

Woodland Stalker

By Kristopher Miller

Ben Matthews inhaled the Boreal Forest's frigid air as he peered through the scope of his .300 Winchester rifle to pick a moose out of the frost-covered brush.

He swore he heard a moose's cry past a ridge he climbed up a few minutes ago. Matthews knew he was on the right track because he saw moose prints leading upward a few meters after a rotten log. So Matthews stopped in front of a fallen tree and sat down to use it as a prop for his rifle. But he could not help but feel anxious. It was probably the cold wind whispering to him as this has been the coldest winter Matthews hunted in during the past eight years he hunted moose in Canada during winter breaks when he was not teaching his World Literature class back in the United States.

Matthews adjusted his scope to zoom in on something rustling in the brush up ahead. He saw a broad shape crack the ice and brambles apart. It was rushing in his direction but Matthews could not help but notice how whatever was trying to break out of the thorny brambles broke these brambles like they were twigs. Either it was a giant grizzly or this was his moose trying to escape from a grizzly in panic mode.

Matthews adjusted his trigger finger to fire. From the corner of his scope, he saw a pair of flat, long antlers burst from the brush followed by the narrow broad muzzle and a bulky muscular body. Matthews watched as the moose poked its head out, probably to make sure it was in safe territory. Then it pulled out of the brush but it shook its head erratically. Then it turned around like it was expecting something else to pop out. Could it sense a predator nearby? Matthews was a witness to strange animal behavior so he kept quiet and low.

After a few seconds, Matthews noticed through his scope that the moose seemed to have calmed down. The animal inched out of the brush and into Matthews' crosshairs close to a tree. At close range, a round from the Winchester would bore a clean hole into the moose's skull and knock it dead. Matthew tensed his trigger finger against the hard, curved metal object that made no distinction between what was a target and what was simply in the background. Matthew felt the adrenaline that warmed him up whenever he saw game ripe for the taking. He took a deep breath-

-then he saw two large arms with claws at the end explode out of the tree and grab the moose's hind legs as pieces of pine needles fell down into the snow. Matthews saw the moose be pulled into the tree kicking its foreheads in panic. He saw the animal's eyes widen in fear as it bleated against the dry air

and kicked at its unseen attacker. Matthews heard a thick, wet *crunch* of bone cracking open. Matthews shook behind the tree as he watched the moose's blood rain down to paint the white ground with a deep crimson.

He tore his sight away from the rifle after hearing bones cracking apart. What *was* that? Matthews thought about sneaking away at *whatever* was making the tree shake with gore. He gripped his rifle with tight, quivering hands. Was this for real? No bear or wolf could ever climb up a tree and pull up a moose with that kind of strength.

After taking a few breaths, Matthews decided to prop up his gun again on the tree and peer through his scope to where he could see the pine needles shake. He squeezed the trigger and saw pine needles spread out at the blast. The gunfire was answered with an angry growl and a moose's head falling down to the ground with a pulpy *splurch*. Matthews cocked the gun again to let out a spent shell and fired again. After he fired the second shot, Matthews almost fell back from the deep roar erupting from the tree. He saw whatever creature he shot at rustle down the tree.

Matthews scrambled up from the broken tree and he ran as he heard a heavy crash behind him. He ran past icy trees and into a frosty thicket as *whatever* was after him pounded into the ground as hard as Matthews' heart was beating in his chest. He rushed to the right and Matthews sped down a slope as he huffed against the cold air. He almost slipped as Matthews gripped a tree. He looked behind him to see something crash into the brush with abominable strength. Up ahead, he saw a broken log surrounded by a thick, dried up field that he passed by earlier when hunting the moose. Matthews thought the cold would have dulled the creature's scent but so far, that scent was frighteningly sufficient as he watched a large hulking shape tearing his way.

Matthews sped off down the hill and he held his Winchester close as he did. It was coming too fast to get a shot off. As Matthews ran closer to the log, he realized his leather backpack-filled with additional ammunition, some jerky, and flares-was slowing him down and it may not have been able to fit into the log with him. As he ran, Matthews ripped the backpack away from him and he dove into the log with his gun.

