

FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

ZENA DELE

**Originally published as
Tough Guy by Susannah Brin**

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Cover Photo: Pedro Jorge Henriques Monteiro /
Shutterstock.com
Cover Design: Lucy Nielsen**

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International Standard Book Number:
978-1-57128-689-5

21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12
10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01

www.HighNoonBooks.com

Tales of Danger set order # 8684-0

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CHAPTER 6

No Escape

A light breeze had come up, chilling the summer night. Joe shivered and wrapped his arms around his body. But it wasn't the cold that made him shiver—it was fear. Pure terror was racing through his body, making his legs weak and churning his stomach. The cruel look on Johnson's face, and the way the man kept waving his rifle around, had turned Joe into a human jellyfish.

Joe glanced at Logan. He looked like he was plenty scared, too. He hadn't moved an inch from the gate. His hand was still on it.

Johnson walked slowly down the driveway toward Logan. "You, boy! Come up here," Johnson said, motioning with the rifle.

“Yes, sir,” said Logan as he moved toward Joe and the bike.

“Fine. That’s what I like. Recruits who can take orders,” said Johnson. He smiled at them. “Now both of you move away from that bike.” He swung his gun to the left and pointed to a spot near the house.

Joe glanced at Logan, who shrugged his shoulders as if to say, *What else can we do?*

“I said, MOVE IT!” ordered Johnson.

They both jumped at the harshness in Johnson’s voice. They almost ran to the place where Johnson was pointing.

“I guess I had you babies figured all wrong. For a minute there, I thought you were on my side,” said Johnson quietly.

“But we are,” Logan said softly. “Isn’t that right, Joe?”

“Yeah!” Joe flashed a big smile at Johnson, hoping to convince the older man. Johnson stared at them without blinking. His mind seemed to be

elsewhere, and his trancelike stare made Joe uneasy. “Uh, Mr. Johnson, we really have to get home. Logan’s dad is waiting for us,” he lied.

“Lies! The enemy will say anything to make you believe them. They will pretend to be friendly, but they’re too dumb to know that you’re fighting the war to help them. It’s a mistake to trust them, because one day you might wake up and find them standing over you with a knife or a gun—ready to kill you,” said Johnson, breathing heavily. His eyes were darting everywhere as his voice rose.

“No, really! We’re friends. We’re on your side,” said Logan.

Johnson seemed to snap back to the present. “You had me fooled back there,” Johnson said, indicating the house. “I guess I’ve been out of action too long. But we can remedy that, can’t we boys?” Johnson’s face twisted with a cruel, insane-looking smile.

“Look—we’re sorry, sir. We didn’t mean to invade your privacy. We really do want you to teach us—help us get prepared and all,” said Joe. He knew he was babbling, but he couldn’t help it.

“Oh, I’m going to teach you all right,” sneered Johnson, raising his weapon. “And one of the first rules of war is to immobilize the enemy.” Johnson walked over to Joe’s bike. He kicked the front tire of the cycle with his boot. Then, grinning at Joe, he thrust the blade of his bayonet deep into the tire.

Without thinking, Joe ran toward Johnson. Anger pumped through his body. “What do you think you’re doing?” he screamed.

Whirling around, Johnson aimed the bayonet at Joe’s stomach. “Stop right there, boy!”

Johnson’s warning brought Joe to a standstill. His anger quickly gave way to fear again.

Walking to the back of the bike,

Johnson stabbed the other tire, then kicked the bike over. Joe heard the hiss of escaping air. Again, his anger overwhelmed him. "You're going to pay for those tires!" he threatened.

The smile on Mr. Johnson's face disappeared. He started toward Joe.

"Look, he didn't mean it, OK?" Logan spluttered. "We just want to go home, Mr. Johnson."

"Shut up! You're a couple of babies. You come out here, snoop around, and when the going gets tough, you think you can just walk away," sneered Johnson. "You think the enemy lets you go free when you don't want to fight anymore? You think the army cares if you're sick and tired and want to go home? No. No one cares about you in war.

"So here's what you get." He waved his rifle in the direction of the mountain. "I'll give you a five-minute head start, just to make this interesting. Then

you become my prey." He laughed maniacally.

"But town is that way," said Logan, pointing in the opposite direction.

"The clock is running, mister," barked Johnson. He fired a burst of bullets at the ground near their feet.

Logan leaped away in a flash. "Come on, Joe. Let's go!" Joe glanced back at his bike. Lying on its side with its tires flat, it looked like a giant dead beetle. He could see that the front fender was dented, too. Until tonight there hadn't even been any scratches on the bike. He felt awful. True, the bike could be repaired, but it would never be brand new again. He shot Johnson a look of pure hatred, wondering if he could charge the older man and disarm him. Johnson smirked. It was as if he could read Joe's mind. He waved the gun at Joe's chest.

"Come on, Joe! Please, let's go," Logan pleaded desperately.

“You have *four* minutes,” snarled Johnson, punctuating his words with another burst of bullets near their feet.

Logan grabbed Joe’s arm and dragged him, running, across the clearing toward the dark woods. When Joe glanced back in Johnson’s direction, he was surprised to see that the man had disappeared.

Reaching the edge of the clearing, the boys plunged into the trees. The woods were dense and overgrown. “Logan, do you know these woods?” Joe asked, breathlessly.

“No, but I know how to find my way in the woods,” Logan called back as he ran wildly forward in the darkness.

“Well, what are we going to do?” hissed Joe, trying to catch up with his long-legged cousin.

“I don’t know. Find a way through the woods and out, I guess.”

Suddenly, the woods exploded with the popping sounds of gunfire.

Flashes of yellow illuminated the darkness as round after round of ammunition flew through the air. Bullets ripped the bark from the trees. Joe screamed and fell to the ground. Logan scrambled for cover behind a fallen log.

Old Warhead wasn't fooling around.



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