

Redemption is only a sacrifice away

The Dutch Dog



Written by Lee Cooper

The Dutch Dog

Europa:

My memories from that distant time are blessedly vague, a time when humanity was unethical, cruel and savage. The old world and its ways had long been forgotten and replaced by a new cold-blooded culture. Our history was lost while democracy became an extinct ideology. No one knew what the year was but some estimated we were in the third millennium. What happened in the extinction of the old world is mostly unknown but legend says a one hundred year storm ravaged and destroyed an already crippling planet, leaving around two hundred thousand survivors across Europa. It was the planet's sixth mass extinction and somehow, we managed to survive it. It destroyed cities, buried the lands and decimated the population. It sent our kind back to the dark ages, and the pockets of people that remained, left a bloodline of authority. We became nomads again, traveling and hunting from one place to another for survival.

Communication across the oceans did not exist. No one knew if there were other survivors past the lands of Europa and sailing a boat across the harsh seas would be suicide. Storms continued to plague the planet and raged with fury. Sometimes it rained for weeks while the winds blew like hurricanes and tore through the land. The summers burned our skins and scorched the ground. The winters were the worst of all and caused more deaths than anything else.

In the aftermath of the storm, a new order emerged from the chaos, far harsher than anything read in the history texts that were found.

For the generations before me, a hopeless war, between the rich and the poor, scattered across what was left of the habitable lands of mainland Europa and created a divide. The poor were beaten and brought to their knees, living on with bitterness and desperation, sacrificing their souls to the bellies of the favoured. The rich flourished with derision for the poor living underneath them, scrounging for the scraps off The Federation's table.

Different Federations grew to govern the six liveable regions of mainland Europa. Ours, so long ago, was known as France, but in the time that passed it became a celebrated battlefield.

Technologies that we acquired were stolen from the recovered files of the late 2800's, the last recorded days of the old world that we knew of. The

way of life we adopted came from fear of the next mass extinction being around the corner. Those, whose blood lines dated back to the old rulers, became governors of their Communist Federations, ruling with strict laws and zero tolerance for crime, making lacerating efforts to control their populations.

My Federation were called The Belanger Federation and we separated into two classes: the Angers and the Bruns. The Angers were the lucky ones, named after the bloodline of The Belangers who were protected from the adverse weather and most of the hardships that the time brought. We wished for nothing in life, having medicine, food supplies and armed defences to protect us but we had to abide by the strictest rules.

Practicing of old religious beliefs became a crime because they did not want desperate minds filled with unworthy passion. Daily lives were timetabled, work was an order, not a choice, having sex had to be approved by the appropriate authorities and partnerships for having babies had to be conducted through an application process. Dedicated slots were issued for recreation and fun. Sports did not exist and if you broke any rules, you were sent to The Pend, our times version of jail.

The Bruns were named after the leader of the resistance, who was burned at the stake after his army of the poor surrendered.

The Angers and The Bruns were separated by a goliath fortified wall that was referred to as the Buffer. A structure that was so overwhelming in size, it was impenetrable. It was built around the tip of the old tower that lay in the city they used to call Paris. It began structure during the war and it was used as a base to protect the rich. But it continued to grow after the poor had been slaughtered and eventually became its own fortified city. The Angers looked down upon the Bruns, a society that was contained in their own filth and disease. Unsanitary soiled barbaric animals that festered in their own faeces, surviving in barely liveable shacks, under feeble protection from the storms. Those who chose to stay close to the Buffer were fed leftover scraps from the daily disposal. Some adapted to living underground but many chose not to because of the risk of collapse due to unpredictable tremors. Collections of people who wanted to distance themselves from our society, started tribes and lived in caves, worshipping Gods of the olden times. Cannibalism rituals became a way of life for them due to lack of nutrition and food in the wilderness.

The Bruns begged for food, water and medicine, and the chance of a better life inside The Buffer. The fortuitous that lived inside the Buffer, were bound to its border, everyone who lived outside the Buffer were forbidden to enter. There was no crossing between the classes, it was strictly taboo, unless you were a member of The Ultras, then it was your obligation to patrol the Bruns.

The Ultras were separated onto two divisions. The Federation's martial law enforcement, who kept the order within and outside the Buffer. Sentencing for those found breaking laws was, instant, ruthless and without trial. The Ultras had no hesitation in sending members of the Bruns to The Pend and anyone who stepped foot in there, knew they would not get out alive.

The other division of The Ultras were the scavengers who searched the wilderness for recyclable materials. These divisions were versatility filled with a variety of roles, from caterers to bomb explosive experts and they were backed up by a heavily armed patrol who set up a fortress of wide perimeters to halt thieves and intruders. There was no tolerance for interference and they killed first and asked questions later. Explorations took place that had the scavengers mine hundreds of feet underground, constructing tunnels into old populated areas, desperate to source the valuable materials that we could not make any more and gain more knowledge of the death of the old world. Their job was the most dangerous that we knew of, killing forty percent of the workforce each year.

There was one main reason why the Angers put up with the Bruns, the need for their children. The population that lived within the Buffer Zone was not vast and it depleted each year due to the mining deaths. So, they stole babies from the outside and ushered them into their system where they would be strictly raised in the adoption program. Their goal would be to brainwash and educate them into positions that needed filled. It was a constructed way to create slaves for The Federation and many would end up working in the mines. The Bruns were not bound by the Angers strict breeding regulations and bred rapidly because they were not supplied with contraception. Surviving as a new-born baby was a tough task in unpredictable weathers and with so much disease, many died young.