Matthews breathed quietly as he hid inside the rotting log. He closed his eyes and clenched his hands around his Winchester as he heard something heavy pound into the stone and rock close to him. He listened to rawhide leather being shredded apart. Then he heard some smaller objects being crunched up and picked to fragments.

Was the thing destroying his supplies?

Matthews heard the thing tear into some snow. The sound raw wood being ripped apart made him shake. He held his breath to try to keep still. Matthews thought it was the log he hid in but the crack sounded too faint to be close like it was looking around one of the trees. Matthews guessed the creature sniffed around where Matthews dropped his pack and assumed he was hiding up in the trees. Soon, he believed it would come close to his hiding spot. Then he heard the beast howl like a monstrous wolf. It was challenging Matthews to come out of whatever hole he hid in. Matthews felt he was about to faint. Was this how prey felt when it was cornered?

Then it uttered a gut-wrenching growl that almost sounded human. The sound played with Matthews' imagination for it sounded like a creature only spoken in legends.

Matthews heard the sound of footsteps growing distant. Maybe the creature was heading somewhere else. Matthews took a deep breath and then he pulled himself and his gun out of the log. He stood straight up and shook from the cold and adrenaline. Matthews raised his gun straight up. Was the beast really gone? Matthews pointed his barrel up at the hill he ran from. Could it be watching from a distance, like a wolf would wait for a mole to come out of its hole?

Matthews shook his head as he kept his gun raised. He walked over to his pack and he saw it was reduced to nothing but torn up skin. He saw the spare ammunition for his Winchester was bent and broken up. Matthews bent down and picked up one of the broken pieces of metal. One of the pieces looked like it was covered in several teeth marks, as the bullet was wet with saliva. He saw the same happened with his flares; they were broken and bittern apart. And he saw torn apart pieces of jerky scattered across the pack.

How the hell would an animal like that know that these were hunters' supplies? Matthews would imagine a bear or a wolf going after the jerky but leaving the bullets and flares alone because they would not taste like food. But this looked like it was done *by an animal with malicious intent to keep Matthews stranded in the cold.*

Could it have known Matthews was hiding in that log and that the creature was just biding his time for him to come out?

Matthews shook his head again as he tried to snap out of his fearful stupor. He took out his compass and saw it was pointing to the northeast. Wasn't he traveling down the southwest? Matthews knew he set up camp somewhere in the south, a few meters close to where his truck was parked. He realized in his escape that he lost his way. So Matthews walked further north for he believed the creature

was still waiting in the other direction. He gripped his rifle tight as he ventured deeper into the frosted aspens and twisted brambles lying before him.

Walking deeper through the woods, Matthews peered at his watch. It had been about an hour since his encounter with the creature and it was already getting darker and colder. He shivered as he treaded past the thick brush and fallen tree limbs.

Matthews theorized what was chasing him. He heard Canadian and French legends regarding to the *loup garou*, more commonly known as the werewolf. Matthews told these legends to his World Literature class back in the States. He recalled that in the French countryside, the *loup garou* would stalk and kill its victims. These victims would be horribly mutilated, and these victims prompted a local militia to hunt down the creature. When a priest in the militia finally shot the creature, the militia decided to parade a regular wolf around the street because the real monster was too horrible to display.

Why did he think back to the legend? Matthews believed he was too afraid to look back when he was being pursued not because it would slow him down but because the sight of his attacker would destroy whatever rational thought he had left.

Then Matthews saw a claw-like object in front of him. He stopped and was about to raise his gun but then he saw it was a tree limb. He looked around him and the brush around him appeared sharp and ready to pierce past his coat and into his flesh. Matthews hurried quickly out of the woods as he pulled out his flashlight in his coat. He flicked it on revealing more twisted-looking trees looming over him. The icicles on the trees lit up at the light but they were painted in deep crimson. Were they dripping blood?

