



THE VENGER
AN AMERICAN WESTERN

FRED BROUSSARD

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“I guess I do.” Joelee turns to face the table. His voice is menacing. “Well. Get up. I will give you a chance. I am going to kill you.” The other patrons raise their hands, and use the back of their knees to ease their chairs away from the table.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Joelee: Raised in a brutal and evil environment, the murder of his mother and the killing of his brother directs his motivations to rid the Earth of evil persons-the ultimate evil: his Stepfather-Hal Lee. As an adult, Joelee visualizes his killings as executions approved by God.

Hal Lee: The Devil personified in the guise of a ruthless frontiersman. Protected by Evil, he continually eludes his pursuer.

Turk: A friend to Joelee. An idealist who subliminally foresees his demise.

Laura: The perfect woman for any outdoorsman. Principled, strong-willed and beautiful. She controls all situations that she influences. Chaos comes from afar - out of reach.

THE BEGINNING. . .

It is midday. Summer. Just east of the Continental Divide, where in modern times the city of El Paso Texas is located. Heading east towards the Mississippi River a traveler becomes in awe by the unlimited expanse of barren land. At this spot, the sun radiates blistering heat. Temperature vapors rise from the earth like shimmering transparent snakes. Miles distant, northward heavy black clouds fill the wide gap between two mountain ranges. From this space crooked streams of lightning sporadically, quietly arc within a cauldron of black haze. A summer monsoon storm roils across the arid plains. Soon drenching downpours of biblical-like floods will swish through gullies, and overflow natural inlets. Viewing left, a separation between two mountains forms a wide, but seemingly prominent gap. A swirling mass of tumultuous storm clouds fills this gap. Suddenly, a lone steed appears, as if a miniature child's toy emerges from the gap. The horse lopez. At this distance, it appears as if the steed is deformed; that a huge growth swells along its neck, but a gunman rides the steed hunkering low in the saddle.

The steed's gait is evenly spaced, not hurried, not wearied. Sadie moves purposefully. To the far distant, but observing unseen quarry, Sadie's movement appears relentless. Joelee rides with his face near Sadie's neck. His eyes swing down periodically to follow the faint signs on the hard ground of his quarry's trail. Before the rains may possibly obliterate the tracks, Joelee visually selects a far distant mountain peak that the tracks are heading.

A far mountain peak will be Joelee's guidepost. Occasionally Joelee peers into the distance, and visually sweeps the horizon to sight for the rogue that he has sworn to catch. Sworn to kill.

The year is 1857, outside the town of Winkleman, Arizona. In the expanding west, strong men take the property or lives of others. Men, terrified by the prospect of singly confronting ruffians unite as Vigilantes, or purchase a champion that they refer to as Sheriff. There is no law west of the Mississippi. Joelee is not a sheriff. He delivers revenge for those persons who yearn for justice, and who are not physically capable of harming or killing the perpetrators of pain or evil themselves. The men who perform Joelee's service are designated Vengers.

Minutes pass and the tumultuous clouds engulf Joelee and Sadie. Joelee does not rein the horse in, but turns the brim of his hat down all the way around to shed the torrent. The downpour ends just as abruptly as it begins. Once in the clear of the rain Joelee sits upright. Sadie maintains her gait. In the southwest desert, it is always hot in the daytime, mostly cold at night.

In layers Joelee's garments protects his torso, a buckskin outer coat, a wool sweater, wool shirt, long-johns. A Spartan lifestyle has sculptured Joelee's frame into a muscular 230 pounds at 6'2", but the man appears monstrously larger in the bulky clothes.

Allowing his eyes to drift forward Joelee extends his vision to follow the hoof-prints into the distance. Joelee carries his Hawken rifle resting across the pommel. With Joelee's ability and the .54 caliber bullet, the 33-inch barrel is deadly at 500 yards.

