

PUSS & BOOTS IN THE 23RD CENTURY

BY
JACK McCLURE

PREVIEW OF CHAPTER ONE
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION WITHOUT THE
EXPRESS CONSENT OF THE AUTHOR
NOVEMBER 24, 2007



PUBLISHED BY
IRON THUMB PRESS
WINCHESTER, VA

Copyright John E. McClure Jr., 1999

All rights Reserved. No Part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.

*All characters appearing in this work are fictitious.
Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

*Cover illustration by Ian Chisty
www.ianchristy.com*

*Published by Iron Thumb Press through Lulu Printing Services.
www.ironthumbpress.com*

Printed in the United States of America.

Chapter 1

The Bounty Hunters

May 1, 2276 AD
Costal Mountains of British Columbia

Two dull-colored motorized mountain bikes slowly enter the clearing from the forest bordering an old burn area covered with scrub brush. Two figures in indistinctly colored clothing ride them expertly as the late spring sun shines down from a cloudless sky in the stillness of an early morning in the year 2276, two years after the end of the Chin War.

Kristina, known in their gritty profession as 'Boots' holds up her left hand and throttles down her bike with her right. She and her friend Marybell on the other bike, called 'Puss' in the same circle coast to a silent stop on an old logging road at the base of a ridge in the Coast Range of what used to be the Canadian Province of British Columbia. Their fuel cell-powered machines make very little noise other than the crunch of gravel or snapping of twigs from their passage, and the quiet sounds of the forest continue around them undisturbed.

Boots dismounts, and after both women remove small backpacks from their bike's carrier bars and shrug them on, Boots also pulls a bulky long-arm from its scabbard on her bike, then pushes it into a brushy thicket overgrowing the edge of the faint track. Puss rolls hers in beside it and carefully rearranges the branches to hide their machines.

Boots is a very tall young woman with wide shoulders and strong legs. She wears an elasticized cat suit colored a splotched and indiscriminate gray-green that matches the foliage and shadows of the local vegetation exactly. She has light field boots on her feet and her combat belt carries a holstered

CHAPTER 1 THE BOUNTY HUNTERS

pistol, several pouches and a field knife. A sheath on her right hip holds three throwing knives. Boots has pushed the hood of her suit back and tied her shoulder-length black hair into a bun at the nape of her neck. It is cut in bangs in the front and falls over winged eyebrows above large eyes that are slightly slanted and colored the deep blue of lapis lazuli. Her skin is creamy white and she has high cheekbones and a generous mouth, and a stubborn jaw.

The woman moves with the deftness and precision of an athlete and has the intent look of a hunter in her eyes. Her mouth is set in a small crooked grin and she looks as dangerous as a dagger blade...

Puss wears a camouflaged jumpsuit of a slightly looser fit that has numbers of pockets in various places. She also wears light field boots and a combat belt with a pistol, ammo and gear pouches and a field knife, and a wide-brimmed soft field hat hangs down her back by its chin string. Her short-cropped hair is a curious dark auburn and is brushed back from her high forehead. She has dark brows over clear green eyes that always seem to smile due to the small folds on their lower lids. "Rifleman's eyes", according to her father.

She is a head shorter than Boots and very erect. Her bust is high and her waist is small and her firm limbs are not hidden by her jump suit. Her skin, where it shows on her face and hands is the color of newly shined copper.

Puss gracefully bends and using a dead branch, first brushes away the tire marks on the trail leading to their bikes, then sprinkles dust and leaves over the brush marks to hide them. After satisfying herself that her work is effective, she stands again in statue-like stillness while she gaze alternates between observing the tree line all around the clearing, and Boots. She looks very competent...

Boots turns and motions forward. "The Intel from Boss Rat shows him somewhere over this ridge. Ready?" she hisses.

"Course," Puss snaps.

"Attagirl," Boots murmurs, as she gives Puss a squeeze on her bottom.

Puss brusquely slaps Boots' hand away - with a glare that would chill a martini at three meters.

Boots' eyes flicker with an uncertain look for a split-second. Then as if pulling down a helmet visor, she closes her face and grits, "OK, lets just Do It!" as she turns and silently starts trotting up the slope and into the trees on the rise above their clearing.