Matthews walked closer to the icicles and then he heard a limb crack and something heavy fell past him. He stepped back then he shone his light and gasped. It was a naked mutilated corpse of a man whose face was gnawed off. Matthews screamed as he backed away. He felt his heart rattle against his chest as he took deep breaths. Then Matthews saw the corpse's chest was ripped open and emptied of muscle tissue and guts. He looked at the face with grimace, as the skull appeared to grin at him and saying *You're next, fellow hunter, you're next.*

So he was not the only one to enter the *loup garou's* lair. Then he heard heavy footsteps pound against the broken wood and ice. It was rushing towards him. Matthews ran ahead. He did not know where he was going but at that moment, he did not care. Matthews leapt over broken tree limbs and until he thought he heard water rushing down. He kept running and running until he saw an opening out of the

woods. Then he stopped to face a rushing river.

Matthews heard a high-pitched howl behind him and the crackling of brush and trees then he looked back to the water. He was already freezing like a madman. Matthews imagined that the water would kill him in minutes. He jumped into the water and he held his gun over him as he crossed the river. The cold snapped at him as his legs felt numb against the water. He felt his mouth tremble as he struggled against the current threatening to push him over.

Then he slipped. Matthews lost grip of the rifle as he clawed at the water. He climbed up to the surface to take a deep breath and swam violently towards the other side of the river. Matthews gasped as he reached the other end and climbed out. He shivered uncontrollably as he felt close to collapsing.

Matthews saw some rocks on the river beach so he grabbed a couple in his hands. He laid them aside to use whatever light was left. He felt for his flashlight which was hanging on his coat but it probably got swept in the river too. As he coughed, Matthews gathered whatever wood was on the beach and threw it into a pile. Then he took the stones and shook as he clasped the stones together. He hoped the sticks were dry enough to start a fire. Matthews saw several flecks of light hit the sticks and the flecks ignited into a small fire. He kept hitting the stones until he fell over. Matthews lost grip of the stones and he realized he needed to get his clothing off. He stood up and quaked in the cold as he unbuttoned his camouflage jacket and pants. He tore off his underwear, boots, and socks and then he bent down into a pushup position. He stood naked against the frigid and indifferent woods before him and then he bent down to do several pushups to keep his body warmth up.

Matthews fell over and coughed to where his lungs might have exploded. He figured the cold weakened his immune system and that hypothermia was seeping into his body. Matthews crawled to the growing fire and huddled close to it. He heard another howl over the distance but he was drifting off to blackness to care about survival anymore.

Matthews was in the woods with a spare rifle he grabbed from the truck. He heard a noise over in the distance and he rushed past the conifers to check what was around the corner. He found a man-like shape sniffing the ground. It was hairy all over and its back was entirely on Matthews. Had he gotten this lucky to kill his pursuer so far?

The hunter aimed his crosshairs at the creature's head and pulled the trigger. The back of the creature's head exploded with red and pink that painted the frosty slope with organic colors. Matthews

held his gun close as he stepped over his quarry, which all of the sudden looked decayed and rotten.

He kicked the corpse over until he saw his own face on the monster's head. It stared back at him with sharp teeth and deep red eyes...

Matthews screamed at the woods as he shot up like a wolverine caught in an ancient trap.

He took several deep breaths to realize the warm object he brushed his shoulder against was just the remains of the fire he made in desperation last night. The nightmare was enough to stir him up but he still felt weak. Matthews stood up, naked and defenseless, as he bent down to feel his clothes. They were dryer than they were last night but still moist in some parts. He reached into the pockets of his coat and pulled out a spare piece of jerky. Matthews bit into it with intense hunger and ripped it in half with his teeth. He relished the salty flavor of the preserved beef. After he swallowed the first half, he bit into the second half with the same vigor.

Still, the beef was not warm enough to keep him satisfied. He picked up his clothes and put them back on. He held his head because it hurt from the cold. Then he gripped leather handle of his Bowie hunting knife. He pulled the blade out from its sheathe. Matthews stared at the knife hooked with a leather loop, and he realized it was the only true weapon he had, apart from a small pocket knife he had in one of his coat pockets.