Joelee stops Sadie and dismounts. He kneels to examine the hoof-prints. The notch of the quarry's horseshoe is in place. This is the right horse. The foe should be atop this steed. Joelee remounts. Looking up leftward Joelee holds Sadie's pace. He sees a sight, a mountain projection. Joelee softly exclaims. "Well, I will be- - ." Looking far into the high mountain ranges

to his left, Joelee observes the telltale map turning point. The directions of the bartender at the last town echoes within Joelee's brain. "Follow the trail out of town southeast until you see tits. Then follow the gap to the right until you see the valley open. The town of Ajo will be some sixty miles dead ahead."

Tits are the imaginary configuration of a male fantasizing a female lying on her back. The twin tops of a distant mountain resembles the breasts of a reclining female with back ached, two luscious tits (twin peaks) jut upward. Joelee nods then guides Sadie. The hoof prints drift toward the general direction of the expected valley opening. Joelee urges Sadie onward.

Some two hours later Joelee knows that his quarry must be nearer to the town than he expected. In the expanse of the plains, distances are deceptive. Joelee stops Sadie. He takes a few sips from his canteen. Joelee dismounts and walks to Sadie's front. He doffs his hat and pours a good drink for Sadie. The horse thirstily sips the water. Joelee knows that he must replenish his canteen and allow Sadie to drink. These mountains are the best place to stop and re-fill his water supply. Holding Sadie's reins Joelee leads the way up the crags.

Looking ahead Joelee observes a depression with a large overhanging boulder, the perfect location for a pool of water to remain after a desert squall. A slight breeze blows upward ruffling his clothing. Joelee carries his rifle in his left hand. He utilizes the hand holding the reins to snug his hat atop his head. Walking gingerly on the balls of his feet, Joelee leads Sadie up the slope. He has Sadie's reins wrapped around his right palm, so with a tug, when necessary he can assist the horse up the rocky slope.

The sounds of Sadie's iron-shoes echo throughout the hills, resounding as if herds of beasts are trudging through the area. High enough on the slope to look down into the pool Joelee exclaims. "Dam it." A horde of bees has claimed this pool as

their property. Above Joelee's view, upon the large boulder, a mountain lion crouches for prey. Motionless, fangs bared, the large cat hugs the rocks. Joelee begins to squat. The lion leaps. Sadie catches a glimpse of the lion. Sadie rears. Sadie exclaims. "NEIGH!" Sadie's right hoof deflects the lion's flight.

Fortuitously, Joelee's clenched right hand with Sadie's reins swings across his face. The lion crashes against Joelee's body. Joelee and the big cat spin over backward, and down the slope. Sadie bucks and pulls away. Sadie screams. NEIGH! Joelee pushes a foot/knee into the lion's body. Gutturally snarling, the lion has clamped onto Joelee's arm with the hand that clutches Sadie's reins. Instinctively clawing, the lion swipes all four paws into and across Joelee's body. The hills resonate with the sounds of materials ripping. The lion is unconcerned which meal will be first, the defenseless human, or the defenseless horse.

Joelee tries to hold his precious rifle aloft. A long-barreled rifle is not the choice for close in fighting, but Joelee knows that if he drops the gun on stone he may destroy the weapon's accuracy. Sadie rears. NEIGH! Sadie bucks. Sadie does not care which combatant wins the fight, she just wishes to get away. Clamor rages within the hills. Sadie pulls Joelee and the lion. Joelee screams. "WHOA SADIE." Joelee cannot regain his balance. Sadie's neck cannot whip away with the combined weight of nearly a quarter-ton attached. Sadie's hooves slide over the rocks. Joelee fears for his life, equally he knows that Sadie will be useless if she suffers a debilitating injury. Sadie snorts. The lion still clamps Joelee's forearm with the hand holding the reins, so that he cannot flex his fingers. Almost of equal weight, the four-legged beast has the advantage. Clamping Joelee's forearm the lion flings Joelee's body clear of the ground. Sadie wails the agonizing outcry of facing death. The sounds of leather sliding across sandstone. The scraping of gravel across boulders fills the air. The lion snarls. Eyes agape and ablaze with terror

