

HAUNTED

By
Douglas Misquita

A Kirk Ingram action thriller

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Douglas Misquita is an action-adventure thriller writer from India. His books have been praised for their quick pace, visuals, intertwining plots, and high-octane action.

Find out more at

douglasmisquita.com

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Know Thy Enemy

To my mother, Audree Misquita, for introducing me to the fascinating world of books, and the stories they contain.

PRAISE FOR DOUGLAS MISQUITA

DIABLO

Highly recommended. A spectacular ripped-from-the-headlines thriller about terrorism and the global migrant crisis. – bestthrillers.com

4 out of 5. Diablo, by Douglas Misquita, is yet another episode of myriad of characters, from varying social and geographic backgrounds, astutely interwoven together, into a gripping action thriller. - [Chicky Kadambari](#)

Fans of political, thrillers, action and suspense genres will find this a fun read. -[Charity Tober](#)

Douglas Misquita has used a great mix of technology and modern day problem to create an entertaining and thought provoking thriller. - [Payal Sinha](#)

Well written ... tight edge-of-the-seat action drama... the story line is well thought out and the book definitely is (sic) a good read. - [Hemantkumar Jain](#)

THE APOCALYPSE TRIGGER

... a wholesome adventure riveted with action, tech and the good ole apocalyptic plan - [Dallyn Misquita](#)

Amazing book with expertly written action scenes and a plot which leaves you craving for more! - [Tulika](#)

Misquita is a prolific author; he is creating his own oeuvre in the action-adventure-thriller genre, and uses history, technology and fiction quite effectively. - [Roshmi Sinha](#)

I felt like watching a Hollywood movie while reading this book!!! Author's vivid narration made reading exciting and fast moving!!! - [Saravan Pandi](#)

It's a perfect Hollywood script, the plot is excellent and the writing style is totally different. - [Nitin Vadher](#)

SECRET OF THE SCRIBE

...reveals the strength of his writing as well as flexibility in dealing with an almost futuristic story. - [Shana Susan](#)

You know you are in the hands of an adequate and efficient writer - [Mandar Talvekar](#)

An excellent read, this book is fast paced and very difficult to put down
- [Omstavan Samant](#)

This book is difficult to put down, so I would recommend reading it over the weekend. It has a gripping story-line combined with a fast pace - [Newton Lewis](#)

HAUNTED

Move over CB and the host of writers who think they can write, Douglas is a star story teller. - [Samarpita Sharma](#)

This is most definitely going at the top of my recommendations list. - [Molly Edwards](#)

It's almost impossible to believe that "Haunted" is the first published work of Douglas Misquita. - [Naman Kapur](#)

Non-stop explosive gun-battles, car chases, double-crossing thugs, and a full cast of dispensable characters carry the plot of this emotion-packed story to an unexpected surprise (sic) ending. - [Richard Blake](#)

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PROLOGUE

"Andrew Osvetljiv to see you, sir."

Lars Gunther, founder of a vast trade empire, was a particularly busy man. His morning calendar – especially Wednesday mornings – were invariably blocked. That Wednesday was no exception: he was on a conference with his regional directors around the world.

Yet, at the mention of Andrew Osvetljiv's name, *something* was triggered in his mind. Inexplicably, Gunther *felt* that he *must* make time for his unscheduled guest. "Send him in." His assistant looked at his calendar and protested. "Sir, may I remind you that you have a meeting with the governor starting in one hour."

"Send him in," Gunther insisted.

Andre Osvetljiv was a diminutive, ordinary looking man. Without a word, he produced a tablet computer, placed it on Gunther's desk, and played a video file.

The two men sat unmoving in Gunther's 30th floor office. The tablet's screen cast a flickering glow on their faces. The images displayed contained strange and indecipherable symbols. The images repeated *randomly*.

The female voice in the accompanying audio track was detached, devoid of inflection or emotion. It was a steady, hypnotic drone.

The message was unintelligible because it was comprised of a *random* sequence of a *random* selection of words in *randomly* selected non-English languages that ranged from German and Dutch to Mandarin and Sanskrit.

Such randomness would ensure the *uniqueness* of the *trigger*.

After exactly 160 seconds, the file stopped playing.

Andrew Osvetljiv produced a hammer and with one powerful blow shattered the fragile tablet. Then he stood and wordlessly left Gunther's office.