Matthews took out his compass and he continued walking through the woods. He looked up at the trees and heard tree bark being knocked on behind him. Matthews' heart thudded when he recognized that it was the sound of a woodpecker hammering into the wood. Matthews took a breath but then he coughed. He needed to find another source of warmth and quickly.

But he kept moving as soon as he heard a low growl from a distance. That *thing* always seemed to know when Matthews was nearby. He huffed as he stared at the compass he pulled out of one of his coat pockets. The pointer inched towards the south. It was not enough to comfort him because he heard the animalistic sound close by.

He heard a squirrel chipping nearby. It ran in front of him to grab an acorn and then it darted back. Matthews knew he did not have enough jerky for the evening, or even for the next day. Then he caught sight at a low tree branch. There was a large stone nearby the river so he ran a few meters back and collected the stone. Matthews found a few sticks and then he cut two pieces from one of the sticks he collected. Then he cut some rough edges with his two shaking hands for the sticks so they could fit

together in a triangle formation. Matthews breathed heavily as he gathered some acorns and set a few in front of the stick supporting the rock.

Then he waited close by a tree. The warm coat he put on could only support so much heat because he took a dip into the river. His bones felt like they were cracking apart as he hid behind the tree. Then he spotted a squirrel poking its head out of the adjacent tree. It crawled down the bark and close to Matthews' hiding spot. Matthews held his breath and covered his mouth to muffle a cough. The squirrel skittered to the acorn but then it stopped and peered around itself. Matthews found it hard to keep still as he shook with adrenaline. Then the squirrel rushed over to the acorns and then it sniffed, then it turned its head back to the tree it hid in. Matthews gritted his teeth to keep from making a sudden move to scare it off.

The squirrel took an acorn and Matthews pulled at the stick. He saw the rock fall and heard a sharp *crack* of bone. Matthews came from out of his hiding place and he lifted the rock up. He picked up the squirrel and pried off its fur to gnaw on the meat inside the still-warm carcass. His mouth filled with the metallic taste of its blood and he chewed furiously at the muscle tissue. Matthews tore his mouth away from the squirrel and forced himself to swallow the slick, red meat as he saw the squirrel's crushed intestines falling out.

After he finished eating the squirrel, Matthews dropped the remains onto the ground and looked for some snow to swallow. He crunched the ice to get that blood taste out of his mouth. Matthews spat out the crimson-colored spit and frost and held his head up not to gag from eating raw squirrel meat. Then he looked at his compass to distract himself from that queasy feeling in his stomach. Matthews found he was still going south, so he tried to give himself credit for finding his way. He was going to try looking for the site he set camp at, as he built it up for an extended hunting trip when he set out in the forest earlier.

Matthews climbed up a hill and fought against the dried up bushes in his way. He felt the woods and the cold have been fighting him every step of the way since the *loup garou* hunted him down. Matthews listened for any heavy footsteps crunching the snow or any wild animal cries. The woods around him were very quiet. As Matthews climbed to the top of the hill, he felt he was no longer in the Boreal Forest. He felt he was in a cold hell, and the devil took form of a wolf.

Didn't Matthews also assign a Canadian folktale about the devil commanding werewolves? Was the creature a demonic agent sent to hunt down woodsmen who got too far deep into the Boreal Forest's cold heart?

Get a damn grip, he thought to himself. Get a damn grip or you'll end up slashing your wrists.

Matthews reached the top of the hill and he saw what looked to be a circular camp fire obscured by several deciduous trees. He climbed down the hill and his heart pounded harder as he approached the spot. He would use what supplies were there were to escape the woods to his truck. Matthews pushed back bare limbs as he ran closer to his camp.

