

Damn the wilderness! Save the children at all costs.

SLINGSHOT 8: THE OLD WORLD

by Danny Creasy

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Book Two in the
Spared Territory Series

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by Danny Creasy



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WORLD***

Danny Creasy

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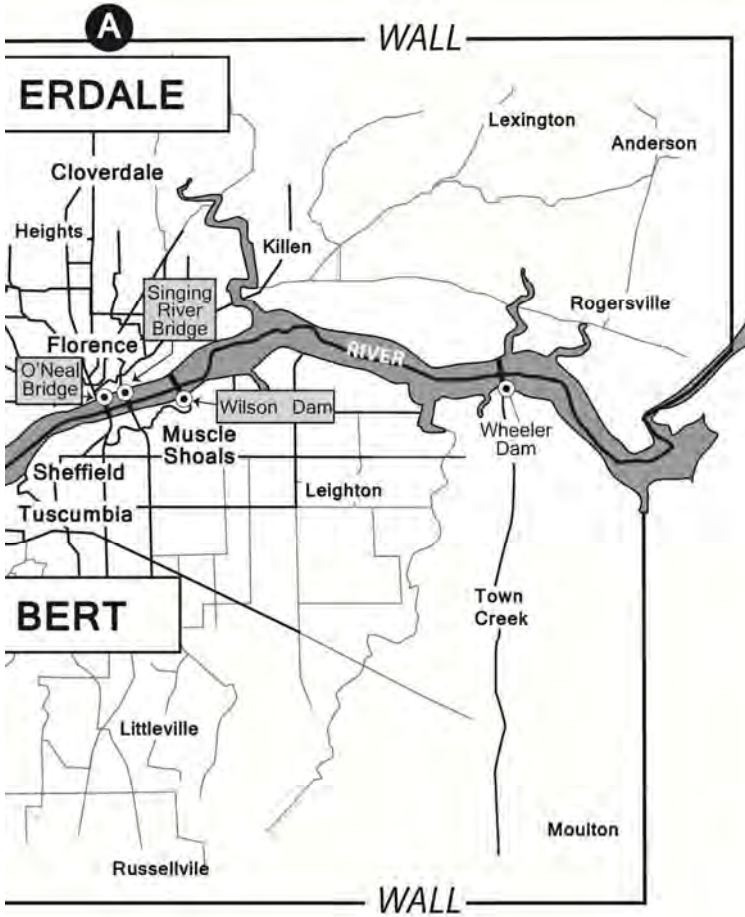
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SPARED TERRI



TORY- YEAR 72



**DAY ONE –
MORNING AND
AFTERNOON**

Tim Gray wasn't quite sure whether he caught the wolf in his peripheral vision or merely sensed its presence. Nonetheless, there it was, standing on the ledge above the bank of Middle Cypress Creek. The creature's eyes fixed on Tim's. In spite of his years of experience as an outdoorsman and soldier, Tim found it disconcerting. The trapper's .36 caliber flintlock rifle was propped against a maple tree to the right of the wolf. Tim had placed it there while he clambered down into the creek to retrieve his capture, a muskrat. This was his last trap, the most distant from his watchman's tower on the Spared Territory's Northern Wall.

Tim had left his post at first light on this late November Sunday morning. It usually took him an hour to work his mile long string of traps. He had enjoyed better yields. Still, he was proud of the morning's work. Standing on the creek bank, Tim's wooden-framed capture pack now held a beaver, a red fox, and three muskrats. He had just finished tying the drowned muskrat to his pack-frame; all his traps were set to quickly drown the furbearers within a half-minute or so of ensnarement.

The pelts would easily bring him a hundred Colbert credits. In the two years since the War of Reunification, the Colbert currency's presence in Lauderdale had increased exponentially. Its declaration as the official currency of the Spared Territory was inevitable. Deep pockets from south of the Tennessee River were wide open. Pelts, handicraft, moonshine, and Lauderdale flintlock rifles were much in demand. Tim couldn't help them with the latter three, but he could sure enough trap. The demand for furs quickly rendered most of Lauderdale trapped out. In spite of Tennessee's forbidden status, Tim saw the lands just north of Lauderdale as a goldmine. He resigned from the mill in September and volunteered for full time militia duty on the Northern Wall. Tim managed to secure one of the solo positions—lonely and disagreeable duty for many but not Tim. His commander may have been aware of the trapping, but if so, he was ignoring it. Tim knew others were plying this trade as well. Stalwart watchmen were hard to find, and the wall commanders were turning a blind eye out of necessity.