Lars Gunther *knew* what he had to do. His mission was crystal clear.

He would use the resources at his command to bring ruin upon the country that had adopted him.

CHAPTER 1

WEST HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, 2 YEARS LATER

The rain fell in great drenching sheets. It thundered onto the road, flowed to the gutters lining the road, bubbling white at the corners.

It drummed steadily on the roof of the black BMW 5, splattered on the windscreen, and ran in rivulets to the hood, streaked down the windows.

Inside, three men waited restlessly, watching the doors to Lucques on the opposite side of the road. They had been waiting for an hour.

In contrast to the fine Mediterranean cuisine offered by Lucques, their dinner had consisted of Burger King Whoppers. A box of soggy fries sat on the dashboard, beside a half-empty pack of cigarettes. One of the men reached for a cigarette and lit up. The flame from the lighter cast his features in flickering red-orange momentarily. He took a deep drag, then exhaled blue smoke toward the roof. The curtain of rain undulated in a sudden gust of wind.

On the sidewalk, people were rushing, hugging themselves, meeting the sudden downpour head-on, or battling it with umbrellas that threatened to blow inside-out.

An LAPD car pulled up behind the BMW, its headlights illuminating the inside of the BMW. The men in the BMW tensed. The police car's headlamps went out. The man in the back seat instinctively touched the weapon he was carrying in a holster strapped to his chest. Three pairs of eyes locked onto the rear-view mirror.

A police officer with an overflowing belly stepped out into the rain. There was a distinct metallic *clack* as the man in the back seat cocked his weapon, and held it out of sight below the rear window. The driver shook his head slightly, indicating that he re-holster his gun. The LAPD officer glanced fleetingly at the BMW. Then, ducking against the downpour he ran toward a convenience store.

The female police officer in the car looked bored. Her fingers tapped a beat on the steering wheel. She reached for a magazine on the dash, thumbed the pages, Abruptly, she discarded the magazine and spoke into her shoulder radio, nodded. She clicked the radio again. Seconds later, her partner burst out of the store, shielding a brown paper baggie from the rain with his bulk. The baggie was already developing a dark spreading wet stain. He got into the cruiser, the engine growled. The light bars came to life. The cruiser made a tight U-turn, in the rain, and raced away, its siren wailing.

In the BMW, the men relaxed, the man in the back seat holstered his weapon.

The taillights of the cruiser had just disappeared, when the doors to the restaurant under surveillance opened.

The man they were waiting for emerged, holding an evening jacket over his wife's head and his. Their five-year-old daughter was cocooned between them, clutching her father's trousers. The family made its way awkwardly to a parked Ford Explorer. There followed the shrill chirp of the alarm being disarmed; the taillights flashed thrice. The family climbed into the Explorer. The Explorer pulled into the road and drove past the BMW.

The man in the driver's seat turned the key in the ignition, and the BMW followed at a safe distance.

In the Explorer, FBI Special Agent Kirk Ingram momentarily took his eyes off the road. He glanced at his wife, Madeline, in the passenger seat; and then at his daughter, Lisa, in the rear-view mirror. Lisa was playing with Freddy, the teddy bear she kept in the Explorer. A smile crossed his face.

"What are you thinking?" his wife asked, staring ahead. She was absentmindedly curling her hair in her fingers.

That morning, Ingram had surprised Madeline when he told her that he had applied for a desk job at the Bureau. No more field assignments, he promised her. Madeline had been incredulous when she saw how sincere he was. She felt immense relief because for her it meant no more worrying for his safety. It also meant more together time, as a family.

"I'm blessed," Ingram replied. "Immensely. With two wonderful women."

She looked at him, cocked an eyebrow. Ingram was reminded of the time they had met. The same coquettish look had drawn him, irresistibly, to her. At thirty-five, Madeline looked as beautiful as on that day. And the years had given her an independent, mature look, making her even more appealing.

Then a shadow of doubt clouded her features. She had heard of agents who had attempted to give up field assignments but could never adjust to the fabric of a *normal* life. They grew detached, depressed, withdrew into themselves. Eventually it didn't work out: they either returned to the field, or the family broke; or both happened.

When she looked her husband, at his strong features and unruly black hair, she wondered if he could ever give it all up. All it would take was one call from Dave Travis and — Ingram knew what she was thinking.