Sadie grunts, neighs, kicks, bucks, and whines to pull away from the dangerous carnivore. The area abounds with the sounds of battle. There is the banging and the clatter of wood and metal against rocks and boulders. In a frenzied tug of war, Sadie drags Joelee and the puma across the rocks. Sadie screams. NEIGH! The lion swipes a paw towards Joelee's face. Joelee turns his face aside. Glancing Joelee sees Sadie sliding on her back down the rocky slope. Her legs pumping the air like she is galloping on invisible turf. Gravity and turmoil impetus spins Joelee atop the puma. Sadie's frenzied tug twists the battlers to give the lion the advantage.

Joelee stiffens the arm with the clamped hand in an attempt to push the lion away. Joelee and the lion roll over the stones, each one attempting to land on top. Instinctively deciding to allow his trusty rifle to fall away, Joelee releases his weapon. Sadie screams continuously. NEIGH.

Now, with his free left-hand Joelee fumbles along his waist then triumphantly locates his knife. In one swift, smooth motion, Joelee extracts the hunting knife. With a mighty extension of his arm, the gleaming twelve-inch blade swings high outward, and then plunges deep into the huge cat's body. The lion screams. SCCCCCH! The lion kicks away. Joelee holds the knife as the lion's body recoils from the pain. The knife-blade severs the cat's body. The lion screams. SCCCCCH! The hills catch the wail and carry the echo. Joelee releases the fingers holding Sadie's reins. Sadie screams, NEIGH! Sadie gallops away. Staggering, Joelee regains his balance.

A short distance away, the lion rocks as if catching its breath. Arms bowed in a defensive stance Joelee holds the knife extended outward. Blood drips from the blade and covers Joelee's hand. With each breath, entrails slowly empty from the lion's body. From the ugly gash on the puma's chest blood rhythmically pulses outward. The lion and Joelee face each other. Their eyes

meet. Joelee's chest heaves while sucking in air. Teeth bared the large cat's body progressively eases downward until it rests on its belly. The lion gradually flexes its jaws as if whispering a plea, or if absentmindedly chewing some meal. Mouth agape the regal mountain lion's chin slowly lowers to the earth. Eyes' glazing the puma appears leisurely to close its mouth. Joelee notices that he has held his breath. Silently, as if not wishing to disturb the big cat, Joelee exhales. Joelee relaxes and then rests the knife upon his knee.

In one definitive motion, Joelee flings his hat at the lion's snout, but the big cat remains motionless. Joelee drags the huge cat away from the approaches of the pool. He skins the puma.

Hours later Joelee locates Sadie. The gelding is skittish as Joelee approaches; she trembles violently, as if she swims in the frigid Artic Ocean. Sadie's skin twitches like volumes of flies nip at her flesh. Joelee's voice is soft as he attempts to calm his four-legged friend. Joelee rubs Sadie's mane and neck as he quietly talks. He must urge Sadie to return to the pool both need liquid refreshment. After the trek, Joelee stands over the pool with a piece of smoking eucalyptus bark. Periodically he waves the smoking wand to keep the bees away. Joelee looks up at the surroundings. Silently he surmises that if this location develops as a likely place for water, he should have recognized that predators would also believe that this would be a good place to linger for prey. The bees buzz menacingly out of range of the smoke barrier. Sadie stands over the pool, her muzzle deep into the energizing waters.

An hour later Joelee stows the lion's pelt into a crevice. There is no way that Sadie will allow Joelee to strap the puma's smell onto her back. Joelee examines his clothing his buckskins are in tatters. Shrugging, Joelee allows that the repairs of his clothing will be later; now, pursuit has priority.

Ajo is dark when Joelee reaches the outskirts of the

settlement. He removes Sadie's riding apparel. The horse begins to nibble the scrub-grass. Joelee crawls into a depression and reclines with his chest facing eastward. The rising sun will be his alarm clock. He lays his rifle across his chest. This is not the location for a human to scream. "Wait until I get my gun!" Wearily, from the day's past excitement and the long ride Joelee falls asleep.