The Ultras were hated and often came under attack from gangs of rebels. The Federation controlled the Bruns like obedient dogs and most of the Bruns obeyed so they would be fed.

Those who committed crimes received a non-negotiable death sentence. For some it would take weeks or months but for others it would take years or decades. There was the same amount of crime inside the Federation as there was outside of it. It wasn't natural for humans to follow such rigid rules all the time and working for The Belanger Federation meant you had to. The Federation did offer a solution to halt the stream of crime and created something called The Park which was a hunting ground where criminals hunted and killed other criminals.

Because of the sparse population and the huge amount of free land, The Park was sizable at its widest point of one hundred and eleven kilometres and lengthiest at one hundred and fifty. Locked around the coastal tip of Northern Europa it was surrounded by a run of motion detectors that set off a cruel device, which is implanted inside all victims, to stop anyone escaping. It was a vindictive game, played to provide entertainment for the world that remained. Crime became formulated into sections and condemned criminals that had committed felonies, from thieves to arsonists to one time murderers, deemed not as severe as others, became bounty hunters. Murderers were categorised as bounty hunters because the crime fitted the job. When you were sentenced there were two outcomes, the first was being sentenced to The Pend where you had a chance of being inducted into The Park, the second being, you would die a slow and lonely death in The Hole. The criminals that were never given a chance inside The Park were classed as boring, or not ruthless enough for the unyielding way of life The Park demanded. If you were sentenced to death row your entry into The Park was guaranteed. Being on death row was a laboured waiting game. You joined a list of the inhumane and you were imprisoned in solitude until it was your time to enter.

Any auxiliary Federations that wished to discard their unwanted convicts were welcome to commit their criminals to the application process.

Once you were inside The Park, there was only one way the hunted could stay alive and that was to hide. Those who did so, were called...Prey. He or she would be a vile criminal, hated by both societies, and only a heartlessly grim death would be sufficient. They would be degraded serial killers, rapists, pedophiles or sex offenders. The kind of people who did unspeakable and awful things.

The game was callous and entertaining. The public longed to see guts and gore created by fierce or sophisticated kills. The gorier the kill meant the

more the bounty hunters popularity would rise with the public.

Inside The Park was an apocalyptic land untouched by The Belanger Federation except for the installation of cameras and motion detectors. It was survival of the fittest, and only possible to stay hydrated, fed, and warm if you were able to adapt to the environment. Old buildings, towns and cities were dilapidated but still stood. They provided shelter and were used by bounty hunters and Prey. Old transportable vehicles existed but working ones were hard to find and even harder to keep moving. Ancient fossil fuels only existed in The Park, as outside everything ran on renewable energy.

When the game began the Prey were sent into The Park through constructed underground tunnels, taking them to a number of outposts scattered across The Park. Once the Prey entered, he or she began a countdown to their annihilation. Once the Prey reached their fated death, another was sent in within a day. The conveyor belt of contestants never slowed. The game became a fictional fantasy for the deluded and there was no lack of demand. There were fanatics who desired to be in the game so badly they would commit crimes horrid enough to be inducted into death row. Like the famous, well-educated and cunning mass murderer called The Boomerang. A legendary figure who created The Park and then decided he wanted to be in it! He held the record for the longest a Prey stayed alive at one hundred and five days.

The Bounty Hunters would carry on from one kill to another, tallying up their digits. It wasn't unheard of for the Prey to terminate a Bounty Hunter. That was a coveted paradigm that everyone loved to see. The underdog that prevailed against the odds. A Bounty Hunter's death only meant he'd be replaced by another. Many times, Prey would take their own life through cowardice, saving themselves from the impending hunt. That was a major disappointment for everyone involved because it did not benefit anyone except from the Prey. It was a ruthless existence where hiding in fear was not an option. The lack of compassion The Federation showed to the Bruns was equal to the savagery of the game but it was entertainment for the rich. They watched on security cameras, surveyed The Park with drones, followed positions with trackers and controlled them with rules. The Federation's shared video feeds with other Federations they were in contact with and it became a betting ring.

The Belanger Federation was governed by a lady named The Angel of Death. Attractive, ruthless and seductively charming. She was a shining

leader to her people who had been the head of The Federation for two years after taking over from her deceased father. She had the same leadership qualities as he did, strict, reserved and hard faced. She earned her name because of her insistence that she would be the last person each convict would see before their induction into The Park. Twenty-seven when she took over and noticeably lacked the ability to hide her emotions.

The Park had rules. Rules that had to be followed, if they weren't then some serious repercussions were in play. A panel of judges headed by Angel of Death were to vote on the severity of each punishment.

Inside The Park, there were always three bounty hunters present, and before the induction of the next prey, these three were inside.

The first one was Chisel, who had been inside The Park for thirty-two days and reached two kills. A murderer and a professional thief, who had dug an eight-mile tunnel into the confines of The Hans Federation on the coast of the Adriatic sea. It had taken her more than a year and she dug straight into the heart of the food stores where she coyly started offloading supplies to her people. She did it unaccompanied to protect anyone else from danger. For four months she ran a supply line to her people. When she was caught, she killed two Federation guards by piercing a chisel into their brains. She was hostile and quick tempered, popular with the Bruns because of her story and her popularity continued to rise with her first two kills.