Unknown to Madeline, he had found out that she had been visiting a marriage counselor. He had tracked the counselor down. It had taken some persistence, but Ingram had shockingly discovered that his wife was considering divorce. It was only because of Lisa that she hadn't filed immediately. It was that revelation that prompted Ingram to take a hold of himself. Whatever anyone thought, Madeline included, Kirk loved them dearly.

He leaned over, kissed her lightly on the cheek. "Hey," he said playfully rubbing her bare shoulder, "I'm here. Don't think that. I promised, didn't I? No more field assignments. We're going to be great together. You, me, Lisa."

She shook her head apologetically, suppressing her doubt. He was making a genuine attempt, and she was going to help him. She vowed that she would make it difficult for anyone to take him away from them. And maybe she was being optimistic and hoping for too much, she thought, as she intertwined her fingers in his., but she believed she could persuade him to switch careers. "I'm sorry. Yes, we are going to be great."

Ingram struggled to make conversation. Had he grown so distanced from them? He had been at the same loss at dinner, but Madeline had so much to say that his problem went unnoticed. Now, Lisa saved him. From the back, she said, "Daddy, Stacy's building a tree house."

"A friend of yours?"

"You've met her *so* often."

"Oh." He found it disturbing that he did not remember. Then, "Well then, we'll get you a bigger one. I'll start on it second thing in the morning."

"Why not first thing in the morning?"

"I've got to fix you a breakfast fit for a queen first."

Lisa smiled and rocked Freddy. In the passenger seat, Madeline also allowed herself the pleasure of a smile.

Then: "David's Mom told me a lot of people want to kill you, Daddy. Is that right?"

Ingram didn't answer immediately. His eyes flicked toward the rear-view mirror and narrowed. He was being paranoid, he thought, imagining they were being followed. He mentally kicked himself: Don't screw it up; you make one wrong move and you'll lose them both. It's come to that.' He tuned back to his family.

"No, Lisa," Madeline was saying, oblivious to his momentary distraction, "David's Mom's is wrong." Mentally, she made a note to call David's mother the next morning, while her husband and daughter worked on Lisa's tree house.

"David says Daddy's going to get *knifed* or shot."

Ingram glanced at Madeline. His look asked her, 'Who are these people?'

"Did he say that?" Madeline asked Lisa.

"Uh-huh."

"Well, he's wrong, too. Now, I don't want you talking to David anymore, okay?"

"*He* talks to *me*."

"I'll tell both to stop talking to you."

Ingram's eyes strayed over to the mirror again. The BMW was nearer. Drop it, he reprimanded himself, this is a free road.

Then, his phone rang. His wife's features visibly darkened. Yet, he answered, putting the phone to his ear. A deep male voice at the other end said, "Listen carefully and do as I tell you and no harm will come to your wife and daughter."

CHAPTER 2

The voice continued, "We have enough firepower to obliterate your family, Ingram. That will happen if you call for help, or attempt to escape. If you want proof that I am serious..."

He saw the BMW's headlights probing through the rain, very close. The headlights flashed thrice, and the Explorer's rear view mirror exploded. Ingram instinctively recoiled as shards of glass flew backward and a big hole appeared in the mirror's housing.

He glanced at Madeline and saw shock and confusion, on her face. Thankfully, Lisa, still occupied with Freddy, hadn't noticed.

The BMW was too close, and the gunsels were ready for evasive maneuvers from him. He considered calling the police but dropped it as soon as it occurred to him. They would arrive up with sirens blaring and lights flashing, and the guys in the BMW would panic. Maybe they would flee, and then again, maybe they would just blast the Ingrams to molecules.

"Kirk," Madeline began in a worried voice, but he put up a silencing hand.

"What do you want?" he said into the phone.

"Drive to Arakaki Scrapyard!"

Ingram knew the place: Arakaki Scrapyard had been abandoned when the proprietor's land deals with corrupt government officials had been exposed.

"Ingram," the caller warned, "their lives are in your hands." The line went dead.

"Who was it?" Madeline asked anxiously

"Don't know." His voice was tight. Alone, he would have resorted to his usual dare-devilry. But now, his dreaded fear, of someone harming his family, was coming true. "Madeline," he said in a low voice that wouldn't upset Lisa. There was no sense in beating around the bush so he decided to lay it out for her plain and simple. "There's a black BMW behind us. They want me to drive to the Arakaki Scrapyard or ..."

