

# PUSS & BOOTS IN THE 23<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY

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PREVIEW OF CHAPTER ONE  
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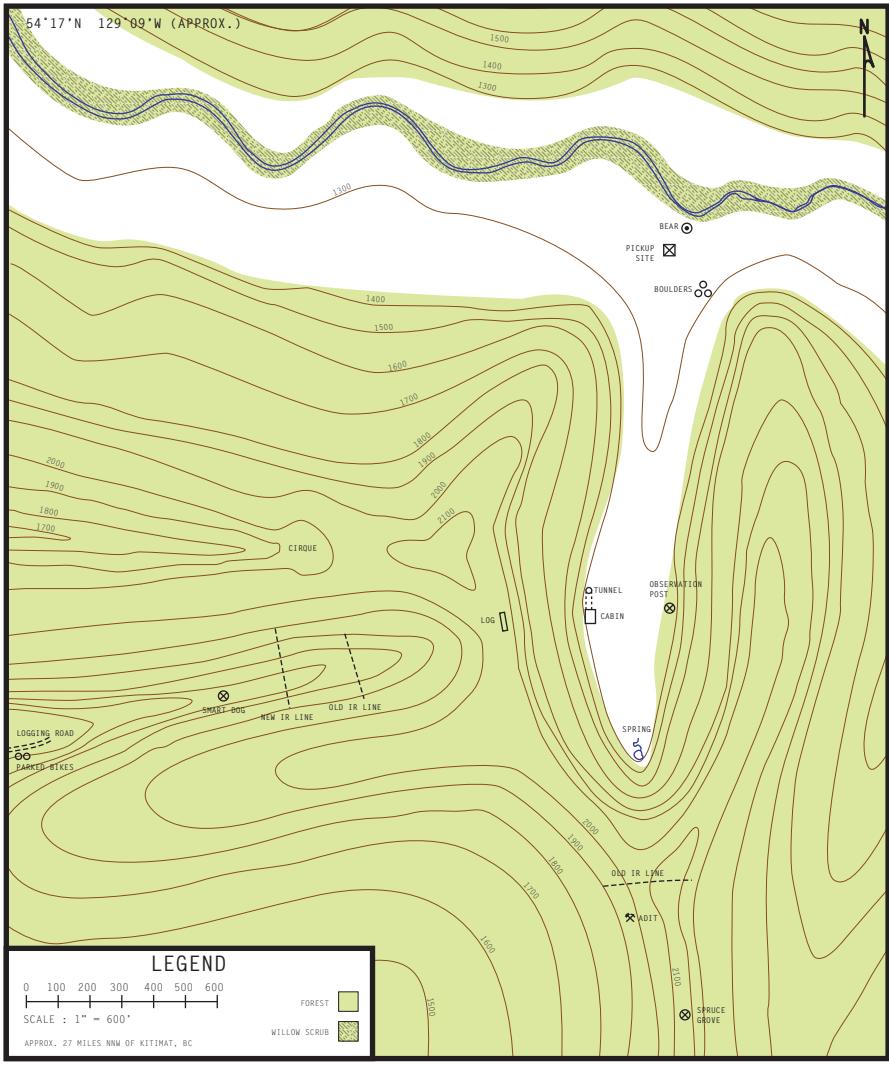
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COASTAL RANGE  
FORMER BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA  
MAY 1, 2276 AD  
(DETAIL)



# Chapter 1

## The Bounty Hunters

*May 1, 2276 AD*  
*Costal Mountains of British Columbia*

The two women were near the crest of the ridge when Puss grabbed Boots' wrist.

She signaled with finger taps, "*Smart dog. 3 o'clock.*"

"It starts now," Boots whispered as she turned slowly to their right, "Get hard girl!" The only other sound was the wind sighing in the treetops of the forest.

Boots inched a tranquilizer dart from her belt pouch and peered around through the gloom of the forest until she spotted the smart dog under a laurel bush twenty meters away. She loaded her gas gun and fired all in one smooth motion.

"Looks like I still can still hit the easy ones anyway," she whispered, as the dog slumped with a rustle of the dried leaves on the ground.

The two women walked with silent steps across the pine needles to the laurel bush. Boots pushed its branches aside and looked down at the mongrel dog sprawled on the ground. It wore a thick plastic collar that had control dials, and sprouted a stub antenna.

Puss dropped to her knees and peered at the collar for a moment then nodded to Boots. Her eyes grew bleak as she bent her face close to the dog's head again and grimaced, then she mimicked the dying squeal of a chipmunk and the growls of a dog eating.