The second was a man who earned the name of The Viking because of his thick rugged hair, sour appearance, sluggish attitude and long beard. His face was covered in tribal tattoos of ancient times, something that was forbidden on the outside. He had been inside for one hundred and twenty days, with twenty-two kills. A formidable and competitive participant in the game. A bandit who grew up in the lawless eastern area of Brandenburg and had a hatred for his peers. He was a nomad who moved across Europa seeking food and shelter. An outsider that couldn't be controlled who paralysed a member of the Ultra division in the Jules Federation of South Europa. All the Ultra did was attempt to steal a slice of his dinner that he had caught. He was lawless, unpleasant and unfeeling, as strong as an ox and once killed a Prey by crushing her skull until it cracked. Inside The Park he had broken some rules and was disciplined by having one of his ears cut off. His popularity stats were well down with the Bruns but high within The Federation because they longed to see a bad guy succeed amongst two others who were popular.

The third hunter was The Dutch Dog. A man who lived without hope of mercy who had been inside The Park for five hundred and eighty-nine days. He was sitting at ninety-nine kills. There was only one way of getting out of The Park and that was to achieve one-hundred kills as a bounty hunter and The Dutch Dog was on the verge of creating that history. He would be given citizenship across all the Federations in Europa. He would be a free man. I remember him as a hero of the people but he would become so much more than that, he would change the world for what we knew it as. I remember the day he entered.

The Dogs Entry:

On death row for an unmotivated crime of arson against The Federation, a man known to society as Gabriel Augustin is shackled in chains, escorted down a dark and narrow corridor by an obedient burly guard, dressed in his flawless black Federation uniform. His imprisoned scabby white jumpsuit was manky with dirt and grime, his sight obstructed by the cover of a hood. That lonesome walk was referred to as the death row's judge. He was taken into a murky, dimly lit room covered in dust. The room was stale, hollow and damp, with bare walls and a concrete floor. A painted circle underneath the ring of light lay waiting and drew significance to the desolation of the convict. The guard placed The Dutch Dog in that spot while he moved out of the spotlighted area and into the corner.

His crime was unprovoked but his reasoning was justified. The Dutch Dog was a member of the elite division of Ultras whose speciality was hunting those who didn't care to be found. They were the highest trained division known to exist and able to adapt to any situation or environment. There was no area they wouldn't travel, no storm they wouldn't tackle, and they would die in the line of duty without question. These soldiers were decorated individuals within The Federation and revered by the Angers. They were feared by everyone else. To be part of The Ultras meant something patriotic and proud. They were die hard to the core and giving up was an option that did not exist. The Dutch Dog was already infamous before his entrance and he was the most anticipated bounty hunter ever.

The door creaked open, The Angel of Death walked in, with me, her six-year-old daughter. I took my place in the corner as I always did, equally as keen to see this renegade of a man everyone was talking about. I shadowed

Mother every day, being groomed to be her successor in many years' time. I had been brought up to neither have nor show pity.

The Dutch Dog stood with his back to me and the label of “Arsonist-Criminal 0982” defining his near future. Mother calmly walked to him, wearing her standard white collared black suit and strangely shaped opaque shades. The Federation’s logo stamped into the white collar showing, she wore it with pride.

“Today, Gabriel Augustin, you will leave death row! You are replacing 0981, The Fox, who was executed yesterday by The Boot. You will enter The Park at checkpoint 12.” She stopped in mid-sentence, her voice with less conviction than usual and I saw her body language waiver as The Dutch Dog stood stern faced, but accepting of his circumstances. He met Mother's attitude with humbleness and held no repentance for her task. Dutch eye-balled the guard who stood still in the corner, seeming oblivious to his surroundings and spoke, “Your Father would be proud!” Mother reacted dejectedly and glanced towards me when Dutch turned too, surprised to see a young child exposed to such violence. “She’s pretty,” he said, while I stared back into his peering and sympathetic green eyes that seemed to have me at his mercy. Mother began to walk the room, weakened by her vulnerability towards Dutch. “You are sentenced to The Park for the crime of arson against The Federation. You will remain there until your death or until you reach a hundred kills.” The guard began to walk behind Dutch and picked up a small implement from a countersunk hole in the wall. “I may inform you, no one has achieved that feat, and you are unlikely to either. Despite The Federation's debt to you as an Ultra you will be treated like any other.”

The guard plunged a device into the lower back of Dutch. He felt it but didn’t make a sound. That device tracked their position but it also had other uses.

“Your remotely charged tracker has just been injected into your back. If you come within ten meters of the motion detectors, an excruciating pain will shoot through your veins.” Dutch felt his lower back, a seep of blood leaked through his overalls, it did not phase him. “You will drop to your knees in agony and all you will desire will be a quick death.” Mother came to Dutch’s face again.

“The Federation no longer requires your services,” she said bleakly, while slyly removing a paper clipping from the inside of her sleeve and slotting it

into the chest pocket of Dutch's uniform. She removed her shades, catching the luring and mysterious gaze from his eyes and leaned in, brushing his lips with a kiss. His eyes blinked but his body language stiffened and he resisted kissing her back. Mother pulled away, "But we are indebted to you." To me, that sounded like Mother held some kind of allegiance with Dutch. Her tight stance had loosened, her guard hand dropped and in front of another member of The Federation, she seemed like she wasn't afraid to show it.

The guard moved into the spotlight and started to remove Dutch's shackles, who gave out no alarming signals that he was a threat, as Mother again held stare with Dutch, he tried to break her down with his penetrating gaze. She resisted and opened her arm towards a heavy steel door. The guard headed towards the door that had a glimmer of light shining through the bottom, appearing as a gateway of no return. The door led to a stairway, the entry into the game. The guard creaked it open as an influx of natural light covered the room. Dutch kind of smiled or showed gratitude, it was hard to tell from such a detached man. He exchanged no looks with Mother and headed into the light, halting abruptly at the doorway, holding his back to the room.