Tim's friend and fellow watchman, Jaybird Rhodes, said the night before, "Hell, what was the wall good for anyway. Nobody is left in the Old World. It really seems like the ST walls are more for keepin' us in!"

Tim saw movement on his left flank. He caught a flash of what he suspected was a second wolf among the underbrush above the creek bank. That wolf would soon be behind him. A third wolf appeared in front of him. A big gray now stood on each side of his rifle, both with the same intimidating stare. Once again, he had yet to hear the sound of their movement. Tim thought, *Sweet Jesus, those wolves must run close to 150 pounds each!*

At this point, Tim realized he would have to abandon this morning's captures. He tried to stay calm while he developed a plan to save his own hide. His first move was to carefully pull his folding trapper's knife from his pocket and open the 4-1/4" clip blade—not the shorter pen blade. Thousands of repetitions made that task simple to complete without shifting his eyes from the pair of wolves in front of him.

In spite of the wolves' stealth, Tim was confident he would hear an attack or approach from behind, as it would require a wolf's clattery movement over creek-gravel and shallow water.

After slowly transferring the knife to his left hand, he slipped his right hand to his hip and removed his little hatchet from its belt sheath. He then transferred the two tools, now weapons, in his hands. The knife was now in his right hand with point forward for slashing and stabbing. Tim grasped the hatchet in his left for parrying and hacking. He was armed.

For armor, the thick cotton-duck militia field jacket and trousers would have to do. It dawned on him that the wolves would probably go for his throat. He slowly squatted down and cut one of the leather straps from his pack frame. He arose and smoothly wrapped the strap around his neck using index fingers and thumbs while his other fingers controlled the blades. He started with the center of the strap high on the back of his neck and wound it around, crossing the leather, until he could tuck a few inches of each end down in the neck of his thermal undershirt. He stopped this binding once as one of the grays leaned

forward, but after a few seconds' pause, and no further advance from the wolf, he continued.

Tim had few options. He could toss his kills to the side of Middle Cypress in hopes that the massive canines would go for the easy snacks instead of the more difficult, larger feast. This might even provide him with an open path to his rifle. In all practicality, he would only have one shot, but a solid hit on one of the pack could cause the others to leave him be. He could then escape south to Lauderdale and reload on the fly. Intuition warned Tim; the complicated and aggressive throwing of anything might initiate an attack.

He could simply move into the creek and try to wade or swim downstream to the wall. However, it was over his head in places and some spots had steep, slimy banks. He had no idea about the wolves' inclination to attack in the water, but he doubted if it would be much of a deterrent. He might stumble into a deep spot and lose one or both of his weapons. The water escape had fewer pros than cons.

Suddenly, a wolf appeared to his right, just above the west bank of the creek, then a second one beside it. Nearing panic, he looked behind, and upon finding no wolves in view, began to side step along the creek bank towards a wide, shallow area a couple of hundred feet to his north. He silently rationalized, *Maybe I can back away from my furs and they'll close on 'em. That'll give me a chance to circle around to the east and head south.*

The first two wolves stayed by his rifle and were soon out of view because of a bend in the creek. Unfortunately, the two on the west bank moved north with Tim. After hitting the flats, Tim looked east and south and upon seeing no threat, he moved away from the creek. The two wolves to the west splashed across the shallows and followed him. Emotion urged him to run, but composure won out and kept him slowly side stepping and pivoting—checking all directions as he veered south. He could see his rifle again. The original pair were not in view, and he was tempted to head for the weapon. *Could they be down in the creek on my loaded pack frame?* Tim turned. *Oh my God, there they are.* The wolves each had distinct coloration and fur patterns. He recognized the first pair, now just a few feet to his south. *Dang it, where did they come from? I just scanned that area.*

It dawned on Tim that this wasn't about hunger. These canines were waxing fat. The Old World's food chain was exploding, especially the tier below these carnivores. *No!* Tim reasoned this aggression was territorial in origin.

All four were soon circling Tim, stopping every few feet then moving again. *I know what you're doing. Sizing me up. Searching for weakness.* He spoke aloud, "Well, there ain't none here. I'm ready for all comers. C'mon you demons. I dare ya. Ya don't want a piece of this. Un uh!"