Hours later as the Sun's rays crest the horizon Joelee stands. After he gathers his gear and readies Sadie, he walks toward the town. He holds the rifle in his left hand. Sadie trails unfettered. Joelee hears repetitive clanking as he nears the closest building. Joelee enters the blacksmith's shop.

The smithy is squat, a very muscular appearing man. The blacksmith beats a horseshoe atop an anvil. He looks up and stops his work as Joelee enters. The Smithy queries. "Good morning sir. How may I help you?" Joelee replies. "Will you give my horse a half-bucket of oats and some hay?" Joelee and the Smithy agree on the price. Joelee removes Sadie's riding tack and leads her into a stall.

So far, all of Joelee's actions have been routine. Now, Joelee departs from the usual. Joelee removes his coat and jacket. He flips the garments over the edge of the stall. He lays his rifle leaning muzzle-up in one corner. He opens one saddlebag and removes a holstered weapon. Joelee sucks his belly-in as he straps the gun around his waist. The Smithy's eyes gawk. The Smithy queries. "Are you expecting trouble mister?" Joelee replies indifferently. "No. Strange town. No telling who's around." The Smithy makes a face and turns back toward his anvil. Joelee removes the modified navy pistol, and opens the breech. He removes the five cartridges. Removal of the trigger radically modifies the handgun. The revolver is the 1841 Patterson Colt. This gun has an accentuated large hammer. Joelee re-loads the weapon and re-inserts it back into the holster.

Joelee checks the ease of the gun's swivel in the scabbard. The Venger walks out into the sunlight.

It is still early morning. Joelee walks toward the cantina. There is no sign on the building, but Joelee observes that this is the sole location with the only horses visible on the street. Joelee walks behind the horses. Bending, he inspects the ground around the animal's hooves. He is looking for the telltale horseshoe. He sees the mark imprinted in the dust.

Joelee straightens and loosens his pistol in the scabbard. He walks to the door of the cantina. Inside the room, it is ominously semi-dark. It takes a few moments for Joelee's eyes to adjust to the diminished glare. There are six males in the room plus the bartender behind the counter. The customers sit as a jovial bunch at one table. Each of the patrons holds a container of elixir – warm home brew or moonshine whiskey. The men all smile as they relax from the end of someone's anecdote. Unconcerned, the seated patrons look-up toward the oncoming stranger.

Joelee's voice booms in the quiet of the room. "Who is riding the roan outside?" One of the men inhales, none replies, none moves jerkily. QUIET. . . Finally, a reply. "It is mine." A gruff-looking male swells in his seat. The other men stare bewildered toward the Responder. Joelee queries. "Do you have an 'L' shaped scar on your right hand between the thumb and forefinger?" The Responder nonchalantly looks down at his right hand. His tone barely audible signals the killer's inner foreboding resignation to this possible moment. "I guess I do." Joelee turns to face the table. His voice is menacing. "Well. Get up. I will give you a chance. I am going to kill you." The other patrons raise their hands, and use the back of their knees to ease their chairs away from the table. The room resounds with scratching wood-chairs against the wood floor. The bystanders rise from their chairs, and tiptoe away from their cohort. The Responder slowly throws both palms up. He does not blink and he stares

at Joelee. Responder queries for an advantage. "I am not armed. Are you going to shoot me down like a dog?" Joelee shrugs; his tone is fatalistic. "That is your problem mister. If you have a weapon, you had best use it." Keeping both hands in plain view, Responder slowly rises. He queries feinting godliness. "Can I say a prayer?" Responder begins to turn his face up, but keeps his eyes focused upon Joelee. Moving quickly, Responder uses his right elbow to move his coat aside. With that same hand, he reaches for a waist pistol. In a flash, with his right hand Joelee swivels the navy .41 caliber pistol horizontal. Simultaneously squatting and throwing his left palm across his body, Joelee fans the hammer three times. Joelee becomes God on Earth.