"You'll get it done?" Dutch asked, and Mother paused before replying, "I'd be more concerned about catching The Boot first!" She had already shown her caring side, weakened by her emotional connection to Dutch. She would show no more but she knew what his question meant.

He turned to me with a short humble smirk and winked. In that moment I did not see an ounce of wrong in the man. He headed up the narrow underground staircase as Mother slid her shades back on and glared into the sunlight. Dutch never looked back and the guard shut the door. When it closed she turned to the guard. "What you witnessed, you will forget or el..." The guard stopped her mid-sentence.

"I witnessed nothing ma'am." He spoke with a firm tone. On the way out the door, Mother stopped and glanced at me, easily noticing my innocence and my notification that her behaviour was unusual. What I didn't know then but I do now, was that she was in love with Dutch, fascinated by his mysterious and heroic nature. It would be five hundred and eighty-nine days before he would get out of the Park and by then, he would be a legend.

The Prey:

Hector Divinski was a vile creature. Driven by his own act of retribution for his family that turned into a feat of wrongness. A man whose death in The Park would never amount to what he deserved. Someone who did things to kids that were unspeakable, things you couldn't forget, that would turn your stomach and make you question your moral reasoning for humanity.

He was an intelligent individual who worked inside The Belganger Federation as a Biomedical Engineer. To look at, he was five-foot-five of spindly waste, with dandruff filled patchy hair and wore round glasses. He had this nasty downwards crick in his neck that forced him to look over his specs in order to make eye contact. He hailed from a family of five kids who lived outside the Buffer and were deprived of the simplest things such as water. Hector was taken from his family at eight months old and inducted into The Federation's adoption program.

The adopted kids were brought up with the knowledge of their adoption. To The Federation's society they were known as outcasts and treated like shamed bastards. Hector suffered years of doleful isolation and was the butt of everyone's heckles. There was no moral support from his adopted parents for anything. They saw their role as a shameful burden but an obligation to The Federation. An adopted parent treated their kids more like a pet than a human. As long as he was fed, dressed and turned up for lessons then their job was complete. His upbringing was emotionally dormant, receiving any kind of love was a fantasy of an adopted child. Life was so bad for some adopted children, that living outside the Buffer Zone would have been less of a struggle. Hector was the youngest of his family and a twin.

For more than a year, there was a desperate hunt for a serial child rapist and murderer in our Federation. The evidence left at the crime scenes was rare and all leads were fruitless. He had one methodical habit, he targeted the children of high standing figures who were important within The Federation. The same kind of high standing people that mocked him as a youth for being an outcast.

He scouted his targets with great precision, noting their daily routines and weaknesses. Then, he would find the faultless moment to snatch a kid and have his way with them. There was only ever one trace of him picked up by a camera, normally his actions or movements were ghost like. Cameras were disabled or he would locate blind spots for his snatch. The one sight caught on camera was a glimpse of the back of his head while he wore a

hat. He remained elusive until he finally slipped up, an almost unusable latent fingerprint was found on a belt buckle of a raped and murdered seven-year-old boy. It's thought a hole formed in his gloves from the tip of his pinkie finger. Because his life was documented from the moment he entered The Federation's system, his information was stored in a database and it was a matter of minutes before they identified him.

They nicknamed him The Destroyer because he left families and lives devastated. Twelve kids between the age of four and eight had been raped. Six of those had been killed. Within the society of The Federation this news didn't deter anyone from carrying on with their daily routines. Caring for others was an imaginative delusion in that time. Hector had given the authorities the slip for eighteen months. A deluded man in his late forties who had lived inside The Federations system from eight months old and his knowledge of the layout of the area led the authorities to believe it aided him dodging capture for so long. Even when Hector was caught it wasn't as straightforward as they thought.

Tasked with finding Hector was The Dutch Dog's elite division of Ultras. They travelled six strong and acted more like a vigilante group on steroids than the law. The six had been together for over seven-hundred days and The Dog was their leader.

At home, Dutch had a wife and two children, who rarely got time to spend with him because of his valuable dedication to his duty. Even when he was at home his mind lived in a different space, poisoned by the unforgiving missions he had to carry out and the predatory creatures he had to deal with.

He would say that he was a die hard Ultra for the benefit of protecting The Federation and providing a better life for his family but that would be a lie, he lived for the chase.

The search had brought the squad to the city of Brandenburg, the furthest east you could travel. Anything beyond the city was wasteland and you'd probably freeze to death during the approaching winter. The city attracted most of the lawless lowlife scum across Europa. It was a staging post for black markets, prostitution, and drugs, that could only survive here because a Federation did not exist in the region. Hector had been travelling covertly across Europa, catching unlicensed gliders across cities. Gliders were heavy duty ambiguous crafts powered by solar and biofuels that could travel over any surface, except from water. It was the only way to travel long distances.

Only The Federations were allocated to run a public service across the continent but that didn't stop bandits running their own. That suited a fugitive like Hector who hopped on and off until he reached Brandenburg where he became cornered. The Ultras followed the trail Hector had left behind, risking their own lives through storms, foraging in hell holes, mingling with rebels and bandits along the way.

In every case, Dutch analysed his fugitives' past, crimes, and general behaviour, in order to paint a picture in his head of who he was hunting and what his next move would be but one thing confused him about his pursuit of this fugitive. During the year-long search for Hector, evidence was extremely hard to come by, yet he left a trail that was easy to follow heading east. They had him photographed at various border checks and by security drones that surveyed the wastelands and highways. He was getting sloppy. Dutch queried if his desperation to make a quick getaway caused his lack of concern but he was never fully convinced.