She understood what he didn't say and twisted round in her seat, her eyes wide with fear.

"Oh my God, Kirk." Lisa looked up, noting the tremor in her mother's voice.

"*Don't look back.* Just listen." Their eyes met. She took a deep breath and tried to calm herself. She reached for her phone with a trembling hand. He arrested her movement, shook his head. "No police. Take my phone." He surreptitiously fished it out. "Keep it out of sight. Call Richard Depalma. Tell him to come to Arakaki with backup."

She held the phone low as she pushed the keys, activated the speakerphone. She slouched in the seat so that the backrest hid what she was doing. The call did not connect.

Ingram took a deep breath. They were almost at the scrapyard. "Okay," he said, "When we reach the yard, I'll get out of the car and try to stall them. You call Richard again."

"But -"

"Madeline."

"Yes, I'll call him, but –"

"Madeline." He gave her a reassuring look. "Trust me."

She nodded.

"Okay, good. Now I want you to get behind the wheel when I step out of the car."

"Why must I –"

He turned onto the road that led to the scrapyards, "If anything happens to me, just drive away. Okay?"

"What?"

"Don't look back. Just drive. Go to the FBI."

"Kirk, I –"

His tone was fierce. "Do it! I can take care of myself, but not when you and Lisa are in danger."

There was no time for debate. Up ahead, they saw the scrap-yard.

CHAPTER 3

He turned the Explorer into the scrap-yard, under a rust-pocked, arching signpost. The headlights of the Explorer illuminated the junk cars and scrap metal piled high all over the place. Ingram's eyes searched the mountains of scrap for movement. But he couldn't see too well in the rain. Behind, the BMW turned broadside, blocking the gate. Madeline was rigid in her seat, her breath coming in gasps. He reached over and squeezed her hand. She flinched. "The BMW's blocking the way out," he said in as calm a tone as he could muster. "But it can't stand up to a head-on collision with the Explorer." She gave no indication that she understood. "Madeline?" She nodded.

"Daddy," Lisa said in a small voice, noticing the towering junk around them. "Why have we come here?"

With dented front grilles, smashed headlights shattered windscreens and caved-in roofs, the scrap vehicles looked evil. The rain on the metal sounded like the beating of drums at a cannibalistic feasting ritual.

"Somebody wants to meet me here, sweetie."

"Who?" she persisted, her nose pressed to the windows.

"We'll know soon enough." He turned the Explorer so that it pointed at the BMW. Then he slipped off his seat belt, twisted the handle, opened the door, stepped out into the rain, and walked away from the car. Madeline was already climbing over the gearshift into the driver's seat.

Ingram stood in the rain, looking around. He could sense Madeline frantically pushing redial on her phone. He wiped the rain from his face. He looked at the BMW, but the doors didn't open. He waited for almost a minute.

A sonorous voice called, "It's been a long time, Kirk."

He spun around. There were three men standing behind him. He recognized the shorter man almost immediately – Danny Miller, Los Angeles' most feared mobster until the FBI, led by Ingram, had come down on him in an explosive raid. And the moment he recognized Miller, Ingram shouted, "Madeline get out of here! Now!" He ran toward the car, waving his hands wildly, gesturing emphatically toward the entrance. "Get out!"

Madeline misunderstood. She opened the door, beckoned to him.

He saw Lisa, her face still pressed against the window, her mouth moving, forming words he could not hear. Madeline began to climb back into the passenger seat. He shouted again at the top of his voice for her to drive, and she looked in the direction he was pointing.

Now, three men climbed out of the BMW. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. Their automatic weapons rose into position, the metal glinting in the Explorer's lights. He heard Miller cackle loudly behind him, taunting him.

Images flashed before his eyes.

The raid on Miller's hideout: Heavily armed FBI agents swarming the compound engaging Miller's men, amid bursts of gunfire, screams, shouts, blood.

Miller's three-year-old twins clutching their father, tears staining their faces as he led them away from the firefight. Miller's wife running behind them. The crossfire that hit her in the head and neck. Her gurgling screams echoing in the courtyard. Miller turning around. The wild look in his eyes as he beheld his wife lying in a pool of blood. One of Miller's kids running toward his mother. The explosion that knocked Miller back, and tore the kid apart. The bullets from Miller's gun that dropped three agents in succession. The bullet from Ingram's gun that was intended for Miller but took the other kid in the chest. The spent cartridge from that bullet flying before his eyes, spinning in the air, falling to the ground with a metallic *clink*.