Sounding as a single shot Joelee's gun expels three bullets. BRRROOMMM! All three bullets hit Responder from the breastplate to his neck. Responder's body sails backward, seemingly nailed to the wall. Responder's derringer trickles from his fingers. Were it not for the wall, the impacts of the gun's projectiles would have immediately knocked the man down. Responder's eyes roll up. Blood spills over his teeth and down his chin. Sinking knees first, Responder collapses to the floor, balances a second then falls face forward.

Joelee remains in a crouch. His left hand remains across his body, palm open to fan the .41 Colt again. Smoke waifs from the nozzle of the gun. The smell of cordite fills the room. No one moves or even blinks an eye. QUIET. . . Joelee eases upright but still clutches the handle of his weapon. He slowly swings his eyes in an arc to observe the reactions, or possible involvement from any of Responder's acquaintances. No one moves. Quiet. . .

Joelee opens the breech. One by one, he removes the expended shells. Joelee drops the empty casings into one pocket then re-inserts three fresh bullets. Outside, multiple hurried footsteps sound on the boardwalk. Joelee straightens then turns sideways to the door and the bar's witnesses. He lays the Colt along his

right leg. Soon the room fills with the town's males. One Citizen queries. "What happened?" The bartender speaks. Pointing. "The stranger here killed the guy on the floor back there." Citizen asks. "Was it a fair fight?" The Bartender shrugs, but replies. "I guess. They seemed to know each other." One of the witnesses volunteers; his voice is low, amplified by the quietness in the room. "He murdered the man. Let us string him up."

Showing that the Colt's hammer is set while appearing to swing the muzzle of the gun indifferently, Joelee quickly interjects. "This man was a murderer. A family up near the panhandle befriended him. He ambushed the husband, killed the boy, and then raped the wife. He left the wife for dead. I swore to the widow that I would avenge her family." Joelee waits a moment. Unseen mumbling comes from the pack. The vigilantes stir, but no one makes an outburst. Joelee continues. "Besides the identifying mark on his hand, he has seven Spanish gold pieces in his pockets. The family's savings." One Witness bends and hurriedly rummages through Responder's pockets. Witness holds one hand up. He jiggles coins. His words verify the killer's statements. "He is right." Joelee holsters his weapon. Returning to his gruesome assignment Joelee strides across the room. Joelee's spurs jingle in satire with the somber occurrence. Clomp. Clomp, sounds in the confines of the otherwise silent room as Joelee's boots hits the floor. Joelee walks forward until he is able to kneel by the dead man's body. Joelee lifts the corpse's identifying palm.

Joelee extracts his knife. Like butchering the paw of an animal, Joelee cuts between the dead-man's forefinger and middle finger. Joelee hears sucking and gasps from the crowd; obviously directed toward his gruesome task. Joelee continues mutilating the corpse until he removes enough of the forefinger, thumb, and the skin with the telltale 'L' mark. Some of the men appallingly frown as if the room has filled with the ultimate of

putrid odors. Citizen queries. “What is the reason for your action mister?” Joelee’s face immediately flushes to a dark color. His body slightly stiffens. Almost on cue, two of the original witnesses quickly saunter to the bar. Seemingly not wanting to remain facing the gunman alone, the other three men hurry to face the bar. If there was going to be a confrontation, these men wanted to make sure that they would not be included. Joelee drops his right hand near his side. “I take the identifying mark to the victim to show that I have completed the task.”

Quiet. . . Citizen shrugs and motions to a few of the other bystanders; this group ambles to Responder, lifts the corpse and walks outside. The other bystanders either take seats at tables, or stroll to the bar. Joelee relaxes. He wraps the evidence in a cloth. Frowning slightly, he stows the confirmation into one pocket. Those viewing Joelee’s actions might wonder. How did this man come to be this ruthless, detached human? Change begins in childhood.

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