his pledge from so many months ago. "I'm coming for you, Kid Ramble."

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Nairn and Somerton had gotten away clean after the jail break. They had learned from their experience and had recovered their health in the following weeks. The local law had not been interested in going after them and White only had thoughts for catching Ramble. They had changed their appearance with Nairn growing a full beard and Somerton taking on a moustache with long, pointed ends. They had also changed their clothes to take on the look of a city type and changed their names.

During their travels they came across a wanted poster for Ramble with what they thought was a reasonable likeness. It offered a \$1,000 reward; that was certainly more than they had gotten out of him after the robbery. Newspapers carried stories about him and it seemed likely that reward was going to grow. They were both full of hatred after they had been left to die by Ramble and the others.

They kept looking for anything about themselves but it seemed neither the law, the Army or the tabloids had taken any interest in them. This was good and would give them the chance to simply disappear. Ramble must think they were dead or in custody. He would never think they would be coming after him and they talked about the priceless look on his face in that moment before death when he realised it was them.

They renewed their pact to go after him and not stop until he was dead. This time, a new part crept into that agreement, a silent and unspoken part. They had come to like and respect each other. They each knew they owed their life to the other and now they had become a real team. Together, they would track down the man that had left them for dead and collect that reward. So they began the process of following up reports and travelling

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inexorably toward a show down with Ramble and whoever was hanging onto his coat tails.

They even said the words together, “We’re coming for you, Kid Ramble”.

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White Bull had returned to his own people but had not been accepted. His actions with the Army, working against the various Indian nations had labelled him as a traitor to his own. He was lucky to get away from his own village alive.

Now he was a solitary man who belonged nowhere. He could no longer live with his own people and he didn’t fit in very well with European society spreading across the land. He really only had one place he could go now where he would be accepted and also be relatively safe. That was in the Army and serving with Sergeant White.

As he spent another lonely evening on the banks of the banks of Horse Creek, he made the decision. He would return to the Army and help Sergeant White with his hunt for Kid Ramble. This was where he belonged now, for the rest of his life.

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It took three full weeks before Quaid was up to travelling. He collected his gear together and went to get his horse. He regretted now that he had given the soldier all of his money. He didn’t need much but right now could do with a good solid meal and new clothes for quitting town.

## The Hunt for Kid Ramble

He collected his horse and grabbed his saddle and threw it on. He was flabbergasted when he checked the saddle bags to find his money still there. He knew how much there was before and when he checked he knew the soldier had taken some but not much. He didn't know exactly but probably \$50 or \$100. Considering there was over \$200 left, that was amazing and he was grateful.

After he had bought that meal he wanted, he grabbed a new pair of jeans and left town. It took nearly three weeks to get home. It would not normally have taken so long but he was still weak and long days in the saddle wore him down. Riding every second day was all he could manage for a fortnight but as he approached Crook, he was much stronger and looking forward to seeing his wife.

As he rode toward the ranch house where his wife was being looked after, children saw him and ran along side. The midwife met him at the front porch of her home. The look on her face told him straight away that something was wrong. He dismounted and raced inside but Molly was not there. He grabbed Kim by the shoulders and shook her, imploring her to take him to his wife. "She's gone John" she said quietly, "She recovered well for a while but then she got ill and wasn't strong enough to fight it."

"When?" he screamed.

"We buried her only three days ago" said Kim, "down at your place with your daughter."

Quaid rode to his farm and saw the crosses together. He sat between them and wailed like a baby.

## The Hunt for Kid Ramble

After a while, John stood up and went to the house. He grabbed a couple of things and packed a sack that he placed on his horse. Then he went to the barn, was there a couple of minutes and walked out with a hay bale on his back. As he walked back to the house, flames began to flicker through the open door of the barn.

John entered the house for the last time. He placed the hay on the ground and cut the strings, then spread the hay in a pile under his marital bed. He lit the hay and then walked out. He never looked back but could hear the sparks as the fire took hold.

At the top of the hill he finally turned and saw the buildings both burning fiercely. He paused for a few moments and watched, remembering the moments of joy he had spent with Molly and Kathleen. As he watched the burning he renewed an old pledge and yelled to the heavens,

**“I’m coming for you, Ramble.”**

## The Hunt for Kid Ramble

### **The Hunt for Kid Ramble – Past Hero**

John Quaid is a determined man, determined to exact the most serious retribution possible from the man who killed his wife and daughter.

Kid Ramble has no compassion for his fellow man, no regret for the suffering he causes and no caring for anyone but himself. On two occasions now, he has attempted to kill John Quaid and caused him serious harm in doing so. He has shown himself to be extremely accomplished at one thing, killing. John knows he does not have what it takes to take on a man such as this but is willing to try again regardless of the price he may pay.

If he can't kill Kid Ramble, he is ready to die in the attempt.

When he meets Sean McLaughlin, a crippled bar tender who was once a feared and respected Sheriff, will the tide turn for John Quaid. McLaughlin was once feared by outlaws across three states but after taking a bullet in the back from a cowardly assassin hiding in the dark, he is no longer able to fulfil the requirements of his noble profession as Sheriff.

Can he give Quaid the knowledge and skills he needs to take on a shameless killer? Can Quaid give him back, the dignity this past hero deserves?

As this pair team up to bring down Kid Ramble, it leads inexorably to a bloody showdown. As the law also closes in on Ramble for murder the Army tracks him for their money and two of his old partners are also on his trail seeking vengeance.

Check on line at  
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for the release of the new book  
**“The Hunt for Kid Ramble – Past Hero”.**

Release Scheduled for Christmas 2011