"You've looked like that every time we've met one of these damm things. I don't think you like dogs much," Boots mouthed as she squatted next to

Puss and drew her belt knife. She then cut the sedated dog's head off with three precise strokes.

Puss ignored her friend's comment as she grabbed the collar when the dog's head flopped free and shook away the spatters of blood on it. She slipped her arm through its loop and clamped its body-heat and pulse sensors in the warmth of her armpit. The two women stood and faced each other.

*"Pay dirt!" Boots signed to her friend, "Mark is near here! His bounty will lift our mortgage big!"*

*"Another dog is dead anyway," Puss signed with a shrug. "But I will not count my sheep before they hatch! We collect this mark, sell him and get our credits before I lift the skirt on my mortgage!"*

Puss grinned then and gave Boots a play punch on her arm, *"Good shot for an old girl though!"* she signed, *"But must we dump this collar quick."*

*"Yes," Boots signed back with a smile, "If no vitals or sound are transmitted from it soon, mark will know something happened to his smart dog."*

*"Yes," Puss signed still grinning, "Also, we are at much risk if we keep this thing. You maybe stumble and make a big noise that mark will hear from his dog's collar!"*

Boots made a face and stuck her tongue out at Puss, *"Little girl make big joke,"* she signed playfully then she smiled in a different way, until Puss froze her with a look like a gust of Arctic air.

*"Dammit! I told you!"* Puss signed with a scowl, *"We go to work now. I will find a way to get rid of this thing."*

Boots dropped her eyes before Puss' glare for a moment then raised her chin and closing her face as if pulling down a helmet visor, signed, *"Yes! What do you think? A bambi?"*

*"Yes. I will scope for one now,"* Puss signed back with a perfunctory nod, then she signed with eyes that were still cold, *"We will talk about you and last night later."*

Puss set her infrared heat sensor on high sensitivity and began to scan the forest as she stalked silently up the ridge.

Boots looked at her friend's retreating back, and sighed after Puss carried the collar out of range, *"I think I really did ferk up biggers that night. I just wish I could remember what I did, dammit."*

Then she knelt and pulled her dart from the dog's chest and placed its severed head so the nose was under its tail, *"OK doggy, you can lick um' for all eternity now,"* Boots muttered as she piled leaves and pine needles over

the carcass.

“Shat though, my doghouse is way cold too, just like yours,” she whispered as she got to her feet. Then she shrugged and loading her tranquilizer gun with a dart set at minimum dose, paced silently after her friend.

\*

“Go some!” Puss signed with a smile, “300 meters north,” as she pointed to the left of the route they had been following.

“Good Girl!” Boots signed, “And you win.”

Puss motioned with her shoulder that had the collar clamped under it and gave an even wider smile as she signed, “We’ll talk after we lose this thing and collect the mark.”

Boots nodded and the two women stalked silently up the ridge through the old growth trees to its crest. When they reached the top, they followed it around to the head of the next valley north of the one they had just climbed.

The landform here was a cirque, a small semicircular depression gouged by an ancient glacier, and found at the heads of many valleys in the mountains of the West. This cirque had an almost level floor and it was less heavily wooded than the ridges around it.

The two women circled to approach from down-wind and crawled to the edge overlooking the glade. Boots sighted on a small doe among the six deer bedded down in the lush grass, dozing and basking in the morning sun. The other deer stirred at the hiss of the dart gun, then bounded away when Puss leaped into the glade. She ran to the doe still on the ground and kneeling, lifted its head and slipped the dog’s collar from around her arm and over its muzzle. She then worked the device over the doe’s flaring ears and settled it around the animal’s neck.

“Go with Manitou,” Puss mouthed as she bent and kissed the helpless but aware animal between its wide eyes. She laid the doe’s head back in the grass and pulling Boots’ dart from its flank, began creeping away from the animal on all fours as its leg muscles began to quiver. Puss continued to back on her hands and knees toward where Boots waited.

The tall woman considered her friend’s form for a moment, then became all business again when Puss bounded to her feet out of the collar microphone’s range and trotted to Boots with a grin of triumph. The two women turned and trotted back a hundred meters from the cirque, then they stopped and did a happy double hand slap.

“OK, Big’un, we’ve cut through his first defense line! Now let’s collect

that som'bitch real quick before he wonders why his smart dog is acting sort of different-like!" Puss whispered with a grin as she handed her friend the expended dart.

"You got that right!" Boots murmured with a brilliant smile, "Let's just go Do It! First one to catch him gets to unzip his pants!"