"No!" Ingram screamed.

Madeline suddenly comprehended what was about to happen and pulled the door shut, her face masked in panic and fear. The Explorer roared, its wheels spun, throwing up plumes of muck. It raced toward the BMW.

The three men near the BMW opened fire.

Ingram heard the dull *thunks* of the bullets punching into the front of the Explorer. He heard glass shattering, over his scream. One of the headlights blew. The Explorer fishtailed out of control, hit a heap of derelict chassis, rose into the air on two wheels and landed on its side, sliding through the muck. The gunsels jumped aside. The Explorer hit a scrap car that was lying with its hood half-buried in the muck. The hood acted as a crude ramp and the Explorer went over partially and came to a halt with the shriek of metal. It lay canting to the left, the beam from its single headlight shone into the air.

Ingram ran hard, heard Miller shout. He saw the men barring his way, had a vague impression of something swinging. He was hit in the chest, and he fell to his face, pain exploding through him.

"Daddy!"

He looked at the Explorer. The rear windows were smashed into spider webs. He could not see Lisa, but he *had* to get to her. Blackness threatened to creep around his peripheral vision. He was having difficulty breathing. He felt burning pain in his scalp as he was yanked upright

by his hair. He struggled and tried to lash out with his feet, but one of the men hit him on the neck with the butt of a gun and he crumpled to his knees, held up by his hair. He felt a wave of nausea, sweep over him and then lift, like a flash storm.

"You know what kept me alive after you put those bullets into me?" Miller shouted. "It was my hatred for you. And my resolve to avenge my family."

"Your family was a mistake," Ingram shouted back desperately, "you know that."

"You killed them and *you know that!*"

"Daddy!" Lisa's voice was distant. Pleading.

"Lisa!"

"How touching," Ingram realized Miller was near. "Daddy thinks he has the situation under control, Lisa. But he doesn't!" Miller stamped viciously on Ingram's left kidney. Ingram coughed blood. "You are going to watch your daughter and your wife die and then you are going to die. This is *payback*." He gave Ingram a kick in the face.

He lay there on the ground, tasting blood in his mouth, spat out a tooth. He watched two men walk toward the car. Miller smiled and put his foot on Ingram's back, pinning him down. Ingram felt the cold barrel of a gun touch the base of his skull. Miller's henchmen held his limbs down.

The men wrenched the Explorer's driver door open and Madeline's limp form tumbled out to the earth. They dragged her away. Lisa jumped out and crouched over her mother. One of the men pulled her away, and she screamed. In the rain, Ingram could see she was crying.

"Danny," Ingram said, his voice pleading. "Please. Take -"

"Oh shut up!" Miller said dismissively. Ingram felt the pressure on his skull ebbing as Miller took the gun off his neck.

There was a loud *bang*.

Ingram saw his Lisa's body twist grotesquely from the impact of the bullet. He saw the spray of blood, watched her small body spin forever, and fall to the muck and lie there, never to move again.

He screamed - a wild animal scream. He thrashed madly as Miller's men pulled his wife up. Her head and arms hung limply. Tears flowed freely down his cheeks. "Miller!" His voice was breaking. He heard the click of Miller's gun being cocked again.

An engine roared. All heads turned. Bright headlights blinded them as a Honda Civic turned into the yard, headed right for them. Gunshots rang out from the Civic and one of the gunsels near the Explorer fell. Another shot and another man dropped lifelessly.

Then Miller fired thrice in the direction of the Explorer, swung his gun toward the Civic, and barked orders to his men as he repeatedly pulled the trigger. Madeline's body jerked with the bullets. The man, who had been holding her up, dropped her body, and ran for cover, firing wildly at the intruder.

Return fire from Miller's gang punched big holes into the Civic and blew one of the tires. The Civic screeched to a halt, bullet holes in the windscreen. Another shot, and another of Miller's men fell. The pressure on Ingram's limbs began to ease off as Miller and his men began to back out of the clearing urged, on by the assault from the Civic.

Insane rage turned Ingram into an animal, his world turned red.

He kicked and spun over onto his back, found himself staring into the barrel of Miller's gun. He moved just as Miller squeezed the trigger. The muzzle flash was like a supernova; the explosion was deafening. The bullet grazed his ear and ploughed into the muck. His ear felt like it was held between red-hot tongs.