It didn't take them long before they had the whereabouts of Hector. He was in open sight, at a bandits watering hole in the centre of the city. There was one thing about the watering hole that fitted, it was a hole. These places attracted the pits of people, the unwashed, the loathsome and the lawless, who would steal the threads of your clothes. The only way for Ultras to deal with such peasants was to use their experience and force to steamroll the bar. These individuals didn't know the value of a discussion.

The Ultras burst in, dressed in their Federation attire, shouting and letting off charged fusion powered rounds from their plastic guns. Two sharp shooting Ultras stood at the rear to cover the others. The other four stormed in knocking anyone to the sides that got in their way. With armoured suits on they deflected incoming fire, mostly from relic guns of the old times, and used close combat to take down the idiotic bunch that dared to take on such a force. They had battled through the crowd, leaving wounded and dead bodies lying in their wake, finally they had sight of their fugitive.

Sitting motionless at the bar with a clear glass of alcohol, the fight behind hadn't fazed him, in fact, he never moved a muscle. He wore a worn-out hat, holding his head slumped into the bar and kept his back to the Ultras approach. The Dutch Dog shared bemused looks with his squad, unsure of why Hector didn't try to run.

"Hector Divinski," Dutch yelled, still there was no reaction from Hector. He took a slow and relaxed drink from his glass. "Hector Divinski?!" he

yelled again, “you are being sentenced for crimes against The Federation, I am sentencing you to death row.” He topped up his glass and again took a slow drink from it. The communication officer received a message over his comms and immediately shouted “Dutch!”

“Not now!” He replied quickly as he used the barrel of his assault rifle to flick off Hector's hat that landed over the bar.

“Dutch, there's an urgent message,” the comms officer insisted.

“What does it say?” Dutch hovered around Hector cautiously.

“I would read that message mister.” Hector broke his silence.

“I don't know, it needs your security clearance,” the comms officer said.

He debated reading it but then backed off towards the comms officer, meeting him in the middle of the room. Dutch began to read the message as Hector spun around with a sneering look of smugness etched across him like a victorious champion. Dutch took some time to mull over what he was reading and then instantly became devoid of feeling.

“Dutch, what is it?” The comms officer asked? Dutch laid the device down on a table and slid his combat knife from his holder. The comms officer started reading the message.

Dutch strode to the man at the bar and placed the knife over his throat.

“The fingerprint, do you really think that was a mistake?” Those were his last words as Dutch slowly dragged the blade across his throat, holding him up by the grip of his hair, allowing the blood to gush out and the life to slowly drain. When he hit the deck, Dutch started throwing tables and chairs across the room while screaming with rage. His fury was unseen by his squad before as he ran rampant. Some of the injured civilians that were still in the bar were beaten for no reason. The comms officer had finished reading the details on the screen. He too, was sickened by what he saw.

Hector Divinski:

The Divinski family held great revulsion towards The Federation for the theft of their child and especially both twins. Once Hector had reached his teenage years and was smart enough he started relaying messages to his family. The first one said, “To my family and twin, we will get retribution.” Hector had no authority to get outside the Buffer and every message that was sent came through the food scraps that were dumped outside twice a day. Hector knew when he sent the first message that one of the Bruns would pick it up and it would find its way to the family.

He was mocked for all of his childhood and teenage years for being an outcast. The bitterness and resentment grew with age. He dreamed of evening the slate and getting his own form of revenge for years. He picked his victims very carefully and mastered his crimes so he wouldn't be caught. He chose important members of The Federation to target, similar to the upper-class kids that mocked him as a youth. Snatching their kids was a vengeful form of payback for his own abduction. A committed rapist and serial killer that analysed the whole operation from the thought of abducting a child to the disposal of the body. His idea of disposal was a statement of "Fuck you" to The Federation and the families, leaving them in a place of importance or visited regularly by the family.

The Ultras hadn't travelled across Europa catching the tail of Hector, but of his twin brother, Vince, and that played right into Hector's hands. It was an endgame strategy from Hector, if he was ever close to being caught he would use Vince as cover so he could carry out one more kill before handing himself in. He wanted The Federation to know who it was and his reasoning for doing so. He hoped that the Angers would sympathise with him and he also wanted to bask in the glory of being a hero to the Bruns.

As Vince led the Ultras on a wild goose chase, inside The Federation Buffer, Hector was planning his final kill. This one would be particularly special and he was prepared to do something out of his ordinary to end his killing spree. His homework didn't have to be so thorough as the times before because there was no intention to hide any more. In his eyes it was time for The Federation to see the person they created. He wanted his notoriety to be known and his name to be written into modern history.

His approach this time was simple. He entered the accommodation blocks and headed for his desired compound. Inside was the creme de la creme of The Federation's most privileged. Hector had a high class status being a biochemical engineer and used his position to gain access to any area. He waited in the relevant enclosure until the wife and kids came home from their daily activities before releasing a toxic gas into the air conditioning unit.

He pulled the woman into a windowless bedroom that gleamed in pure white. The walls, floor, furniture and bed sheets all glistened and were impeccably clean. He stripped her of her clothes and lay her on the bed. He also unclothed the two kids, sedated them, and bound them together, back to back, on the floor with rope. Not once, in all his murders did he do

anything to an adult but here, he raped the woman and left his seed inside her. When she woke naked, she lay tied up in a cross shape with a tight gag around her mouth. Hector killed all his victims in differing ways and this was no exception. While her eyes were pierced wide open with a resounding fear he proceeded to slit open her skin, over a hundred times, with a bladed implement. Her blood soaked the white sheets while she tried to scream through her gag. Hector proudly stood over her leaking body, enjoying the torture that bled from her eyes. She screamed and screamed through her gag but no one was going to save her. Not even her husband.