Tim was a big man, over six feet tall and a solid 230 pounds. He crouched and circled in a defensive stance. Wheeling the hatchet and knife in tight, threatening, circular patterns towards the pack. Tim's panic had turned to anger, but as he realized that the four had become six, his heart sank and his legs weakened a bit.

Tim didn't even catch the first attack until the wolf clamped down on his left calf. He reacted quickly and swung hard with his hatchet, striking a glancing blow off the wolf's skull. The canine yelped and jerked back, dazed and snarling. Tim pivoted to receive the next attack head on. He jabbed his attacker's open mouth with his knife and followed it with a solid hatchet strike to its rib cage. Tim took the impact in his arms, but the momentum set him back a few steps into another attacking wolf. Fangs sunk into the leather wrapping on the back of his neck. They did not break skin but the force of the bite was numbing. Tim spun to his right. The wolf's teeth lost their purchase on the slippery leather. The beast was slung to the side. After Tim stopped the spin, no wolves were in front of him so he sprinted in that direction. They gave him little respite. Within ten yards, two wolves took Tim down from behind. One snared his coattail and the other clamped the back of his right arm. Tim fell, turning and flailing with his weapons. The wolves' hold was broken. They recoiled and immediately lunged towards his arms and face, while a third clamped on to his left leg and furiously shook its head. Tim screamed, thrashed, and kicked free of the three only to be pulled down by the next tag-team within a few feet. Fang lined jaws clamped down on the top of his skull, but they slipped free with his wool toboggan cap. Another wolf almost got its jaws around his neck, but Tim thrust the hatchet

into its mouth and stabbed the knife's blade in its ear canal. Tim scooted backwards on his butt. The bloody creature violently jerked in death throes. Tim's reversal halted after his shoulder blades slammed into a tree trunk.

Tim swept the blood and sweat from his eyes with his sleeve. He scanned the scene to assess his situation. A few seconds free of the lupine throttling were a Godsend. *Thank you Jesus!* To Tim's immediate front, the dying creature convulsed while off to its sides at least a dozen motley colored timber wolves milled about. Some were bloodied but most were unscathed—all were locked on Tim. Tim's head, hands, forearms, and legs were bleeding. The fangs had torn through his layered clothing. However, he had no abdominal or throat bleeding. With a quick side-glance, he assessed his flank.

Disoriented, Tim stopped panting for a moment and listened for the creek. At first, it was hard to detect the babbling water's sound above the intermittent snarls and growls of the wolves. *At least I've aggravated 'em.* Finally, Tim heard the creek. Middle Cypress was now to his left, at some distance, and the rising sun, to his right, indicated he was facing north. His oak was a big one. It was broader than his shoulders. He decided it was best to receive the next wolf attack from here. At least he had a protected one-eighty behind him.

Tim drew his knees up to give them some protection and preload them for kicking. He placed his hands on either side of his thighs and flipped the hold on his knife to point-down and edge forward.

The next onslaught overtook him. As if planned by committee, three wolves hit him simultaneously. After they pulled him away from the tree, others soon enjoined. Tim could no longer distinguish the bites. The hatchet and knife were gone from his hands and he was no longer striking back. Mentally, he saw images of his little family—*Bye-bye, Connie, Candace, and Carl. Lord, help me.*

Just as Tim was losing consciousness, the vicious killing snarls changed to yelps and cries. Tim was on his side staring at his big oak tree. He saw a short, bloodied, arrow drive into the trunk, and felt a wolf's body crumple over him. It rolled into his field of vision kicking and thrashing as blood spewed out of wounds on either side of its chest cavity. Tim wondered, *Angels?*



Lauderdale President Henry Wade Smith V rolled over and winked at his beautiful wife, Colbert President Catherine Isabel Ragland Smith. She had been staring at him as he emerged from nah-nah land. She chuckled at her husband and asked in a whisper, “How does anyone wake up that good lookin’?”

“Takes one to know one,” he replied with the same whispering voice.

“Yeah, right.”

“Cut the shit, girl. You look like an angel—a golden haired angel.”

She leaned in to kiss him and he wrapped his arms around her to pull her in close as his leg came to rest on her hip. Any apprehensions over morning breath were quickly overwhelmed by the wonderful softness of their kiss.