"What-the-hell-fer?" Puss snorted.

"So we can put our leash on him, why else?" Boots replied as she reached out to ruffle Puss' short hair, her deep blue eyes wide in innocence.

"Jeseu Buda, gal!" Puss exploded in laughter, "You're one way weird dudette!"

"Yeah, but you have to admit it takes great Strinth of Carachter for me to be that way, let alone do it all the time," Boots sniffed as she lifted her head with an exaggerated look of noble purpose.

"Da' words is Strength and Character you furkin' Heathen," Puss teased as she reached up and gently griped Boots by the chin, as the Alpha wolf does to the others in its pack.

"Ja Boss," Boots replied, remaining passive.

"OK Buddy," Puss whispered, "Now let's just go do it!"

"Yep Kiddo," Boots murmured, "But we know he's near here now so it's war paint time," as she pulled a camouflage makeup kit from a belt pouch and began to streak her face.

"Right," Puss said as she flipped her own kit open and started daubing on various colors of dark greasepaint.

Boots watched Puss as she began by making three vertical black streaks on her forehead before partially covering them and the rest of her face with splotches of green and gray.

"She always does it that way. Wonder why?" Boots thought as she pulled the hood of her cat suit up to cover her long black hair and her head except for her face. She stepped back under the shade of a hemlock and to the casual eye, disappeared.

"How's this for a party dress?"

Puss finished painting her face and hands and after jamming her wide-brimmed field hat down over her auburn hair, she backed into a laurel thicket also disappeared.

"Pretty good. How about me?"

"You be good, Squaw Woman," Boots answered with a grunt, "So now let's just go do it!"



Boots was tall and had wide shoulders and strong legs. She was dressed in a cat suit colored with splotches of gray-green that matched the spring foliage. She wore light field boots, a small back pack and a field belt carrying a pistol, equipment pouches and a field knife. She also had three knives in a sheath at her right hip. The woman had high cheekbones and a generous mouth, over a stubborn jaw and moved with the grace and precision of an athlete. She had the intensity of a hunter in her blue eyes and looked as dangerous as a dagger blade.

Puss wore a camouflaged Army jumpsuit with many pockets. She had on light field boots as well and had a combat belt on with a pistol, gear pouches and a large knife. She also wore a small backpack.

Her dark auburn hair was cut short and she had emerald green eyes that always seemed to smile because of small folds in her lower lids. Her father called them "Rifleman's eyes."

She was a head shorter than Boots and very erect, and her jumpsuit did not hide her firm body. Her skin, under the camouflaging paint on her face and hands was the color of new copper. She looked capable, and strong.

Puss nodded to Boots and they had begun trotting through the forest and up the ridge as silently as two hunting cats.

Kristina Hamier known in their gritty profession as "Boots" and Marybell Bolling, called "Puss" in the same circle had ridden to the base of the ridge on their fuel cell trail bikes early that morning. They had hidden them in an old burn area covered with scrub at the edge of the forest after driving in along an overgrown logging road in the Coastal Range of the one-time Province of British Columbia.

When Puss was satisfied that their bikes were well concealed, she had looked all around the clearing, and into the forest beyond as she let her mind expand to feel anything she sensed to not be natural. When she had felt nothing, she had turned and nodded to Boots.

"The intel from the Network shows him somewhere in this ten klick-wide area," Boots said in a low voice. "And the IR surveil sat cams picked up the heat signature of a cabin over this ridge," she added with a gesture toward the tree line, "Ready for a walk in the woods?"

"Always," Puss had answered with a grin.

"Attagirl," Boots murmured as she made a final adjustment to her pack straps and looped the sling of the thick-barreled tranquilizer gun over her shoulder. Then she had entered the tree line in a silent trot.

## CHAPTER 1 THE BOUNTY HUNTERS

Puss followed her friend an easy and even quieter pace, and opened her mind when they entered the shadows of the forest. She had let her conscious expand as she always did in the wild, listening to it and feeling its nuances...

The two had climbed halfway up the ridge when Puss sensed something was not right. “The under story birds have stopped calling,” she thought.

She had paused then and gripped her friend’s arm. Boots had halted in mid-stride, and the two froze except for their eyes. Puss had slipped the tube of an infrared heat detector from a pocket on her leg and kept her arm down at her side as she rotated the instrument around where they stood as she cautiously searched the shadowy forest.

Her instrument had vibrated a “hot” signal a moment later when it picked up a heat signature in a laurel thicket to their right.

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