Then Matthews' mouth dropped open. His shook with anxiety as he clenched his fists when he saw the tent was torn off its rods and torn to shreds. The rods themselves were bent and twisted into warped shapes that were spread around the site. Matthews saw the top of a box he kept supplies in was torn off its hinges. Its contents were bent and torn apart; bullets for his lost Winchester were bitten into metal chunks, other flares were gnawed and torn into several pieces, and cans of beans, fruit, and spare jerky were shredded apart to nothing but pieces and juice.

Matthews almost collapsed. He realized the *loup garou* knew where he was staying and that he knew he was here long before he was discovered. Or so, Matthews theorized. He looked around the woods and pulled out his knife. It could be waiting up in the trees or far in the distance in front of him, in this spot. He scrambled over to the sleeping bag to see all of its stuffing torn up.

Then he felt the sleeping bag for something solid. He reached under and felt the leather handle of a gun. Matthews pulled out a Smith and Wesson .38, a gun he kept under his bag in case some animal poked around his camp site. He opened the cylinder and found all six cylinders were filled. These bullets were the only ones he could use.

Matthews shoved the .38 into one of his coat pockets and he looked around the camp site for anything else that was not discovered and vandalized. He explored the rest of the ruined camp site where he found batteries broken to pieces and a larger flashlight with its glass broken. He found his propane tank, used for starting fires, was tossed against a tree and bent beyond use. Matthews coughed as he ran to the other side of the camp site. He gasped when he could not run anymore. Matthews bent down and took out the .38. Six bullets. He could probably use it to shoot some prey for food at least. But what if he was cornered? Maybe he could use the last bullet on himself.

Then Matthews tore his eyes away from the gun and shoved it in his coat. He took out his compass and saw it pointed southwest. Matthews double checked the box again and saw there were a couple of matches remaining intact, something that the creature left behind. Matthews stuck the matches into his pocket and he wandered from the camp site.

As Matthews navigated and shook, he saw a hare leap from a snowy mound. He saw a fox was chasing it. He watched as the fox leapt and snap its jaws across the hare's neck. Matthews saw the predator twist it, like there was no big deal to snuffing out a life in his godforsaken wilderness.

Matthews pulled out his .38 and aimed at the fox. The fox looked up and Matthews pulled the trigger. Its muzzle shattered into bloody chunks as it fell dead on the snowy forest floor. The gunshot echoed across the trees. It was Matthews' cry of defiance that he would not be another statistic in these woods and not in the least some meal for a mythical beast hunting him down.

Matthews took the carcasses of both the fox and the hare. As he trekked across the rough ground, he mused that he at least bagged a few animals on this trip. The prize moose would have to wait some other time.

Darkness whispered at Matthews in form of a shrill wind to remind him that he was at the mercy of the night.

He managed to find a small cave away from the wind and snow to kindle a fire in. Matthews held his hands over the fire and bit into the last bit of hare. He stored the fox's meat in one of his pouches for later. His limbs were warm with the fire's healing energy but its crackle could not distract him from the shrieking wind outside of the cave.

Matthews stared at the fire and he wondered how such a creature could know so much about hunting equipment. If this was a *loup garou*, could it have been a hunter like Matthews? Could it somehow been stricken by a virus running around in these woods by another animal? The traditional werewolf figure was supposed to turn back to human form but he saw the *loup garou*-or at least its hideous shape obscured by the wilderness-during the daylight; so much for other aspects of the legend.

Then a low growl seeped its way into the cave.

Matthews jerked his head up and pulled out his .38. He wondered if a tiny revolver would actually work against the creature. He shot it once with his Winchester but it did not seem to bring it down. Could it be immune to bullets? If not, Matthews dreaded it had a very quick healing ability.

Matthews took out one of the sticks in the fire and he threw it out of the cave like a flare. Then he saw a thick, hunched shape dart in the trees. Matthews felt his heart almost stopped. It was here and it was seeking him out. He pulled a fiery stick from the fire and tossed it out like a flare.

He was greeted with a pair of bright red eyes that shone with malevolent fury in the dark. Then

Matthews saw its white teeth and realized it was close to the fire stick's light radius. Matthews aimed and fired his .38 off at where he thought the *loup garou* might be. The red eyes shifted quickly and he saw a thick outline dodge to the right. Matthews fired again but the thing leapt up out of sight.