Puss shows a slight smile as she easily and even more silently follows Boots up the slope and enters the forest of tall pines and spruce blanketing the ridge. Once amid the shadows of the forest, she allows her mind to open into a familiar and comfortable state. Her consciousness expands as it always does when she is in the wild places and Puss once again becomes a part of the natural world around her, instinctively feeling all of its nuances.

*

Half the way into their silent climb up the ridge, Puss senses a change. She pauses and silently grips her companion's arm. Boots stops in mid-stride and the two stand in frozen immobility. Then without moving their heads they cast their eyes slowly about, and search the shadows in the forest around them, as Puss also mentally re-plays her feelings as they had ghosted up the ridge.

"The understory birds aren't calling!" she suddenly thinks. Then with extreme slowness, she removes the tube of an infrared body-heat detector from a pocket on the thigh of her suit. Without moving her body, and with her arm hanging at her side, she slowly rotates the sensor tip of the instrument around their position - until she feels the instrument silently vibrating a "hot" signal as it points 90° to the right of their line of travel. Quietly as a drifting cloud, she turns her head until she spots a shadow under a mountain laurel bush 30 meters away.

Using the complex touch and sign-language that the two women have developed in order to survive in their profession, Puss signals Boots, with her hand that still grips the woman's arm, "*Smart Dog at 3 o'clock*".

Boots turns her head as carefully as Puss had done, while at the same time, inching a tranquilizer dart out a belt pouch and arming it. As soon as her eyes make out the shadow of the creature under the bush, in one finely coordinated motion Boots wheels, brings the gas-powered dart gun to her shoulder as she loads it and fires – seemingly without aiming. The only sound is a soft hiss from the gun, and then a rustle of leaves as the shadowy shape slumps.

The two women quietly move over to the bush and silently kneel beside the prostrate form of a medium-sized mongrel dog, that wears a complicated collar with a stub antenna protruding from its top. Puss bends, and lifting the unconscious dog's head, quickly examines the collar. She smiles grimly up to her friend, then sounds the faint "Seek" of a dying chipmunk, followed by remarkably life-like canine eating noises.

CHAPTER 1 THE BOUNTY HUNTERS

After a moment Puss nods, and Boots silently severs the unconscious dog's head, using her belt knife with quick surgical precision. Puss lifts the freed collar and flicking away a few drops of blood, slides it over her arm and places it so the body-heat and pulse sensor on its inner surface is clamped in her armpit, and its microphone is covered.

Rising, the women confer in their language of signs and touches, *"Pay dirt!"* Boots signs with an exultant grin. *"He near here! This one lift we mortgage sure!"*

Puss signs, *"One less dog, anyway,"* unconsciously rubbing her side with her free hand. Then she signs, *"I don't count we sheep before they hatch! We must collect him - move him out - get credits - before I lift skirt on my mortgage!"*

Then she grins and gives Boots a play punch on the arm. *"Good shot for old girl though! But we not carry this thing much long."*

"Yes," signs Boots, *"Wrong direction. Wrong pace. Mark catch on."*

"Yes," signs Puss, still grinning. *"Much risk. You maybe stumble, make big noise!"*

At this, Boots makes a face and playfully sticks her tongue out at her companion. Then suddenly her eyes change, to being playful in a different way as she slowly licks her lips - until Puss freezes her with a look like a blast of Arctic air from eyes suddenly the temperature and color of ice in the core of a glacier.

"Dammit, me tell you!" she signs. *"Now go work, or we loose this thing."*

Boots, dropping her gaze from Puss' glare, sighs then quickly raises her chin and becoming all business, signs, *"Right! What you think, deer?"*

"Yes. I scope one." Puss replies as she silently retraces her steps back to the route they had been following, and starts scanning with her Infra Red heat sensor set at maximum distance.

Boots waits until Puss carries the collar with its microphone out of range, and then covers the dog's carcass with leaves, after removing her dart from the center of its chest, and playfully positioning the severed head so that the dog's nose is poked up under its own tail. "OK buster, now sniff all you want," she mutters to herself as she regains her feet.

Then she sighs as she thinks "Shat tho', my doghouse is just about as cold as yours is, right now..." as she moves back silently to join Puss, re-pouching the used dart and loading a fresh one set at minimum dose into her gun as she walks.
