

## **‘The Sequoian Ranger’**

**by Cian O’Farrell**

The eerie quiet of the dead-lands surrounded Willa as she trudged ever onwards. The cold night air blew past her masked face, as she rubbed the eyes of her mask. Willa continued alone, such was the life of a ranger. Wandering the dead-lands and the ruins of the old world, she searched for people to bring back to Sequoia. Willa had never actually brought anyone back to the home forest; she knew it was a rarity for rangers to meet someone who wasn’t hostile and was willing to come to Sequoia. Willa kept walking, adjusting her dark woollen trench coat. She absentmindedly fingered the revolver at her side as she walked, lost in her own thoughts.

Willa thought about being a ranger. It had been her dream since she was just a little girl clutching at her mother’s legs. They were the legendary defenders of Sequoia, fearless and brave, decked out in their long woollen coats and their dark trousers. Intimidating with their wide-brim ranger hats and gasmasks, their signature forty-four revolvers always holstered on their hip. They were certainly a sight to look upon. The fearless wanderers and guardians of the Sequoian people, they had taken their name from the giant trees that had sheltered them during the Catastrophe. Their people had dwelt in what had once been Sequoia National Forest, and the Rangers ensured they could stay. Not only did rangers like Willa bring other to Sequoia and defend it from those wishing them harm, they also brought valuable supplies like weapons, ammunition and medical equipment, as well as some luxuries like food and drink from the old world.

Every little Sequoian boy and girl wanted to be a ranger, but the training was rigorous and brutal. You had to be fierce and smart, agile and enduring as well as know your way around survival and shooting. Most dropped out, but every Sequoian tried; after all it was a great privilege to defend the homeland in any way. Rangers served as the police force of the tribe; many people lived in the wide area and it was a ranger’s duty to protect them from all dangers, human or otherwise. The two branches of the rangers were the park rangers and the roaming rangers. Willa of course was a roaming ranger but the Park rangers patrolled the forest and the little communities within.

Willa was startled by the sound of a gunshot in the distance. Quickly, drawing her revolver, she began double-timing it over the ridge towards where the shot came from. As Willa crested the

ridge she dived to the floor and grabbed her binoculars. With her revolver in one hand and her binos up to her eyes, she peered down at what looked like an old derelict factory. Willa saw three men gathered around a door. One had a gun, aimed right at the lock. As she watched, she could hear one of them shout: *"Listen kid, all we want is that key you got! Give it to us and we'll letcha go right quick."* Willa put her binoculars back into her jacket and slid down the hill she had been resting atop. Landing gracefully at the base, Willa lay there for a few seconds making sure she hadn't been seen. Slowly getting to her feet, she advanced, trying to keep as low as she could to avoid being seen. Luckily, it was not too hard given the men were focused on the door. She heard a younger voice, coming from within: *"Yer not gettin it ya'ear, it ain't got nutin'n do with you."*

Willa crouched roughly ten metres from the group as one of them attempted to kick down the door; it didn't look like it would be giving way any time soon. Willa carefully took aim, two hands on the grip of her revolver. She got the one with the gun in her sights. Willa let out a breath she didn't know she had been holding as she slowly squeezed the trigger. *BANG.....Bang Bang.* Three shots rang out from the barrel of the now smoking forty-four. Willa exhaled again before standing fully, she swiftly scanned all around her, moving towards the three dead men. Willa quickly checked their pockets but they didn't really have anything of worth, just a few dollars here and there as well as a working watch. But the real bounty was the rifle and its ammo; a well-polished Lee-Enfield with a clip loaded and two extra on his belt.

She slung it over her back smiling, pocketing the ammo before knocking on the door. *"Who's there?"* The frightened man within asked. He couldn't have been much older than Willa but her mask obscured her voice making it sound deeper and distorted as she answered. *"Sequoian Ranger. The guys out here are dead. Now unless you want to end up like them, I need to know why they wanted you so bad as to waste a bullet trying to shoot a door's lock."* There was silence for a few moments before she heard a key getting placed and turned in the lock. Opening the door, she saw a young man clutching a pouch to his chest. *"They wanted my pa's ol' key. They stopped us on the trail 'bout a mile away, killed ma, pa an' the helpers. I ran back here, but th..th..they followed."* He peered at the dead bodies as well as the imposing figure of the ranger before him. Gulping, he continued. *"We lived here... I-I don't know what more ta tell ya."*

Willa nodded, holstering her revolver. She thought to herself for a few moments while staring at

the man, from behind the gas mask. Willa nodded her head slowly. *“Right well you sure as shit can’t stay here.”* Will paused for a moment, as he nodded. *“You got a name kid?”*

*“Marc....”*

*“Alright then Marc, if you want, I can bring you to a place where you’ll be safe. It’s called Sequoia.”* The boy’s face went through a range of emotions, he looked as though he was about to weep both tears of sadness and joy. Quickly Marc nodded as Willa motioned for him to follow her. *“It’s around a four -day hike so grab whatever you can. I’ll be waiting on the ridge.”* She proceeded up to the ridge with haste. This was why she had become a ranger, to help poor bastards like Marc who were reduced to nothing. Marc soon joined her with a rifle in hand and a large pack on his back. Marc took one last lingering look at the old factory, tears unshed in his eyes as he nodded to Willa. They began walking north, to Sequoia, to a new life, to hope.