Matthews heard something scratch the cavern ceiling and he looked up to see a wolfish face roar back at him with those blazing red eyes. It dropped down on him and Matthews rolled out of the way. He struggled to raise up his .38 but the *loup garou* lashed forward and knocked the gun out of his hand. Matthews swung his torch against the creature and it backed away after one of its claws ignited with fire. The *loup garou* came towards him and Matthews pulled out his Bowie knife and slashed away. Then Matthews felt cold and as the snow hit him, he realized the *loup garou* lured him back out into the open.

Matthews felt something knock him down from his left shoulder. Then he felt sharp fangs bite into his right shoulder. He cried out in pain as he heard the beast tear into his shoulder. Then Matthews pulled his Bowie knife from his sheath and he thrust the blade into the monster's back. The *loup garou* howled in fury and Matthews kept stabbing it until the monster picked up from off the ground and the creature's cry mixed with the high pitched scream of the wind. Matthews stared deep into its eyes, which to him was a portal to a primal, lawless world in which he was forced into.

Matthews jabbed his knife into one of its eyes and the creature threw him down to the ground again. The impact bruised Matthews' back and he shivered as he struggled to get up. He saw the outline of the *loup garou* hold its gouged eye. Then Matthews looked back to see the flame in the cave entrance and he rushed over there. He heard the creature huff after him.

Matthews felt dizzy as he took another stick out of the fire. He felt he was bleeding profusely and he started losing focus on the red eyes and wide jaws of the wolf-like figure chasing after him on all fours. Then Matthews stuck the stick at the creature's head and thrust it into its chest. The *loup garou's* fur caught on fire and Matthews watched as the wolf-thing writhed and delivered a shrill wail as it stumbled out of the cave and into the flurry in which it came.

Then Matthews fell onto his knees. He felt he was getting weaker and he had no way of searing the wound. Then he looked at the torch he used to fend the beast off with. Matthews struggled out of his jacket and his shirt. Then he took the torch and he brushed the fire against his wounds. Matthews cried out in pain as he felt the fire searing flesh. He felt his muscles tense and he fought with himself to keep the fire on the wound.

Then Matthews lost grip of the torch and he fell close to the fire.

Matthews was running in the woods. He heard it growl behind him and he knew it was not too far off from where he was. He ran down a slope but tripped on his way down. The white engulfed him as he rolled down to the bottom. Matthews just saw a blurry outline of bare trees, frost covered pines. A mix of snow and dirt blocked his vision.

He pushed himself up but felt a strong body push him down as he came face to face with himself, bearing a wolfish grin and a pair of blazing, blood-red eyes. He saw the jaws open and it thrust its head to bite off Matthews' face...

Matthews opened his eyes.

He felt his wound on his naked flesh. He felt the marks, which resembled the marks made on serrated steak knives, and gasped to realize he survived *that*.

Matthews stood up and stared out into the cavern. It was daylight. He put back on his shirt and his coat. Then he saw the .38 he dropped during the fight with the *loup garou*. As he walked forward to pick it up, Matthews coughed violently. He bent down and saw the gun but he felt something rip open at his shoulder wound. He screamed in agony as he gripped the wound. Matthews turned and vomited on the cave floor. He shook and he panted as he tried to regain his footing.

What the hell was that about? Matthews put a hand on the cavern wall, and then he slowly bent down to pick up the handle of his .38. With weary hands, he popped open the cylinder and he found three rounds left in the gun. Just three rounds. He thrust the gun into one of his pockets and he felt for the knife in the leather sheath. Matthews knew he must have dropped it somewhere. He searched the cavern floor and found it was close to the fire. Matthews picked up the blade, placed it into the sheath and he wondered out of the cave to grip his aching shoulder.