When the kids woke they were confused. They saw blood dripping to the floor from the bed but they couldn't see their Mother's face. Narcissistic and callous, he left the kids to wonder whilst watching their mother's eventual death. What he did to those kids after is too traumatizing to repeat. The victims were Dutch's family.

When Dutch read the security message on the comms device, it told him of that horror and that the man they had caught was actually Vince, Hector's twin.

Dutch was a broken man and there wasn't anything anyone could do to help him. The only thing he desired was to have Hector's head on a stick. While he travelled west, back to The Federation, Hector had been inducted into Death Row and as important a man as Dutch was, he was denied any contact with Hector. He became unstable and reckless, tortured by grief. He turned to the moonshine, stealing it from the Bruns and drank to forget. He became obsessed with avenging his family, driving him to pits of rage. He received no help from The Federation. What had happened to Dutch's family was of no concern to them. He continued to work because that was all he knew, he took his grief and anger out on anyone who got in his way. He became resoundingly passive and cold hearted, not allowing himself to slip through the different processes of grief but he had decided on how he would exceed his revenge. After months of causing more issues in his job than good he was sacked by The Federation. An implication that saw him thrown out to the Bruns. There, he hit rock bottom and lost his will to live. The Ultras who he ruled with disciplined ethics had become his enemy and so did The Federation whose scraps of food he had to eat to stay alive. Out there, something happened to him, he saw both sides of the coin at the same time. He pitied the way The Bruns lived day to day and felt sorrow for his previous oath to being an Ultra and the harsh laws he enforced. His old

Ultra colleagues mocked him and showed him no respect. Dutch had to watch The Ultras mistreatment of all the hopeless poor and a new kind of rage began to brew inside him. He was alone in the world, he didn't have a friend or ally to confide in while The Bruns spat at his feet and offered no sympathy. After a few months of surviving he did something insane, something no one had been able to do, he managed to break inside the Buffer. The food factories and stores inside the Buffer Zone were all located in one part of the complex. Eight sheds and six processing plants supplied The Federation with more food than they needed. Dutch, in one evening, using his covert expertise, simultaneously blew them all up and a fire raged for days, leaving nothing but ash and the lack of a food supplies caused havoc for months after. He handed himself in to a fellow Ultra. The charge was death row. He was thrown into The Pend and there, he waited patiently for his entry into The Park. His fate was sealed.

Inside The Park:

He entered a distressed man and The Park did something it had never done to anyone before, it focused and rehabilitated him. His training and experience as an Ultra made him the perfect survival weapon. It took him no time at all to settle and kill The Boot.

There was no alarm surrounding him, no haste to do things, instead he became a man at ease, sharing his time with many bounty hunters and watched many of them die.

He set up home on the top floor of an old sky tower that had been buried into the earth, building an enclosure so the drones couldn't film him in private. Aside from killing every low life that entered, he gained a hobby that took his attention away, collecting memorabilia from the old world, gathering knowledge along the way. He read books and built things. He found killing devices from the old world, guns made from metal, and moulded his own bullets from a furnace he built.

Across the expanse of The Park, he had fixed several vehicles and stashed them around for quick pickups. Not once had he been found guilty of breaking any of The Park rules and as the number of kills grew, his popularity rose until he became a celebrity.

He held no attachment to anyone who crossed his path and as the time passed, he became a fixture.

One by one the Prey came and one by one they fell. When he hunted, he was a man possessed and other times, when he needed to recharge and find food, he backed out of the chase and let one of the other two collect the kill. He set ingenious traps for some, killed others with his bare hands, blew some up with homemade grenades and he buried one alive.

When The Bounty Hunter they called The Cowboy was killed by the Prey, The Pebble killer, in came The Viking as his replacement. Dutch had reached four hundred and sixty-nine days at this point and sat at ninety kills. The Viking was about to make life exceedingly difficult for The Dutch Dog.

With only 10 kills to go until he reached immortality, The Viking halted his progress. Dutch knew him as a crazy, unpredictable man but he was a born killer, an animal. Someone who loved the hunt as much as Dutch and had little mercy for anything or anyone around him. A brute that didn't much care for the rules but he soon learnt to abide by them after having his left ear chopped off.

Both of them saw many bounty hunters come and go before Chisel entered. She wasn't a natural killer like the other two, she killed out of necessity and had a certain style around her. Her first kill was against a perverted henchman, they so kindly named Perv. A security guard who set up hidden cameras in ladies quarters and communal areas, spying on them without permission from The Federation. Before the Prey entered the bounty hunters were told of their past and crimes so Chisel knew exactly what he was. She had picked up a two wheeled off-road vehicle within the first few hours she was inside, it was rapid, reliable and handled the off-road terrain. She tracked him down very quickly and ran him over. While he was unconscious she poured oil down his throat. A quite unique way of killing someone. Something the fans loved to see.

The time had arrived for the entrance of new prey.

Chisel was speeding her way across the quadrant trying to locate food and water, she was still fairly fresh and didn't know where she was going.

The Viking was sitting on top of his bulky vehicle munching on an apple waiting patiently.

The Dutch Dog had just pulled into an old gasoline station with burned out cars and rubbish surrounding it. He approached the boarded-up window and

lifted his leg to smash it in when a notification pinged from his car.

'Within a couple of hours, a fresh Prey is being released into The Park' a message sent out to the bounty hunters on a remote screened device.