“Hey, me!” fourteen-month-old Henry Wade Smith VI called from his baby bed in the adjoining nursery.

The couple moaned in frustration.

“Go, Harry, before he wakes Clementine.”

Harry broke the embrace and rolled away rising to his feet. He crept by one-month-old Clementine’s bassinet, peeked in and smiled at their sleeping baby girl. The door to the nursery was open. Harry entered and saw his son standing in the baby bed grasping the bars like a jailbird.

“Dah!”

“Yeah, it’s your Dah,” said Harry as he hurried to secure the little loudmouth. He lifted Henry and kissed his forehead. “Shh shh, son. Don’t wake your sissy.”

Harry returned to his side of the bed and crawled in. Catherine took the boy in her arms. He grinned and giggled upon spying her face. They cuddled for a few minutes until the active little fellow could stand the bed no more.

“Cate, I’ll take him down and feed him. You rest until Clementine wakes up.”

“No, I’m wide awake. Thanks though. While you feed him, I’ll make pancakes.”

“Sounds good, darlin’.”

They smiled at each other and kissed again. Catherine lingered in bed a moment as she watched Harry stroll out with the future president of the Spared Territory. *Not Colbert. Not Lauderdale. For the first time ever, the ST would have one ruler.*



“Hi, Miss Jenny!”

Jenny Hart waved at the Williams boy, standing by the side of McKelvey Hollow Road, and replied, “Mornin’, Little Mike!”

He smiled at her as she slowed from a sprint to a jog. He was returning from his early morning hunting expedition along the shores of the Tennessee River.

“Good shootin’, son. Two rabbits and a fox squirrel?”

“Yes, ma’am!” and he proudly held up the kills.

In spite of the interruption to her cherished morning workout, she stopped to visit with the eldest son of her closest neighbors, Michael and Tassy Williams. She adored the polite young man and never ceased to be amazed at his woodcraft and shooting skills. “What’s that, Mike, a breechloader?”

“Yes, ma’am. It’s a little single shot break-open carbine. It is chambered for .357 Magnum. Daddy taught me how to cast 158-grain lead round nose bullets for it. I lube ‘em with beeswax and seat ‘em in .38 Special cases on top of a case full of fffg black powder. It clobbers these small animals without tearin’ ‘em up real bad. That hard bullet drives clean through, like a pencil. The scope is an old fixed four-power. It’s a little yella’ but still clear enough. We got a .22 long rifle barrel for it as well. It will shoot rimfire or centerfire cartridges, but the rimfire ammo is nigh on impossible to come by these days. Daddy says it’s probably a hundred years old. Ya wanna check it out, Miss Jenny?”

“Well, of course I do.”

The petite rifle's breech was open and the chamber was empty. Little Mike safely handed Jenny the firearm with his right hand and she took it with both of hers. She double checked the chamber, closed the breech, and shouldered it. She aimed at the top of a nearby cypress tree. Michael Williams had obviously shortened the buttstock for the boy, but the length of pull was not outrageously short for her. Jenny brought the rifle back down from her shoulder admired it once more, opened the breech, and returned it to its owner. "That's a fine rifle, Little Mike, and very well maintained."

"Thanks, Miss Jenny. I love it."

"Did your folks find that on one of their horde hunts?"

"Yes, ma'am. That was the one that had all the primers too...thousands of 'em...all in good shape."

"Wow!" and after patting the boy's shoulder she said, "Well, Mr. Williams, I'm gonna get back on this workout. You tell your bunch hi for me. Okay?"

"I will, Miss Jenny, see ya later."

— — —

Michael Williams hooked his arm around his wife as the couple gazed out their front window. They watched Jenny Hart race by.

Tassy commented, "She never misses a day, does she?"

"Not hardly."

"Lordy, she must be lonely in that house all by herself."

"I don't know. She's different."

"Different? That's puttin' it mildly."

"Now, Tassy, be kind."

"Well, all she does is work out, tend to her garden, hunt and fish some, and target practice. Heck, where does she get all that ammunition from?"

"You know what Harry told us when he moved her in there and asked us to look out for her. She was some kinda big deal in the war. Him and 1911 Johns bring her supplies and ammunition occasionally."

"Yeah, and that's probably not all that Harry brings her."