As he wandered out into the woods, Matthews looked at his campus. He was still going south. His truck must still be somewhere within the vicinity of the woods. As he wondered down a hill dominated by trees, Matthews contemplated his role in the woods. For years, he hunted in the wilderness and he never felt the fear an animal would have if it were chased down. But now, this experience of being hunted down by a creature beyond his understanding made him consider that he was being punished. He stopped and breathed heavily when his shoulder twitched again. Matthews grasped a tree, and then he took out a piece of cooked fox meat. He chewed it and he immediately felt disgusted by the texture. It just was not as

good as it was last night.

Maybe the pain and the cold somehow nullified his taste buds. Yeah right.

He remembered that according to legend, a werewolf's bite would turn its victim into something like it. As Matthews looked ahead in the woods, he felt the handle of his .38. He did not feel as cold as he was. Maybe this was a sign of the transformation. He was about to pull it out but then he thrust it into his pocket. No, he had to keep moving.

Matthews followed the direction of his compass until he saw a hard-looking green shape covered in frost. His heart thudded as he believed it was his truck. Matthews broke into a run and as he beat back the brambles, he pulled the truck keys out of one of his coat pockets. He reached the door of his truck and he jammed the key into the lock. Matthews twisted it and he took the key out to pull the door. But it would not budge. His truck had been out for so long that it was covered in frost. He wrenched the door one more time and when he finally tore the door from its icy hinges, he felt his shoulder tinged sharply again. Matthews hissed as he hoisted himself into the cab. Then he shut the door.

Matthews inserted the key into the ignition but the engine only creaked in reply. He tried again and the creaking scratched into his ears. He gritted his teeth until he heard the truck roar to life. He paused struggling with the ignition and he breathed in the thin air. Matthews felt the revolver in his pocket again. If it did not start, what the hell would he do now? The solid grip of his .38 no longer felt comforting.

He twisted the ignition again and after some creaking, the engine roared with fire. Matthews stepped on the accelerator to rev the engine. Then Matthews heard metal twist and rend as he looked up to find a burned up claw slash at the side of his face. He screamed as he tasted his own blood. Then the same arm gripped his shoulder and crushed at it. Matthews struggled to get his knife out as the arm of the *loup garou* crushed it. He jabbed the knife deep into its arm and started cutting at it and he tried to ignore the beast's intense, agonized growl. Blood spurted back at his face and Matthews was blinded in red as he cut into the meat of the *loup garou's* gnarled appendage.

Matthews heard bone cracking and he wrenched off part of the *loup garou's* arm. He felt hot blood flood upon him. He was blinded by the pure color of dark red as he heard something being wrenched open behind him. Matthews opened his eyes, only to find himself pulled by a strong force. It pulled him back like he was ripped away into the air by a bloodstained bungee cord. He saw the color of dark brown, red, and white mix together as he hit the ground with a solid grunt. Matthews looked up to find two burned, hideous clawed feet close to his head. Then he looked up to find the tall burned wolf

shape staring at him with an angry red eye and several rows of sharp teeth waiting to gnaw into him.

Matthews tried backing away but the *loup garou* lurched forward and grabbed him by the coat. It growled at him, as if venting its misery of the hunt on this man who eluded it for so long. Matthews breathed in and screamed as he pulled out his .38 and jabbed it down the monster's throat. It bit into his arm as Matthews pulled squeezed the trigger three times. He did not care as he was rewarded with the sound of exploding bone and brains. The scent of gun smoke mingling with charred flesh sent a rush through Matthews who felt himself falling to the ground.

He looked to the side to see the *loup-garou's* cracked open head crash into the dirt and snow. He felt his bones quiver and his heart race as he burned from the inside to the sound of crackling legs, ribs, and arms...

Matthews rose up and sniffed the air. He leapt off the ground and rushed straight into the trees. Then he saw the moose turn in his direction. Matthews slashed at the moose's throat and it fell down. He felt the hot blood in his hands and he looked at it to lick it off.

Then he dove into the moose's flank and ripped open its fur to pull out the hot flesh inside. He finally had his prize moose after all.

© 2012 Kristopher Miller