All three bounty hunters looked on their screens and were advised to get to checkpoint four within two hours or face a punishment. The Viking and Chisel set off in a hurry, but Dutch was not as inclined to race off. Slowly he got into his car and lit a stubby half smoked cigar. He flipped down the visor and out fell a picture of his family. He stared at it for some time, having flashbacks of happier days. Then he remembered where the picture came from. The Angel of Death had slipped it into his pocket five hundred and eighty-seven days ago. It was a bitter reminder of why he was in The Park.

Checkpoint Four:

In a compact dimly lit room, a bland table sat in the centre with three chairs. There was a digital countdown clock on the wall, ticking away the two hours the hunters had to arrive.

Inside a wide gully, standing lone and inviting was a small hut, shaped like a curved boat sail over sandy ground that guarded the door to checkpoint four.

The first to arrive in the swirling wind was The Viking who abandoned his vehicle and entered the room. He took a seat at the table, followed an hour later by Chisel.

“You took your time!” The Viking said in his hoarsely voice.

“Still getting my bearings around this place!”

“Maybe I can give you the bearings to my heart!” the Viking smirked. Chisel stood up and stabbed a knife into the table.

“Maybe I can put that into your bearings!”

“Ohhh,” he shivered in a sneering way. “fiery, I like that in a woman.” Chisel leaned into the light and pulled the knife from the table. “Tut Tut,” the Viking said, wagging a finger at Chisel, “remember the rules fiery lady, no harming other hunters.” Chisel scowled and sat back down.

The Angel of Death entered the room with the guard by her side. She and her authoritative body clumped around the table, remaining mute, observing the hunters while looking at the countdown clock. She stopped and stood

beside the obedient guard in the back of the room. As usual I was with Mother and stood behind the door of entry.

Dutch arrived in a blacked out solar powered vehicle door fifteen minutes before the deadline was up. He strolled in, whilst taking a jab at Mother and proceeded to the table. He seemed content and in no way excited that he was one kill from release. A patch on the shoulder of his jacket, of an old flag, from a country known as Holland who called their people Dutch, gave meaning to his Park name.

Mother began the proceedings while Dutch showed little interest. Once he settled, he glanced at me, with a short smirk and nodded his head.

“You have all arrived within the time so there will be zero punishment handed out. You are here today to welcome Prey 1012 into The Park.” The Guard headed to a corner of the room, adjacent to the angle that they sat at the table. He flicked a button on a projector that hung on the wall like a shelf and produced a variety of holographic upright screens. Dutch still wasn't one bit interested, slumped in his chair while the other two edged forward in anticipation of what lowlife they were getting to hunt. The screen's held information of each bounty hunter's stats and popularity. There was a map of The Park with all the checkpoints marked on them. The Federation logo was scattered across one screen. Then, the Prey's face appeared while Mother stood to the side and continued, “This man is a highly intelligent criminal, someone who is both tactical and merciless. He has been tipped to reach a few kills of his own but one thing that is not on his side, his age, he is getting old. His fiftieth was last week.” Dutch still had no interest in the speech. “Thirty minutes ago, he was released from checkpoint forty one.”

Checkpoint Forty-One: Thirty Minutes Ago:

Inside checkpoint forty-one, Hector stood, hooded and in his shackles, in the centre of the room with only a guard to accompany him. His time in The Pend had made him mentally lifeless. These prisoners were in twenty-three-hour, pitch-black lock down, sometimes for the rest of their lives, if they weren't granted entry into The Park. They knew nothing of what happened in the real world. His motivation and enthusiasm were lacking inspiration while his stance sagged in the middle of the room. But physically, Hector

was well. A couple of weeks before a convict is released into The Park, their food rations are tripled to build their strength.

Mother had visited Hector before his entry, standing firmly in his eye line, wearing her opaque shades and usual Federation suit. She removed his hood but Hector had his eyes firmly on the stew covered ground, refusing to partake in any kind of response.

“Hector Divinski, today your sentence of death row will come to an end and you will enter The Park at Checkpoint forty-one.” The guard moved to the projector and flicked the switch. The screens popped up and the information of the first bounty hunter was there to see. “The newest hunter inside The Park today is Chisel, a female renegade thief and murderer of two Federation guards.” Hector's chin lay in his chest. This was no fun for him. “She has massed two kills so far and is a firm favourite with the Bruns.”

The Viking's face and stats popped up, “The second hunter inside The Park is The Viking, possibly the most ferocious contender we have ever had. A stone-cold killer of two members of the Ultras who tried to relieve him of his dinner before he was finished. He has reached twenty-two kills and is a force we think will not be stopped.” Mother paused as the face of The Dutch Dog appeared on the screen. “The third hunter is the most famous of any who have entered before. He has amassed ninety-nine kills and has one more before he becomes the first convict to reach a hundred kills and be granted a citizenship inside the Buffer Zone.” Hector's chin was still breached into his chest as he rubbed the strain marks on his wrist, becoming desperate to be unshackled. Mother removed her shades and took a step closer to Hector.

“He is The Dutch Dog, a man who used to be a member of the Ultras special division.” Hector's neck creaked and his head started to rise. “A trained survivor, hunter and killer.” His posture straightened and his eyes pierced open, he saw who The Dutch Dog was. Hector was now discreetly aflame with panic. The guard moved behind him, aggressively puncturing his skin and sunk the tracker into his lower back. He neither winced or took notice, as the shock of who would be hunting him overwhelmed his every cell.

“It can't be,” he whispered in a gravelly voice.

“The Federation demands that you pay for your crimes, Mr Divinski, your end is near.” Hector gave himself up, in the glory that he would be

remembered for what he did. The smartest and most famous serial killer in the known world. But at that moment, I think he thought otherwise.