There would be no second chance.

Ingram buckled his knees, fired his feet into Miller's midriff. Miller staggered, the gun flew from his grasp. Ingram pounced, straddled Miller's chest. His hands closed around Miller's neck, choking the life out of him.

Miller clapped his palms over Ingram's ears, hard. The air pressure nearly burst Ingram's eardrums. Ingram released his stranglehold on Miller, who struck at Ingram's solar plexus. Ingram gasped. Miller punched Ingram in the gut, pushed him aside, and grabbed for the gun that lay near one of his fallen goons.

As Miller raised the gun, he saw FBI Agent, Sean Walter, coming out of the Civic, swinging his automatic at him. Both men fired at the same time. Walter missed. Miller's shot took the agent in the head and threw him across the hood of the Civic, splattering the windscreen with brain matter. Walter's body slid down to the ground, swayed unsteadily on its knees and then fell face-first.

Agent Richard Depalma ducked behind the wheel on the far side of the Civic when Walter died. He had been too late to warn Walter, but if he didn't do something soon, Ingram would soon join the body count. From where he was, Depalma could see the bodies of Madeline and Lisa lying near the Explorer. He pumped out his spent magazine, pushed a new one in, chambered a round, turned, and fired over the hood.

His shots sent Miller running behind the junk. Taking a deep breath, Depalma stood behind the car and panned his weapon in sweeping arcs.

No one. Just the sound of the rain.

CHAPTER 4

"Kirk, you okay?"

"Lisa..."

His eyes darting all over the place, Depalma ran out of cover, to Ingram. He grabbed Walter's gun as he ran past the body.

He crouched beside Ingram. The concern etched on Depalma's face was lost on Ingram. "Backup is on the way," he said, helping Ingram to sit and shoving the gun into his hand. "We were nearby when Madeline called."

"He killed them," Ingram said in a voice devoid of expression, staring *through* Depalma, at where his family lay. "He killed them. He --"

"I know," Depalma said, nodding, squeezing Ingram's shoulder. He blinked rain from his eyes.

"Stay here. I'm going to see if they're still around." He patted Ingram on the back and then was gone.

Ingram looked at the bodies littering the yard – Madeline's, Lisa's, Walter's and four of Miller's men. Two left, including Miller. And in this yard, they could still make a lethal combination.

Depalma saw two fleeing figures dodging among the cars and he fired. The figures split up. He went right, into a crude path between the cars, slowing to a cautious trot, weapon raised. The cars presented numerous hiding places. He heard a shot and a bullet ricocheted off a door with a metallic *zing*. Depalma ducked and spun, just as another bullet ploughed into a tire. Depalma drew a bead, and fired, heard a cry, saw a figure limping away, deeper, into the yard. Depalma gave chase.

Ingram closed his eyes. His mind kept playing back their murders endlessly. With great difficulty, he willed himself to stop thinking about it. His hands trembled and he bit his lip with the effort. When he opened his eyes, he looked different. He was not the man who had just lost the two people he loved most in this world.

His eyes were narrow slits, aflame with vengeance. Blood dripped freely from his split lips mixing with the puddles of rain. His hair was plastered across his face. His jaw was set in cold determination giving him a grim, foreboding appearance.

In a detached part of his mind, he understood what kept Danny Miller alive when he should have died from his gunshot wounds.

Slowly he stood, looked around, feeling the weight of the gun. He touched the cold metal to his skin and breathed deeply. He heard gunshots from somewhere.

"Miller! Your wife and kids deserved to die!" he taunted. "You hear me! They deserved everything that happened to them!" Silence answered him. He heard the raindrops on the tons of metal all around him. "Miller!"

Movement behind him. Ingram spun, dropped to the ground, raised his weapon, and squeezed the trigger twice as he fell, all in one fluid motion.

Miller ran out into the clearing, gun spitting lead. He dived, dodging the bullets Ingram had fired, and hit the ground rolling. He came up on one knee, spun on it, and ducked behind a car, his back to the door.

Ingram regained his feet, fired into the car, moved sideways, to circle around Miller.

Miller felt the bullets punch into the car he was resting against. The window above his head exploded, glass rained down on him. He waited for a second and then began making his way toward the front of the car. He crawled over to the front bumper, peered under and saw Ingram's shoes, making their way around the other side.