“C’mon now, Tassy. You shouldn’t think the worst and it’s really none of our business.”

“None of our business? Little Mike dotes on her and he’s getting of the age where he will start puttin’ two and two together. I mean, he don’t miss nuthin’, and you know he notices that Slingshot 8 Humvee up there on occasion. Now I ask ya, what kind of impression is that for a boy to have about his president?”

“I know, Tassy. I can’t argue that.”

Tassy gave Michael a look common to the female gender. It’s kind of an expression of disappointment when their man has tired of the fight and wants to surrender and withdraw back into his self-absorption.

Further annoyed by Michael’s attention to the distant, slim figure, Tassy cautioned, “Careful now, honey, you might start droolin’.”

Embarrassed and caught, Michael quickly averted his gaze to the opposite end of the road. “Where’s that boy. He shoulda’ been back by now. He needs to get cleaned up for Sunday school and church.”

Still wanting to twist the knife, Tassy teased, “Sunday school! That’s a good idea. I think I’ll stroll out to the fence and catch Miss Jenny on her way back. You know ... invite her to go with us to church.”

“Tassy, leave it be.”

She cackled in victory and pointed north along the road. “There he is. Laws! Look at all them critters. You best go help him clean his kills. I’ll get some freezer paper for the meat. I’ll give Jenny Hart credit for one thing: it’s sure nice to finally have power out here.”



At 7:45 a.m., Nanny Hannah Frederick took Henry up to be bathed and dressed for church while Catherine sat in her sunroom’s rocker and breast-fed Clementine. Harry passed by the sunroom’s entrance on his return from the garage. He stopped and smiled at the picturesque scene of mother and child.

“Well, I’m all packed and ready to go. Mort’s supposed to be here in the 8’s Humvee to pick me up around 8:30. I better get a shower and shave.”

“Why do you need to get cleaned up to go camping at Waterloo?”

Ready for that question, Harry answered, “Well, its good to start out clean when you know you’re gonna be all grimy and wooly for a couple of days.”

“That’s true, I guess.”

“You Ladies are beautiful in the mornin’ light.”

“Well if we’re so beautiful, why do you want to leave us and go traipsin’ off to the west end of the ST for two days? Tell Mort to take it on back to Miss Nell’s, and you come with your family to church. We’re having Sunday dinner over at the Palace too—with Momma and Daddy.”

“We talked about this, Cate. I’ve been all tied up with ST Day events for the past week and now that it’s done, I wanted to go ramble around the woods and get away from civilization for a while.”

“So Mort is driving?”

“Yep.”

“That’s good at least. He concentrates on the road. Unlike some world leaders I know.”

“Oh me, darlin’, are you going into that again. I didn’t run off the road last night. I ju—”

“You just got in your own little world, as you are so prone to do, and quit paying attention to the road. We almost wound up in a ditch, sweetie!”

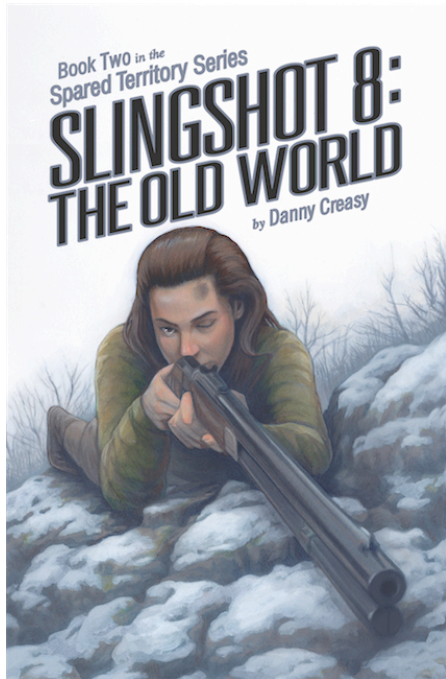
Harry sighed, “Yeah, I know, I gotta watch that.”

“Don’t say it, ‘I’ll do better,’ right?”

I shoulda woke up at four and left before dawn, thought Harry as he gave Catherine a helpless, little-boy look.

She relented, “Oh, go have fun. But be careful, and give us a kiss before you head out.”

“I will, but how ‘bout one now?” He grinned and walked over to kiss his wife on the lips and his daughter on the noggin.



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