The guard moved across the room as Hector seen the light protrude from underneath the door as it opened. Hector then realised something had been planted in his lower back, he felt the wound that initiated a change in his facial reaction as he thought about a way to commit suicide.

“That I assure won't be possible, no person has ever managed to come within ten meters of the shield. The pain generated is so severe you will not be able to crawl, let alone walk.” Mother edged Hector towards the door as he shuffled forward in his shackles. He held his hands out to the guard for the chains to be undone. The guard ignored his request but tore every thread of clothes from his body leaving him as naked as his vulnerability at that moment.

“The Park will torture and slaughter you for what you did. Leave this checkpoint and meet your fate vile creature.” Hector knew his death would be the most painful he could imagine. The guard pushed him out the door and locked it behind him.

Hector hopped and struggled, butt naked up the stairs until he stood in the swirling wind and dust, exposed to three square miles of nothing but wilderness. He was a sitting duck!

Checkpoint Four

Back at the table, the introduction to the new prey continued. Dutch was still void of interest of the whole affair. He had no desire to reach that infamous hundred kills and leave a place where he felt at ease with his grief until he got his redemption by killing Hector. That was his sole reason for being inside the Park. Mother continued, “A serial killer of the highest calibre, one who evaded capture for over a year...His name is Hector Divinski.”

Dutch leaned forward and slid his elbows over the table. Chisel and The Viking noticed his new found interest. He pinged a look at Mother who didn't take him on. His hopes became elevated and he had already prepared for such an event. Mother moved away from the screens to behind Dutch.

“As per usual, the rules apply when the game starts. No harming other hunters. No tampering with other hunters vehicles. No stealing of supplies and no befriending with the Prey.” All three hunters began eyeballing each

other, keen to get the hunt began. "You will pick up your preferred gift and leave in the selected order." The hunters all chose a gift before each kill. A number of things were on offer. The guard moved to the darkness of a corner and returned with a low level long rectangular trolley that was full of accessories. Chisel and The Viking had a good look at what was available while Dutch's eyes were still locked on the screen.

"Chisel, since you had the last kill, you get to go first. Pick up your gift and leave." She stood from the table while The Viking eyed her slender body and tight ass. Sheepishly she headed over to the trolley. The variety of contents included beer, cigarettes, chocolate, a knife, candles, matches, lighters, a steak, whisky, and tampons. She picked up the tampons as The Viking burst out in laughter. Chisel looked down on him and uttered "Pig" before hurling out the door. She had a five minute lead. The Viking addressed Dutch, "I will add this sick man to my list of kills." Dutch swung a poised look in his direction and answered, "You will have to get used to the idea that you won't be leaving this place in a hurry." He said with great conviction.

"I would love to punch you Dutch, it would make me very happy!"

"It would bring me some happiness too because you'd probably get that other ear cut off!" Both of them laughed, holding respect for each other. Dutch continued, "Mr Viking, say I get out of here before you, on the outside would you share a drink with me?"

"You get out of here before me?" The Viking said jokingly, "I have met far worse cunts than you, so the answer is yes, we would drink together."

"Good because I'll need a good ally on the outside, I will come get you!" Mother and the guard listened with no interruption, probably enjoying the conversation but it became time for The Viking to leave.

"Viking you're next to depart, pick your gift and leave." Mother stated frankly. He stood up and headed to the trolley analysing its contents. He picked up the four pack of beer and headed to the door. Before he could get there Dutch stood up.

"Hey! not offering me your hand Viking?" He stopped with his back to Dutch and turned around.

"You can shake it when we meet again...friend." Dutch smiled, then sat down and watched The Viking give the guard a jab with his neck. The guard flinched.

As soon as he was out the door, Dutch's demeanour changed, he now had a profoundly serious expression. He neared the trolley as Mother dropped her guard and approached him from behind.

“You saved him till last?” Dutch asked.

“The Federation has a list to follow. It was never my intention.”

“Bullshit, you could have put him in any time you liked.”

“That's not true!”

“You play god to your audience. The Federation has enjoyed watching me rot.” Mother knew he spoke the truth and didn't have an answer for him.

“How long have I been here.”

“Five hundred and eighty-seven days.”

“Time flies while you're killing!”

“Your time is up, pick up your gift and leave.” Dutch picked up a packet of stumpy cigars and walked past Mother on the way to the door.

“I've left him in his shackles, he will be caught easily.”

Dutch stopped before he walked out the door and thought about showing gratitude but he didn't bother. Retribution was all that he cared for. When he left, I looked at my Mother who became sad and I also had strange feelings towards him. I did something crazy and ran out the door and into The Park after him.

To the left was Chisel, frantically trying to kick start her vehicle and having no luck. She spotted Dutch and knew right away he had something to do with it. To the right was The Viking who was lying underneath his motor trying to figure out why it wasn't starting. He saw Dutch and slid out, rifling him with a hostile stare.

Dutch walked in a straight line towards his motor without a care in the world. He opened the passenger door and lit his cigar. He dipped into the car and threw out a slice of a wiring loom from Chisel's vehicle and two hacked belts from The Vikings van. Viking and Chisel looked at each other knowing Dutch didn't break any rules because he did it all before the game started.

He clocked me in the far distance with that short smirk crossed over his mouth again. Playfully, he pulled his arm to his chin, and fired at me with a gun salute before he entered his motor and sped away.

Later that day he gained his revenge and won his freedom. But that was only the start of his story.

He was about to change our world for what we knew it as!

The End.