Miller jumped upon the hood. He fired as he ran on top of the car's roof. He had a clear advantage, but he slipped on the rain-slicked metal and his aim faltered.

The bullet that would have killed Ingram grazed him in the thigh. As Ingram fell, his gun went off, expending its last bullet. Miller fell off the roof, banging his head on the rear bumper. Ingram's freak bullet missed Miller's head by an inch.

The two men glared at each other, their hatred burning fiercely within them, searing each other as their eyes locked. Both raised their weapons at the same time at point blank range and pulled back on the triggers simultaneously.

Loud clicks.

Then with a cry of rage, Miller threw himself at Ingram, brandishing the gun like a club. Ingram rolled and Miller landed in the muck, recovered instantly, rolled away as Ingram's foot stamped down where his throat had been an instant ago.

Miller grabbed a two-foot-long lead pipe lying nearby, swung it at Ingram. Ingram backpedalled, hearing the deadly hiss as the pipe cleaved the air. That afforded Miller time to regain his feet.

The two enemies circled each other. Miller held the pipe menacingly. Abruptly he lunged, making as if to swing at Ingram's head. But in the arc of the swing, he lowered his hands, and the pipe struck Ingram's knee. Ingram collapsed, clutching his knee. Miller moved in, swung at Ingram's head. Ingram put his hand out to ward off the blow and the bar smashed into his wrist, snapping the bone. Ingram cried out in pain.

An evil smile pasted itself across Miller's face as he raised the bar over his head. Ingram had a split second and used it to punch upward at Miller's groin. Miller's face contorted in pain and he dropped the pipe. Ingram reached up with a roundhouse punch with his good hand. The blow spun Miller around and dropped him, beside the pipe. Ingram caught Miller by his greying hair and pulled his head back. He didn't see Miller's hand grope for the pipe. He was about to snap Miller's neck, but hesitated as his mind replayed his daughter's violent death.

Miller drew the pipe in, and rammed it into Ingram. Ingram stumbled, clutched his bruised ribs. Miller stood, and stalked him drunkenly from the shooting pain in his abdomen. He swung the pipe, Ingram backed away along the muck, gasping from the flaring pain in his chest. Miller swung again. The tip of the pipe caught Ingram in the cheek, splitting open a deep, bloody gash.

Ingram's hand touched something round and flat, buried partially in the muck. It was a hubcap. He butt-crawled until his back came to rest against a car. End of the line. His fingers dug into the muck, closing around the hubcap. He had one chance to pull it free of the suction and throw it. Miller swung. Ingram ducked, simultaneously pulling at the hubcap. It came free, and his hand rose with the momentum of his pull. He saw the pipe coming at his head. He let go of the hubcap. He heard Miller grunt. The pipe hit Ingram on the head, hard enough to stun him. With his last burst of energy, he lashed out with his feet, kicking Miller's feet from under him. Miller's pipe flew, landed somewhere in the junk.

Ingram crawled over to Miller. Halfway there, he slumped in intense pain from the blow to his chest. He lay in the muck, unable to move. His breath came in ragged gasps and wheezes. Miller looked around for something to kill the helpless FBI agent with. He spied a rusty spike protruding from the mounds of junk. Miller went over, freed the spike, stalked purposefully back to Ingram. With his foot, he easily flipped Ingram onto his back.

Ingram stared up at Miller through vacant eyes. He saw Miller raise the spike above his head, his lips curled in a demonic snarl. Ingram was too drained, emotionally and physically, to respond. Surprisingly, he was very calm. Large drops of rain fell from heaven above into his eyes and open mouth.

The spike hurtled toward him.

Miller's body jerked and his eyes grew wide in surprise. A bullet hole had materialised in the centre of his forehead. Miller stopped his downward plunge, swayed unsteadily and then toppled forward, still holding the spike.

Ingram heard Richard Depalma's scream of anguish. It seemed to come from very far away. Then, Miller's spike pierced into Ingram. It made a puncturing sound as it went through flesh and organs. Ingram had a blurred impression of Miller's lifeless body falling over the upright spike. He heard and felt the spike impale Miller. The end of the spike protruded from Miller's back, dripping blood.

Like a grotesque pin the spike held the two men together.

Kirk Ingram's scream merged with Depalma's, and reverberated in the scrap-yard.

Then everything went black.